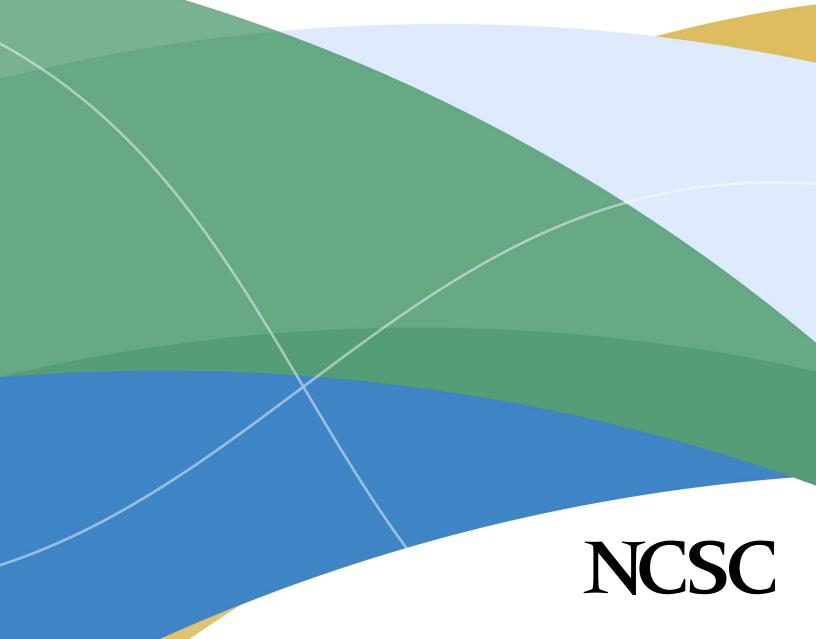
2024 Anni

Annual Report





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Introduction

Message from the NCSC President and the Chair of the Board

Courts are not distant, detached institutions. Courts are rooted in their communities, solving local problems and reflecting the values of those they serve every single day as they provide fair and impartial justice, all while maintaining the highest standards of ethics and accountability.

NCSC's 2024 Annual Report provides a look back on a busy year where we developed new and exciting partnerships, around the country and around the world, and where we celebrated leaders from across the state courts for their service.

We hope you enjoy this review of just a small sample of NCSC's incredible impacts. It's a reflection of the power of collaboration between NCSC and the court community. The *Annual Report* spotlights this connection to local communities.

NCSC's mission is to drive innovation and progress in courts and justice system. The *Annual Report* showcases how, together, we strengthen our courts.

This storytelling now extends on to our new website. If you enjoy the recaps in this report, we encourage you to read many more of them and to support our mission and our work at ncsc.org.



NCSC partners with Philadelphia municipal court on digital assistants

Courts across the country are recognizing the potential of digital tools to bridge the gap for self-represented litigants navigating complex legal issues. These tools assist users in understanding the legal process and help them make informed decisions about their case.

Working with NCSC, Philadelphia's Municipal Court introduced two new digital assistants: Tenant Landlord Digital Assistant (T/LDA) and Consumer Debt Information Bot (CODI).

These tools serve as virtual companions — offering stepby-step guidance and plain language explanations — for self-represented litigants in landlord-tenant and consumer debt cases, adding Philadelphia to the growing list of courts embracing innovative technology solutions to improve court services.

"The majority of our litigants are pro se," said Judge Gregory Yorgey-Girdy, supervising judge of the Civil Division, Philadelphia Municipal Court. "This technology gives them the keys to unlock the doors of the legal process and allows easier access to the Philadelphia Municipal Court." 66

There is no shortage of legal information online. Sometimes the challenge for users is managing it all and determining what applies to their situation.

