

2020

ANNUAL REPORT



MISSION STATEMENT

The National Center for State Courts promotes the rule of law and improves the administration of justice in state courts and courts around the world.

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President & Chair Message

Without question, 2020 was a year of epic challenges. A global pandemic, national protests over racial injustice, a disputed U.S. presidential election, and online disinformation campaigns disrupted society, damaged the economy, and challenged our constitutional democracy.



Mary Campbell McQueen
Mary Campbell McQueen
President
National Center for
State Courts

But while it may seem that society simply “closed its doors” in 2020, courts did not. The mission of the courts — to resolve disputes and to dispense justice — may have rebooted but never closed. Courts at all levels adapted to the tumult of 2020 by pivoting to remote proceedings and reinventing long-standing processes.

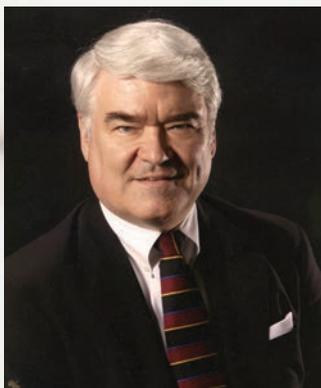
The way that NCSC served the courts changed, too. For example, Court Consulting Services curtailed on-site technical assistance in favor of remote consulting, while the courses of our Institute for Court Management (ICM) became completely virtual. Many staff worked remotely for the first time in their lives, trading traditional 8-5 workdays for 24-7 home offices. The Williamsburg headquarters remained open throughout.

NCSC continued to provide leadership and service to courts: Ensuring that innovations in one state court can aid all courts. As courts confronted the crisis of the pandemic, NCSC collected, organized, and shared hundreds of emergency orders. CCJ and COSCA created a pandemic “Rapid Response Team” (RRT) that conducted a series of webinars about how courts could cope with the disruptions of the pandemic. More than 25 webinars on diverse topics such as mental health in the workplace, access to justice, jury management, and more were held in 2020 — many featuring court leadership as principal speakers. The RRT’s workgroups collectively produced over 100 deliverables in less than nine months.

While the pandemic will remain the predominant crisis of the year, the courts were faced with other transformative challenges. Ensuring racial fairness in the justice system has been a cornerstone of NCSC’s mission since its creation in 1971. In 2020 a leadership position was created to advance those goals: Director of Racial Justice, Equity, and Inclusion. Combating disinformation about the courts through a series of virtual workshops was also a priority for 2020.

2020 was a year without precedent. For the first time in its history, the CCJ-COSCA annual conference and NCSC’s William H. Rehnquist Award programs were held virtually, rather than in person. Despite all the challenges presented in 2020, NCSC continued its work to improve court operations and public trust and confidence in the justice system. And it will continue to do so through 2021 and beyond. Never has it been more evident that courts are essential to preserving the rule of law — and that NCSC is essential to helping our state courts fulfill that promise.

As former ABA President and NCSC supporter Wm. (Bill) Robinson III wrote:
“No Courts. No Justice. No Freedom.”



Nathan C. Hecht
Nathan Hecht
Chair
Chief Justice of
Texas Supreme Court

Advancing

2

“Since the onset of the pandemic, courts throughout the country have been determined to stay open to deliver justice without faltering, no matter the adjustments and sacrifices demanded, but also to protect staff, security, lawyers, parties, jurors, judges, and the public from the risks of disease...”

*Texas Chief Justice Nathan Hecht,
President of the Conference
of Chief Justices*



Knowledge

Rapid Response Team Creates a Roadmap to Guide State Courts

Soon after the pandemic forced courts to suspend many of its services, the Conference of Chief Justices (CCJ) and the Conference of State Court Administrators (COSCA) decided court officials needed guidance, and the **Pandemic Rapid Response Team (RRT)** was formed. The six-person RRT and its six working groups, composed of court leaders from all levels, created a roadmap to help state courts move forward during the pandemic — and after it ends.

The RRT and its working groups, supported by NCSC and funded by the State Justice Institute, have focused on how to resume court operations during the pandemic and what can be done post-pandemic to build a stronger judiciary.

NCSC, working with the RRT, created a data visualization that charted courts' adjustments to the pandemic nationwide, from jury suspensions to remote hearings to court operating hours.

The RRT has produced — and continues to produce — an enormous amount of resources to help the courts. Here are some examples of what the working groups accomplished in 2020:

- **Appellate** — As the pandemic began, state appellate and supreme courts wasted no time conducting oral arguments remotely. This resource provides guidance on what courts have done that have worked well. The document also includes links from states, such as Idaho, Washington and Florida, that have previously shared similar information.