- Aubrie Souza

NCSC Senior Court Management Consultant

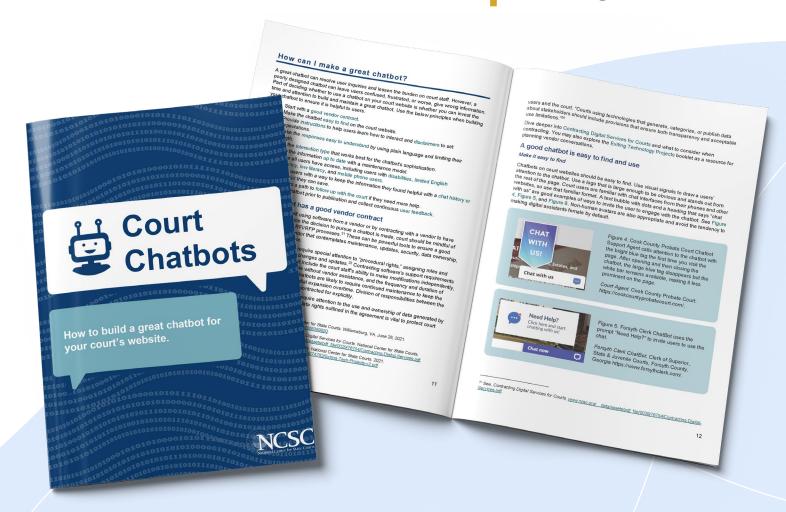
Philadelphia's new digital assistants guide court users through the landlord/tenant and consumer debt process. By answering questions about their situation, court users receive a customized "just-in-time" plan in a friendly, plain language document they can bring to court.

"There is no shortage of legal information online. Sometimes the challenge for users is managing it all and determining what applies to their situation," said NCSC Senior Court Management Consultant Aubrie Souza. "Digital assistants enable individuals to focus on the next steps in their case rather than figuring out how to digest and piece together information found online."

The Tenant Landlord Digital Assistant (T/LDA), also known as Tilda, acts as a virtual guide for self-represented tenants facing eviction due to nonpayment of rent. Tilda obtains information about specific court documents, hearings, and desired outcomes to guide tenants through the process, explain options, and offer potential next steps. Tilda can also provide support for landlords.

NCSC developed the digital assistants and a resource guide for building a chatbot with the support of **Pew Charitable Trust's Civil Legal System Modernization Project**.

Read the guide at ncsc.org/chatbots



Eviction diversion programs can foster collaboration, connect parties to resources

NCSC launched its Eviction Diversion Initiative (EDI) in 2021 to help courts respond to the nation's growing eviction crisis by bringing community resources and other problem-solving strategies into the court process. Support from the **Wells Fargo Foundation** and **Bank of America Foundation** provided funding for staff and technical assistance to develop or enhance court-based eviction diversion programs and implement related court improvements across 17 states and the District of Columbia.

Close to 90 percent of eviction cases that engage with diversion programs are resolved without judgments against the tenant, according to an NCSC report released in November 2024.

"Reimagining Housing Court: A Framework for Court-Based Eviction Diversion" shows how eviction diversion programs can foster collaboration and connect parties to resources, leading to higher appearance rates, more sealed eviction records, and increased trust and confidence in the justice system.

Read the report at ncsc.org/eviction

"Housing instability doesn't begin or end in court, but courts can play a pivotal role in preventing evictions," said Samira Nazem, the EDI project director. "Each site participating in the EDI has shown that the harmful effects of eviction can be avoided or mitigated when landlords and tenants have additional time, information, and resources to resolve their housing disputes."

Interim findings show that about 80 percent of the more than 7,000 program participants identify as non-white, with all but four sites reporting that the majority of tenants identified as Black. Additional data reveal that the risk of eviction disproportionately impacts women and children. Project sites also report a significant number of tenants with at least one household member with a physical or mental disability.

The report highlights success stories, such as in Las Vegas, where tenants in eviction court worked with social workers to access \$2.5 million in rental assistance. And in Harris County, Texas, the rate of tenants represented in court by legal aid attorneys increased from 3.27 to 11.45 percent after the diversion program was launched.

"We're extremely pleased with the success of the program so far," Nazem said. "Each court is studying the data and adapting their program to meet the specific needs of their community and make the court experience more accessible and user-centered. These insights will help sustain the individual diversion programs for many years to come, transforming the housing court experience."



Housing instability doesn't begin or end in court, but courts can play a pivotal role in preventing evictions.