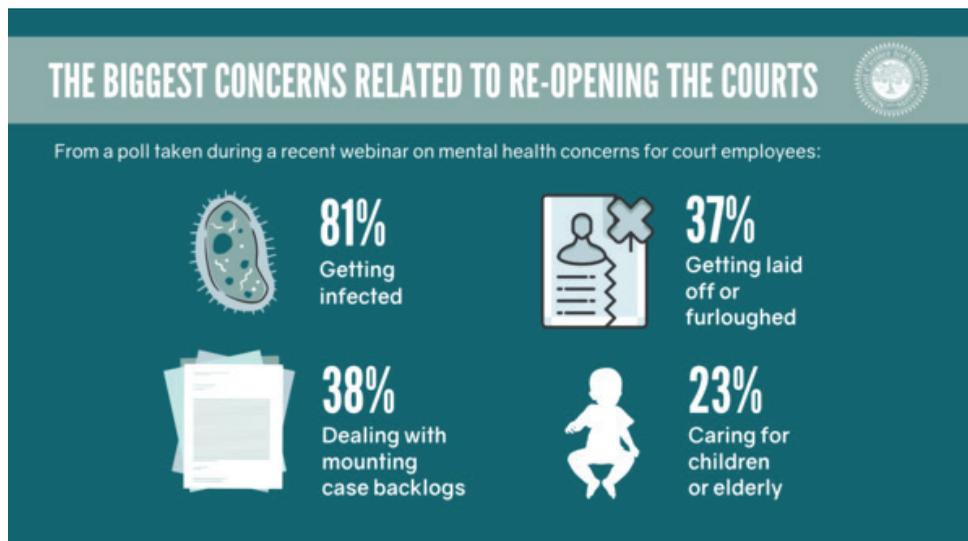
npsc.org/pandemic

CCJ/COSCA's Rapid Response Team

- Texas Chief Justice Nathan L. Hecht
- New York Chief Judge Janet DiFiore
- Maryland Chief Judge Mary Ellen Barbera
- Rhode Island State Court Administrator J. Joseph Baxter
- Texas State Court Administrator David Slayton
- Nebraska State Court Administrator Corey Steel

- **Children, Families and Elders** — In response to stay-at-home orders in the spring, courthouses in most states were closed for in-person proceedings, creating a huge backlog of cases. If that wasn't bad enough, courts anticipate a surge in filings in the months to come. This group has produced a document that offers creative solutions to help courts stay on top of backlogs and the anticipated surge.
- **Civil** — This working group also tackled the problem of backlogs and an anticipated surge in civil filings due to the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic. It will take more than just "working harder" to solve these problems. This document describes 12 practical steps to make civil case processing more effective and efficient, not to mention fairer to litigants.
- **Communications and Funding** — To prepare for what could be severe pandemic-related budget cuts, this group examined what did and did not work for state courts during the "Great Recession," which started in 2008. It compiled a list of dos and don'ts based on those experiences to help courts prepare for — and possibly head off — severe financial shortfalls.
- **Criminal** — During remote hearings, courts must meet the needs of people who have limited-English-speaking ability. This working group created a document that explains how courts can use virtual platforms to conduct simultaneous interpretation. It also answers many questions about remote interpretation.
- **Technology** — As more judges and administrators embrace technology to get work done, the pandemic offers a unique opportunity to think creatively about using technology to operate more efficiently. RRT has adopted six principles to guide decisions for court leaders as they integrate technology in their work.

Chief Justice Hecht, said, "Since the onset of the pandemic, courts throughout the country have been determined to stay open to deliver justice without faltering, no matter the adjustments and sacrifices demanded, but also to protect staff, security, lawyers, parties, jurors, judges, and the public from the risks of disease. . . . We are learning new technology and practices together. Now, our Rapid Response Team is helping us shift attention to what's next for courts as we begin to dig out."



Slide from March Webinar



State of the State Courts in a (post) Pandemic World

The coronavirus pandemic didn't keep NCSC from commissioning the annual **State of the State Courts poll**, but it changed the poll's focus. Courts wanted to know what the public thought about going to court in person during the pandemic and how they felt about appearing on juries remotely.

Nearly two out of three people said they were receptive to appearing in courtrooms remotely — a significant increase from just six years ago, when two out of five said they were receptive. This finding reflected the public's growing comfort level with technology and its discomfort with being in close proximity to others during the pandemic. Some of the results, which came from 1,000 registered voters who were polled in June, reflected the degree of uncertainty and anxiety that comes with living during a pandemic.

In a question about whether respondents would be more comfortable serving on juries in person or remotely, 44 percent said remotely, 32 percent expressed no preference, and 23 percent said in person. The most reluctant jurors tend to be young black and Hispanic women and older white women while the most receptive jurors are younger white males, especially blue-collar workers who identify as politically conservative. Many court officials worry that the reluctance of certain groups to serve on juries will make it more difficult to assemble diverse juries.

About two-thirds of respondents said they think courts should require people to wear masks in courthouses, and at least 70 percent said they would be more comfortable in a courthouse if courts enforced social distancing, checked temperatures at the door, required court employees and visitors to wear masks and tested for COVID-19.

ncsc.org/survey

Charting the Future of the Courts

While NCSC's 2020 Annual Report reflects on our accomplishments of the past year, we are always looking to the future. In 2020, much planning took place in preparation for 2021, which marks NCSC's 50th anniversary. To recognize NCSC's five decades of improving court administration and to provide focus and direction for the upcoming decades, our Research Division embarked on a new initiative: Just Horizons.



Just Horizons: Charting the Future of the Courts is an initiative to envision how our work can help the courts operate more efficiently in future decades. NCSC assembled a 19-member team of experts — justices, judges, administrators and scholars — to brainstorm and make recommendations. The Just Horizons Council's goal is to identify actions that courts should take now to ensure a thriving court system in the future.

To reach that point, the council will address a series of questions in five phases:

- **Preserving the Future:** What core values do we want to preserve?
- **Exploring Macro Trends:** What trends might affect courts in the next 10 to 15 years?
- **Broadening Input:** What do court stakeholders consider the most important and uncertain drivers of change for courts?
- **Creating Scenarios:** What are possible futures for courts and how might each affect court justice system values?
- **Charting the Future:** What actions do we take to prepare for and shape the role of courts in delivering justice in the future?

To ensure that the council is well-informed, it will have access to a series of interviews and surveys from court stakeholders, including employees, users and lawyers.

Ambitious Project Could Lead to 'Faster Courts' Nationwide

Before the coronavirus pandemic reduced court operations, state courts nationwide resolved 40 criminal felony cases and 100 criminal misdemeanor cases every minute of every day. But most courts failed to meet national time standards because judges allowed too many continuances and scheduled too many hearings.

These findings come from one of the most ambitious undertakings of its kind, the **Effective Criminal Case Management** project, a five-year examination of 1.2 million felony and misdemeanor cases from 136 courts in 21 states. In 2020, NCSC released a report that details the project's findings, conclusions and recommendations. They recommend that courts:

- Limit continuances;
- Compile data to help determine why some cases are resolved more quickly than others; and
- Schedule hearings on dates that maximize the likelihood that prosecutors and defense attorneys will be prepared.





Here are a handful of the project’s major findings:

- The average time to disposition is 256 days for felony cases and 193 days for misdemeanors, but no court in the study meets the current national time standards. Current time standards say that 98 percent of felony cases should be resolved within 365 days, and 98 percent of misdemeanor cases should be resolved within 180 days. On average, courts in the study resolved 83 percent of felony cases within 365 days and 77 percent of misdemeanors within 180 days.
- The courts that resolve cases faster are led by presiding judges who make it clear that they dislike continuances, which lead to additional hearings and delays.
- Timely courts dismiss fewer cases than the slower courts, and they are faster across all case types and all manners of disposition.
- Differences in court structure play a small but surprising role in overall average timeliness, with single-tiered courts being least timely and two-tiered courts being most timely.

“The report’s most important conclusions revolve around what faster courts do to be fast and what slower courts do that make them slow,” said lead researcher Brian Ostrom. “We know courts are always striving to be more efficient, so our hope is that court leaders read the report and implement its recommendations. What’s at stake is whether every person’s constitutional right to due process is honored in the process of seeking justice in individual cases.”

Role of Courts in Serving People with Mental Illness

Determining which court cases involving individuals with serious mental illness need to stay in the justice system and which cases can be diverted out of the courts or, even better, how communities can provide assistance before someone ever reaches the courts, is one of the top priorities of the National Judicial Task Force to Examine State Courts’ Response to Mental Illness.

The task force is made up of judges, physicians, psychiatrists, attorneys, practitioners, law enforcement, court officers, and court, peer and recovery professionals from 25 states. In addition to improving diversion methods, the task force’s priorities include: using community intercept mapping, focusing on children and youth, modernizing state mental health codes, improving collaboration between mental health professionals and law enforcement, developing a unified set of definitions for mental health, and securing necessary resources.

The Task Force is co-chaired by Vermont Chief Justice Paul L. Reiber, and Chief Administrative Judge of the New York Courts Lawrence K. Marks. The Conference of Chief Justices and the Conference of State Court Administrators established the Task Force to help state courts more effectively respond to the needs of court-involved individuals with serious mental illnesses. It is building on the work of NCSC’s National Advisory Committee, funded by the State Justice Institute.

Addressing



“The existing imperfections in our justice systems have profound and lasting effect on all of us, but it is more severe on those of us who are the most vulnerable. There is a need for real and immediate improvement.”

Connecticut Supreme Court Chief Justice Richard Robinson

Racial Inequality

Nation's State Court Leaders Vow to Make Judicial System Fairer to All

One of 2020's major stories was the killing by police of George Floyd in Minneapolis. Floyd's death, witnessed after the fact by many millions of people worldwide, triggered mass protests, not only in the United States but also in Europe, Australia, South America and Africa.



Floyd's death and the killing of other unarmed Black people in the spring of 2020 also led court leaders in at least 24 states to vow to make the judicial system fairer to all.

One of those leaders was Connecticut Supreme Court Chief Justice Richard Robinson, who said, "I must make it clear that I am not disparaging law enforcement or our judicial systems, but I am saying that they are not perfect institutions. I am outraged by some of the things that I have seen and heard. ... The existing imperfections in our justice systems have profound and lasting effect on all of us, but it is more severe on those of us who are the most vulnerable.