> - Samira Nazem EDI Project Director National Center for State Courts



Judicial leaders urge courts to go "beyond" civics education

To improve public trust and confidence in courts, NCSC worked with a committee of the Conference of Chief Justices and Conference of State Court Administrators to build a new strategy that encourages deeper connections with communities. "Beyond Civics Education: The Health and Wellness Guide: Four Essential Steps to Boost Public Trust and Confidence" provides courts with a prescription for addressing a significant decline in public trust in the courts' ability to deliver on a core promise of equal justice, as revealed in recent years during NCSC's State of the State Courts Survey.

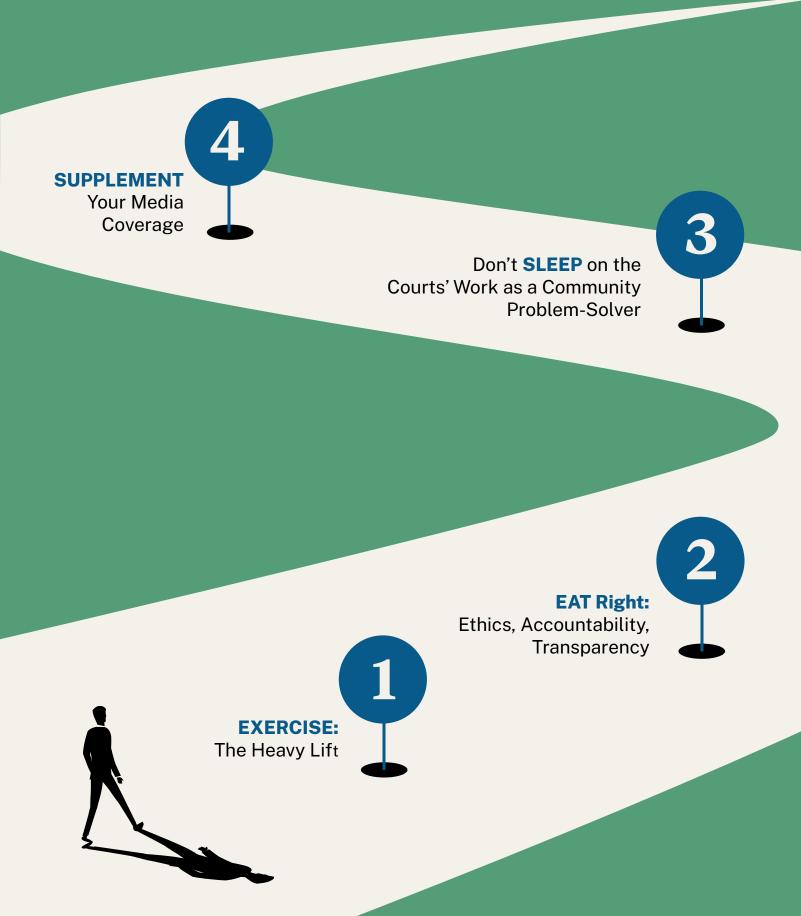
"Through our surveys and our focus groups, we have refined a strategy to better communicate the important work of the courts," said Chief Judge Anna Blackburne-Rigsby, co-chair of the CCJ/COSCA Public Engagement, Trust, and Confidence Committee. "This guide outlines a strategy that can get our public trust and confidence back in shape. We hope courts nationwide will adopt the recommendations contained in this report."

"Many Americans believe there are two systems of justice in America — one for the wealthy and well-connected and one for everyone else. Our focus group research allowed us to hear from court users firsthand, and to develop messages that can help address their concerns," added committee co-chair Marcia Meis.

To reduce the gap between how courts perceive the success of the services delivered and how the public experiences those services, the guide recommends that courts embrace a new approach to education by sharing positive impacts that touch community members' lived experiences.

The guide's four-step "health and wellness" program offers a thoughtful, sustained regimen to strengthen public trust and confidence, culminating in a healthier court system.

Read the guide at ncsc.org/beyondcivicsed



NCSC teams with Thomson Reuters Institute to inform, educate judiciary on AI

NCSC and the **Thomson Reuters Institute (TRI)** in June 2024 announced the launch of a strategic artificial intelligence (AI) partnership called the *TRI/NCSC AI Policy Consortium for Law and Courts*.