There is a need for real and immediate improvement. America can — and must — do a better job of providing 'equal justice under law,' the very words that are engraved on the front of the United States Supreme Court Building in Washington, D.C. I believe that our justice system is one of the best in the world, however, to quote Victor Hugo, 'Being good is easy, what is difficult is being just.'"

And from Hawaii Chief Justice Mark Recktenwald: "The recent deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery, within months of each other, have been tragic reminders of the reality that many face every day across our nation. For those of us who work in the justice system, which promises equal justice for all, this is a time of reckoning that requires careful listening, increased education and self-reflection, and, most importantly, action. We have a collective responsibility to hear the voices that have been raised, and to address deeply rooted and systemic problems within the structures of our institutions."

CCJ and COSCA pledged to improve the system with a resolution, which concluded that "too many persons, especially persons of color, lack confidence in the fairness of our courts and our criminal justice system," and that must change.

To support CCJ/COSCA's resolution to address racial equality, NCSC created a position dedicated to **Racial Justice, Equity, and Inclusion**.

Racial
Equity,
Fairness
& Inclusion.

Educating

ICM Kept Teaching — Virtually

The pandemic changed the way all of us worked, and that included our Institute for Court Management staff.

With the coronavirus epidemic becoming a pandemic in March, ICM conducted no in-person courses after February, but staff quickly adapted, offering **19 certification courses remotely** in 2020, as well as a new course, on procedural fairness, in partnership with the state of Ohio.

To accommodate court professionals around the country who could no longer attend in-person courses, ICM offered all courses at a discount.

What Happens (in our courts) when America Votes?

2020 wasn't just about the coronavirus pandemic and mass rallies supporting racial justice. The year's other huge story was the presidential election, which triggered hundreds of lawsuits before election day and dozens more after it, when Donald Trump contested the results.

Many of those lawsuits were filed in state courts, where in some cases judges were unfamiliar with the intricacies of election law. That's why the **Election Law Program**, a joint effort by NCSC and the College of William & Mary Law School, was created years ago, and that's why it served as an important resource for judges in 2020.

In the fall, the program hosted four webinars to help judges and other court professionals better understand election law, which has grown in popularity since *Bush v. Gore*, the U.S. Supreme Court case that settled the 2000 presidential election. The webinars, which were also open to the public, were offered with the theme: "What Happens (In Our Courts) When America Votes?"

In another effort to help judges, the law program's digital library was recently reorganized and updated, with statutes organized by hot-topic areas such as absentee voting, mail-in voting, in-person voter identification, and COVID-19-related developments.

ncsc.org/icm

"Disinformation campaigns directed toward the judiciary cause a crisis of confidence that trickles down to the smallest court in the smallest state. These campaigns harm all of us."

*Janet Bancroft,
Public Information Officer,
Nebraska's Administrative
Office of the Courts*

Leaders

Combating Disinformation Campaigns Against the Courts

Those who get their news from Twitter may have seen this:

@BleepThePolice – The American (in)justice system does not need a few tweaks, but it needs to be completely overhauled.

Tweets like this one, which portray the American judicial system as broken and dysfunctional, did not come from U.S. citizens exercising their free speech

rights, but from the **Internet Research Agency**, an organization with ties to Russian intelligence agencies that uses fake social network accounts to spread disinformation. Russia isn't the only nation doing this, but its disinformation campaigns are the most sophisticated and prolific.

In 2020, NCSC took a lead role in efforts to combat court-related disinformation campaigns, which NCSC President Mary McQueen has called “the biggest attacks that we’ve seen on the judicial system.” Last year,

NCSC conducted seven workshops, supported by the State Justice Institute, to train court professionals to recognize disinformation campaigns and counteract them.

“Disinformation campaigns directed toward the judiciary cause a crisis of confidence that trickles down to the smallest court in the smallest state,” said Janet Bancroft, public information officer for Nebraska’s Administrative Office of the Courts. “These campaigns harm all of us.”

Bancroft said a key takeaway from the NCSC workshop she attended was the importance of creating a response plan and committing to it in writing rather than working from crisis to crisis.

Cynthia Clanton, director of the Judicial Council of Georgia, described the workshop she attended as “another good wakeup call to remain vigilant and have a plan to combat disinformation about the courts, judges, and the judicial processes. In Georgia, we have ongoing planning that factors in important information we learned through the NCSC disinformation webinar so we can educate, clarify, and calm those in our state should a disinformation attack occur.”

NCSC, which has also assembled focus groups and conducted polling on this issue, is working with the **Center for Strategic and International Studies**, a bipartisan think tank that has made monitoring disinformation campaigns a focus of its work. In a 2019 white paper, *Beyond the Ballot: How the Kremlin Works to Undermine the U.S. Justice System*, the authors stress the seriousness of the problem:

“The United States’ justice system is under attack as part of a long-term Russian effort to undermine the appeal of democracy and weaken the West. Like elections, the justice system depends on public trust in the legitimacy of its processes and outcomes. And like elections, there is documented evidence that justice systems are consequential targets in our adversaries’ attempts to undermine democracy.”



Engaging



12

They met in diverse places — a high school in Kansas City, Native American reservations in Nebraska, a community center in western Massachusetts and a courthouse in the southern tip of Texas — but their goal was the same: Find out what disenfranchised people think of the courts in their communities.

the Public

Courts Listen to Public to Improve Trust and Confidence

They met in diverse places — a high school in Kansas City, Native American reservations in Nebraska, a community center in western Massachusetts and a courthouse in the southern tip of Texas — but their goal was the same: Find out what disenfranchised people think of the courts in their communities.

These meetings — and many more, in six states — were part of the **Public Engagement Pilot Project**, which seeks to engage the public and identify ways courts can best overcome social inequities and bias and build trust.

There was no consensus, but in many meetings, all of which occurred before the pandemic arrived in the United States, attendees said they have some distrust of the courts, but a desire to learn more about the justice system.

Chief Judge of the D.C. Court of Appeals Anna Blackburne-Rigsby, who leads the public engagement project, said this effort was unique because it focused on users.

Here are the six pilot project sites:

- Supreme Court of Nebraska
- Kansas City (Missouri) Municipal Division
- Massachusetts Trial Court
- Texas Office of Court Administration
- Franklin County (Ohio) Municipal Court
- Puerto Rico Judicial Branch

Tiny Chats

2020 saw NCSC's first sustained effort to use video to communicate our work to the court community and to the public. Tiny Chats are short videos that explain and highlight areas ranging from access to justice to court operations. The videos, hosted and produced by NCSC consultants Danielle Hirsch and Zach Zarnow, sometimes use humor to drive home points, but they always provide timely and relevant information.



Chief Judge
Anna Blackburne-Rigsby



Tiny Chats

By the

6

NUMBER OF
PANDEMIC RAPID
RESPONSE TEAM
WORKING GROUPS

1,618

NUMBER OF STUDENTS WHO
SUBMITTED ESSAYS
FOR THE 2020 ESSAY CONTEST



NUMBER
OF ACTIVE
CONSULTING
PROJECTS
IN 2020

NUMBER OF
FULL-TIME NCSC EMPLOYEES
AS OF DECEMBER 31, 2020

153

15 years

OF COURT EXPERIENCE
FOR EDWIN BELL,
NCSC'S
FIRST-EVER DIRECTOR OF
RACIAL JUSTICE, EQUITY,
AND INCLUSION

37

NUMBER OF
STATES IN WHICH
OUR CONSULTANTS
WORKED IN 2020

4,187

NUMBER OF NCSC'S
TWITTER FOLLOWERS —
AN INCREASE OF 645
SINCE 2019

NUMBER OF
WORKSHOPS
NCSC HELD
IN 2020 TO
TRAIN COURT
PROFESSIONALS
TO RECOGNIZE
AND COUNTERACT
DISINFORMATION
CAMPAIGNS

28

NUMBER OF
MICROSITES ON THE
NEWLY DESIGNED
WWW.NCSC.ORG

NUMBER OF
EXPERTS ON NCSC'S
JUST HORIZONS COUNCIL,
WHICH IS BRAINSTORMING
WAYS TO IMPROVE COURTS

NUMBER OF NCSC'S
FACEBOOK FOLLOWERS —
AN INCREASE OF 752
SINCE 2019

5,734

6

PILOT SITES IN THE
PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT
PROJECT

Numbers

NUMBER OF
**REMOTE CERTIFICATION
COURSES OFFERED**
BY NCSC'S INSTITUTE FOR
COURT MANAGEMENT IN 2020

FROM MARCH 26–DECEMBER 16, 2020, THE PANDEMIC RRT HELD

37 WEBINARS,
ATTRACTING MORE THAN
37,400 ATTENDEES

NUMBER OF OUR
**INTERNATIONAL
FIELD OFFICES**
IN 2020

APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF
**COURT PROFESSIONALS WHO
IN THE SPRING ATTENDED A WEBINAR
ON RESUMING COURT OPERATIONS
DURING THE PANDEMIC**

1,200,000

APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF
**CASES EXAMINED AS PART OF NCSC'S
EFFECTIVE CRIMINAL CASE MANAGEMENT PROJECT**

MINIMUM NUMBER
OF STATES THAT
**RELEASED STATEMENTS
IN SUPPORT OF
JUSTICE FOR ALL**
IN THE WAKE OF
RACIAL JUSTICE MARCHES

24

PERCENTAGE OF POLL RESPONDENTS
WHO IN JUNE SAID THEY'D BE MORE
**COMFORTABLE IN COURTHOUSES IF
COURTS ENFORCED SOCIAL DISTANCING,
CHECKED TEMPERATURES AT THE DOOR
AND REQUIRED MASKS.**



Promoting the

Travel and other restrictions brought on by the pandemic presented challenges to NCSC's international efforts, but they also presented opportunities.