This joint initiative informs and educates the judiciary about the opportunities and challenges of evolving AI and generative AI solutions, thereby enabling judges and legal and court professionals to make informed decisions about adoption and use.

The partnership has recruited forward-leaning legal thinkers and court leaders to address these vital goals, as well as discuss policy developments and responses crucial to the future of the justice ecosystem.

The partnership's mission is to inform and educate the judiciary and other legal professionals about the opportunities and challenges of evolving AI and Generative AI solutions, thereby enabling judges to make informed decisions about adoption and use. The partnership will have a significant positive impact on the practice of law, increase access to justice to underserved communities, and position the U.S. courts as the trusted leader on responsible judicial AI adoption across the world.

FOCUS AREAS

- » The future impact of generative AI on the practice of law and the courts
- » How AI and generative AI can be appropriately harnessed to increase access to justice
- » What policy responses should be explored and recommended to protect the rule of law from any potential ill-effects of generative AI

The membership roster includes:

Chief Judge Anna Blackburne-Rigsby

District of Columbia Court of Appeals

Megan Carpenter

dean, University of New Hampshire Franklin Pierce School of Law

Judge J. Michelle Childs

United States Court of Appeals, District of Columbia Circuit

Lord Justice James Dingemans

UK Court of Appeals

James C. Duff

executive director, Supreme Court Historical Society

Ron Gordon

state court administrator,
Utah Administrative Office of the Courts

Dr. Gary Marchant

regent professor of law, and director of the Center for Law, Science and Innovation, Sandra Day O'Connor School of Law, Arizona State University

Bridget Mary McCormack

president and CEO, American Arbitration Association-International Centre for Dispute Resolution

Jami McKeon

chair, Morgan & Lewis

Associate Chief Justice Faye E. McWatt

Superior Court of Ontario

Andrew Perlman

dean and professor of law, Suffolk University

David Slayton

executive officer/clerk of court, Superior Court of Los Angeles County

Justice Beth Walker

West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals

WORKSTREAMS

- » Al governance and ethics
- » Workforce readiness for Al adoption
- » Rules and practices pertaining to AI
- » Al's impact on access to justice

EDUCATION IMPACT

Launching at the end of August of 2024, the initiative hosted five educational webinars in the final half of the year. Over **3,400** individuals are signed up for the ongoing webinar series.

Learn more at ncsc.org/ai

ICM Fellow extends research into practical action in her local community

The Institute for Court Management (ICM) has educated court leaders since 1970. The ICM Fellows credential is the most advanced level of court leadership training available and is designed to demonstrate a court professional's extensive knowledge of court administration and leadership. Since its inception, ICM has graduated over 1,300 Fellows.

One of the 2024 Fellows is Melissa Lahey, who serves as the court administrator for the circuit court in Wicomico County on Maryland's rural eastern shore. During the program, Lahey's research focused on how to improve legal services to self-represented litigants in her jurisdiction. Through her original research, Lahey concluded that the existing Family Law Help Center—located in the local courthouse— was limited in its ability to reach rural and underserved communities, and that it should partner with local organizations to extend the reach of those services outside the courthouse.

Lahey was not satisfied to let her findings sit on a shelf. She is partnering with the county library's existing Mobile Learning Lab to offer free family law services directly on a bus — bringing the services into the community. As Lahey told a local news outlet, "you should be within ten or 15 minutes of your home and come access those services, which is especially important because more than 90 percent of people in family law cases represent themselves."

More than

1,300

Fellows have graduated from ICM since its inception



Programs promote legal professionalism and strengthen the rule of law in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova

With the financial support from the **State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics** and Law Enforcement (INL), NCSC has created a regional approach to promoting legal professionalism and strengthening the rule of law in southeastern Europe. The focus is on improving legal education and creating practiced-based learning opportunities for law students.