Rule of Law Overseas

ncscinternational.org

Working Overseas During the Pandemic

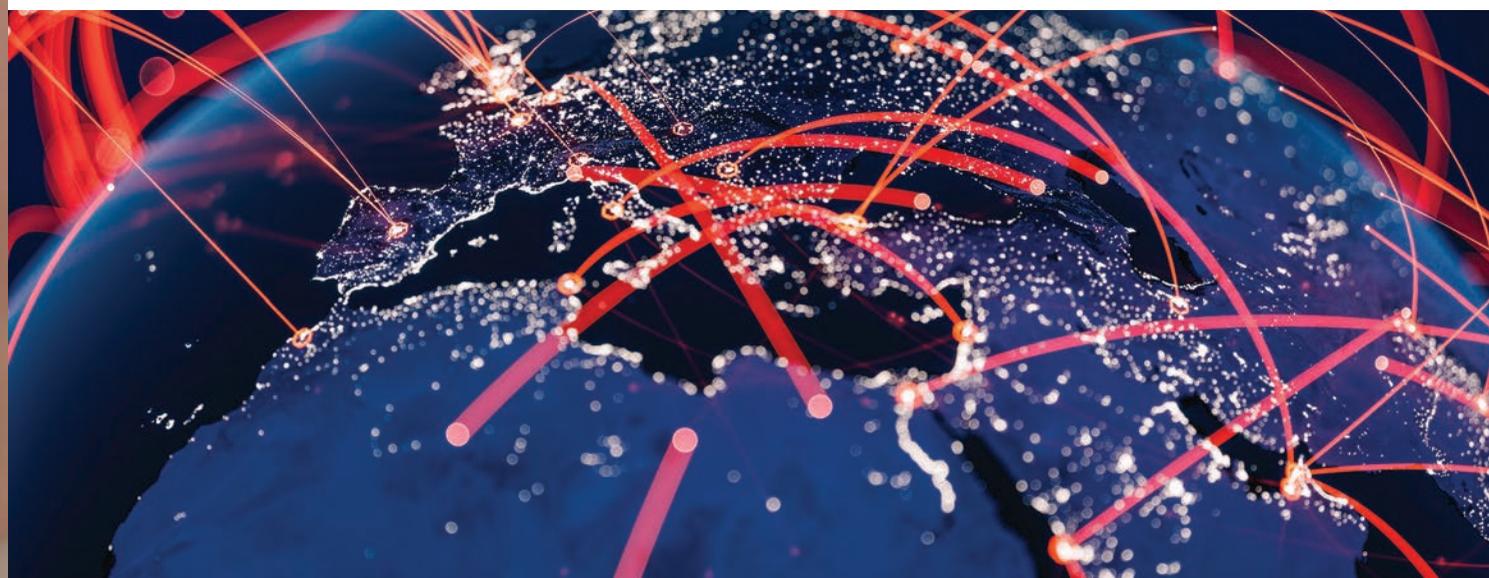
Travel and other restrictions brought on by the pandemic presented challenges to NCSC's international efforts, but they also presented opportunities.

Our International Division used video technology to work with judges, court administrators, prosecutors and others in Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin America. The work involved everything from gathering information to providing training to signing agreements for future projects. For example, NCSC signed a memorandum of understanding with the Judicial General Council of Mongolia that may lead to opportunities to exchange information, conduct visits and provide training for judges and other court employees.

As the year went on, we received contracts to work in Honduras, Costa Rica, Panama and Venezuela, among other countries.

Some of the other work involved:

- Convening dozens of meetings, through the Caribbean Anti-Crime project, including one with 15 judges from 10 countries that focused on how those countries' courts have responded to the pandemic.
- Leading a similar meeting with judges and judicial educators from South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia, Malawi, Tanzania, Nigeria, Mozambique and Kenya. They discussed, among other things, how technological limitations impact remote court hearings.
- Planning to conduct a remote court assessment for courts in Pakistan.
- Conducting four webinars to allow South Korean judges who visited the United States to interact with state and federal court judges.



Recognizing

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Texas Judge Emily Miskel, who in May led the nation's first-ever remote jury trial, received NCSC's 2020 William H. Rehnquist Award for Judicial Excellence, which honors a state court judge who demonstrates the outstanding qualities of judicial excellence.

Leaders

Texas Judge Received Rehnquist Award

Texas Judge Emily Miskel, who in May led the nation's first-ever remote jury trial, received NCSC's **2020 William H. Rehnquist Award for Judicial Excellence**, which honors a state court judge who demonstrates the outstanding qualities of judicial excellence. Chief Justice of the United States John G. Roberts, Jr. presented the award remotely to Judge Miskel, who was in her courtroom in Collin County.



Judge Miskel

Judge Miskel, of the 470th District Court in Collin County, is an expert in bringing technology to courts. In May, with only one month of preparation, she oversaw the nation's first remote jury trial. She also trained many judges and other court leaders in Texas to use technology, helping Texas become a leader in this area. Judge Miskel, who has a mechanical engineering degree from Stanford and a law degree from Harvard, frequently writes and speaks on legal technology topics such as electronic evidence, e-discovery, data theft, interception of communications, and online impersonation.

Chief Justice Roberts, who traditionally presents the award in person during a ceremony at the Supreme Court, provided a pre-recorded video to honor Judge Miskel. Chief Justice Roberts also recognized NCSC and Judge Miskel in his year-end report on the State of the Judiciary.

Judicial Excellence Events Go Virtual

NCSC's 2020 Judicial Excellence Events, hosted virtually for the first time, delivered robust discussions between the bench, bar, and business leaders. More than 150 members of NCSC's General Counsel and Lawyers Committees and members of the Conference of Chief Justices attended regional Conversations with the Chief Justices events. These virtual discussions revealed universal challenges including the immediate pandemic response, access to justice, racial and economic disparity and the importance of building and maintaining trust in institutions. As Ohio Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor said: "So many things in 2020 have pointed us in the right direction, and our challenge is to keep going in that direction."

Much of the discussion centered around courts' response to the pandemic. Connecticut Chief Justice Richard Robinson observed that this year's challenges brought great opportunity to his courts. "It's safe to say the branch as it is now is not like it was before the pandemic." As with courts across the country, the chiefs emphasized that there is an evolution to be more nimble, more relevant, more efficient, and accessible.

The annual Justice Roundtable, hosted just prior to the presentation of the 2020 William H. Rehnquist Award, explored and evaluated the delivery of virtual justice. A panel of judges, attorneys, and court administrators considered what was working well, what may be lost in a virtual environment, and what opportunities have been presented to improve access and fairness in the courts.

Warren E. Burger Society

The National Center for State Court's Warren E. Burger Society honors those who have volunteered their time, talent, and support to the National Center in exceptional ways.

The Burger Society is named for the former Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court who helped found NCSC in 1971. We are proud to recognize the following Society members.

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ROGER K. WARREN
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MERCEDES M. BAUERMEISTER
J. JOSEPH BAXTER
THOMAS C. BROWN, JR.
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SHEILA CALABRO
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RONALD ROBIE
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ROBERT J. TORRES, JR.
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MICHAEL ZAMPERINI
LEONORA BURGER
PAUL J. BURKE
PAMELA BURTON
CHARLES F. CAMPBELL
ALEJANDRO CARAZAS
WILLIAM C. CARPENTER, JR.
PATRICIA A. CHAUVIN
IDA K. CHEN
SARAH T. CLARK
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HUGH M. COLLINS
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HILDA CUTHBERTSON
DIANE C. DEAL
SUSANNE DIPIETRO
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RICHARD B. HOFFMAN
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Honoring Service

WARREN E. BURGER AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN COURT ADMINISTRATION

Rebecca L. Sandefur, a professor at Sanford School of Social and Family Dynamics at Arizona State University, received the 2020 Warren E. Burger Award for Excellence in Court Administration. The Burger Award is presented to an individual who has made a significant contribution to the field of court administration through management and administration, education and training, or research and/or consulting, and who has contributed to the mission of the National Center for State Courts. Professor Sandefur was recognized for her significant contributions in the field of access to justice.

NCSC SANDRA DAY O'CONNOR AWARD FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF CIVICS EDUCATION

The **Our Courts Colorado** program received the 2020 Sandra Day O'Connor Award for the Advancement of Civics Education, presented annually. The award honors an organization, court, program, or individual who has promoted, inspired, improved, or led an innovation or accomplishment in the field of civics education related to the justice system.

Our Courts Colorado was selected for its broad reach, continued program expansion, and its ability to be replicated in other jurisdictions around the country.

Our Courts, a joint program of the Colorado Bar Association and the Colorado Judicial Institute, was founded in 2007 to provide nonpartisan educational programs to adults to increase their knowledge of the courts. To date, 294 speakers (judges and attorneys) have presented more than 600 times, reaching more than 20,000 Coloradans.

HARRY L. CARRICO AWARD FOR JUDICIAL INNOVATION

Texas Chief Justice Nathan Hecht was awarded the Harry L. Carrico Award for Judicial Innovation. The award is named after the late Virginia Chief Justice Harry L. Carrico, who was instrumental in founding NCSC in 1971. The award honors a sitting state court chief justice or justice who has inspired, sponsored, promoted, or led an innovation of national significance in the field of judicial administration.

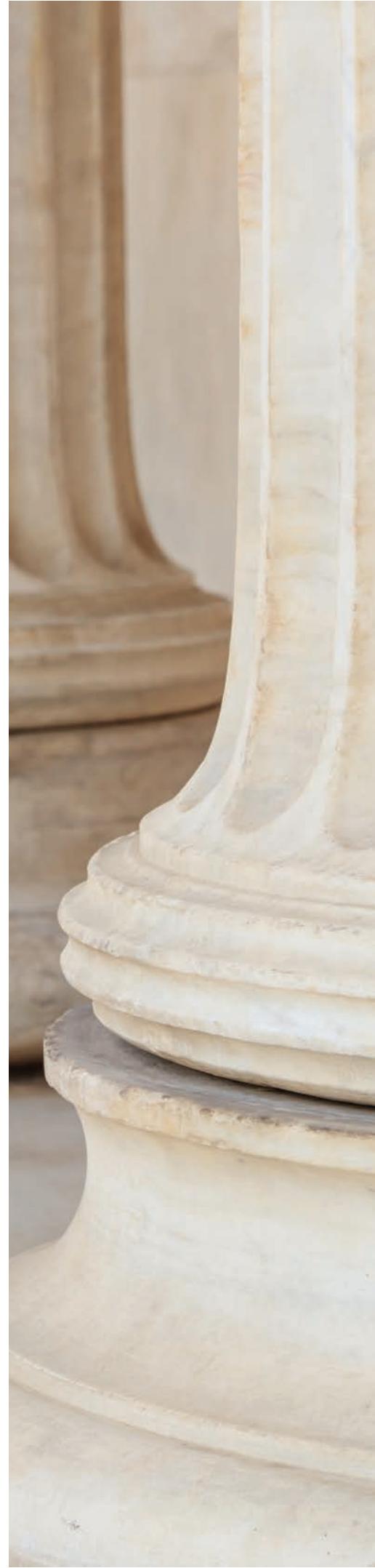
Chief Justice Hecht was selected for his outstanding leadership during the early stages of the pandemic. He immediately established the National Pandemic Rapid Response Team — made up of state court chief justices and state court administrators — that developed practices and resources to help courts remain open, accessible, and safe. Texas led the nation in helping judges quickly move to remote hearings, with Texas being the first state in the country to hold a civil jury trial remotely.

G. THOMAS MUNSTERMAN AWARD FOR JURY INNOVATION

Kyle Rimel, IT director for the Superior Court of Arizona in Mohave County, received the 2020 G. Thomas Munsterman Award for Jury Innovation. The Munsterman Award recognizes states, local courts, organizations and individuals that have made significant improvements or innovations in jury procedures, operations and practices.

Rimel was recognized for his innovative approach to remote appearances during the pandemic; the development of its in-house technology system for the court's new Superior Court building; and for upgrading its juror communications programs.

When the COVID pandemic started, Rimel began looking for ways to enhance remote appearances for staff, attorneys, witnesses and jurors for court hearings. Rimel installed Zoom in courtrooms and office spaces, wrote detailed instructions on the steps grand jurors needed to take to log into the platform and conducted user testing.



THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR STATE COURTS WAS ESTABLISHED IN 1971 AT THE URGING OF CHIEF JUSTICE OF THE UNITED STATES WARREN E. BURGER. NCSC CONTINUES TO BE LED BY THE COLLECTIVE EFFORT OF BRIGHTEST AND MOST INNOVATIVE MINDS ON ISSUES AND TRENDS THAT IMPACT THE JUSTICE SYSTEM. NCSC IS GOVERNED BY THE CONFERENCE OF CHIEF JUSTICES AND THE CONFERENCE OF STATE COURT ADMINISTRATORS AND IS CLOSELY ALIGNED WITH 15 OTHER NATIONAL COURT ASSOCIATIONS. OUR STAFF IS COMPOSED OF SPECIALISTS IN A RANGE OF FIELDS, FROM ECONOMICS AND SOCIOLOGY TO POLITICAL SCIENCE AND THE LAW. EACH DISCIPLINE CONTRIBUTES A UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE, BUT IT'S THE BLEND OF THESE SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE THAT NCSC COMBINES EFFECTIVELY TO CONDUCT MEANINGFUL RESEARCH.

2020 Staff Awards

STAFF EXCELLENCE AWARD

Jacque Ring, program manager, Court Consulting Services. This award goes to the employee whose work has significantly contributed to the fulfillment of our mission. The recipient consistently produces a high quality of service that enhances our reputation and earns the support and trust of the court community.

FLORENCE MCCONNELL AWARD

Justin Apperson, senior administrative specialist, Court Consulting Services. In honor of former employee Florence McConnell, this award is given to the employee whose interaction with the courts and with fellow employees creates an atmosphere of trust and respect. The recipient not only maintains a high level of professional performance but also is supportive of colleagues in their personal challenges.

JEANNE A. ITO AWARD

Evan Frauhiger, program associate, International. This award acknowledges an employee who has worked here for five years or less and who exemplifies the same traits as Ms. Ito, who developed a reputation for innovation, initiative and enthusiasm during her five years at NCSC.

KATHERINE T. WILKE MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

Liz Barnhart, court management consultant, Court Consulting Services. Named for NCSC's former deputy director of Development, this scholarship goes to the employee, like Ms. Wilke, who holds herself to high personal and professional standards and always strives for professional improvement.

ROBERT W. TOBIN ACHIEVEMENT AWARD AND THE DALE A. SIPES MEMORIAL PRESIDENT'S AWARD

NCSC President Mary McQueen, presented this award to all employees for their ability to pivot and adjust during a year when the pandemic made all of our jobs more challenging. Named for longtime NCSC consultant Bob Tobin, the Tobin Award goes to a group or an individual who developed an excellent product. The Sipes Award highlights an employee whose exceptional work and dedication merits special recognition from the NCSC president.



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