NCSC's Strengthening the Justice Sector by Improving Educational System (JUST-ED) developed high-value impact in the legal education and justice sectors in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** by:

- 1. Creating a first-ever nation-wide community of practice to institutionalize inside the classroom practice-based learning
- 2. Piloting a structured summer/semester externship program for law students, creating a first-ever systematic approach to expanding outside the classroom law student learning
- 3. Developing a structured system for placement of law graduates in apprenticeships with legal professional associations, justice institutions, and law firms
- 4. Piloting JUST-NETWORK a four-month mentoring program teaming 15 credible legal professionals with 15 high achieving law students involving mentor/mentee presentations on legal topics and ethics at professional association conferences and law faculty events





Over a three-year period in *Moldova*, NCSC's *Advancing Legal Reasoning and Writing Program*—in partnership with William & Mary Law School and five Moldova law faculties—implemented a two-semester legal reasoning, research, and writing (LRRW) course in a civil law educational setting. The LRRW course has revolutionized the way professors teach legal reasoning and writing and the way law students develop their legal skillset to be practice-ready:

In the Semester 1 course, students learn objective legal reasoning and writing, and in Semester 2, students learn persuasive legal reasoning and writing.

At Moldova State University, the LRRW course emerged as the course with the highest number of law student enrollment.

Based on a survey across the five law schools, prior to the program none of the law students rated their legal writing skills as superior. After taking the LRRW course, 42% of law students rated their legal reasoning and writing skills as superior and 50% as advanced.

"We had the opportunity to work with experts from practice, to ask what was unclear to us, to have them in their own way explain each of the positions during the criminal proceedings and from the perspective of the lawyer (defense), the prosecution, and the judge. The experts were extremely kind and professional," said one participant. "The knowledge and practical experience that they have passed on to us and the way they have passed it on will definitely follow us until the end of our studies, and their advice and experience will help us in practice even after our studies."

Judicial leaders press Congress to support judicial security

After 16 years on the bench, Judge Julie Kocurek of Austin, Texas said she felt safe and secure in her daily routine. But that sense of normalcy changed in a heartbeat. On November 6, 2015, Judge Kocurek and her teenage son, Will, were returning home from a high school sports event when a disgruntled litigant shot her multiple times in her vehicle outside of her home.

"The gunman had shot through the driver's side window four times, from just four feet away. At that moment, I thought my life was over," Judge Kocurek told a captivated room of close to 100 congressional staffers at a May 22, 2024 Capitol Hill briefing organized by NCSC.

Judge Kocurek's personal testimony—highlighting that she spent 40 days in hospital and had over 30 surgeries on her road to recovery—helped put a fine point on the risk taken daily by so many members of the state judiciary, and why federal action is essential to improve the safety of all judges and their families.

Three state court leaders — Chief Judge Anna Blackburne-Rigsby (DC), Chief Justice Michael Boggs (GA), and Chief Justice Matthew Fader (MD) — joined Judge Kocurek for the briefing. The event also included remarks from U.S. Senators Chris Coons (DE) and Chris Van Hollen (MD) and Jonathan Mattiello of the State Justice Institute. Mike Buenger, NCSC's executive vice president and COO, served as the moderator for the event.



The gunman had shot through the driver's side window four times, from just four feet away. At that moment, I thought my life was over.

- Judge Julie Kocurek

"Threats and attacks on judges can also lead to continued and increased judicial threats and attacks," said Chief Justice Boggs, who resigned from the Supreme Court of Georgia in March 2025. "When people attempt to harm or kill a judge or their family member because of their position and the work they do, this emboldens others to do so as well."

"While judges have always lived with a certain level of risk, we have never experienced risk on the scale that we currently see today," said Chief Justice Fader of Maryland. "We are facing an entirely new threat environment that drives to the very heart of the rule of law and the fair administration of justice under law."

Chief Justice Fader highlighted the murder of one of his judicial colleagues, Judge Andrew Wilkinson, as a recent tragic example of that existential threat. Judge Wilkinson was killed in his driveway in Hagerstown, Maryland, on October 19, 2023, by a disgruntled litigant. Earlier that day in court, the judge had ruled against the assailant in a family case. It was the third targeted shooting of a state judge in recent years.

The Capitol Hill event provided critical background as Congress considered legislation to improve the safety and security of the tens of thousands of state and local court judges, many of whom lack the resources or the training to provide for the security of themselves, their staffs, and their families. The bipartisan bill, titled the Countering Threats and Attacks on Our Judges Act, would create a State Judicial Threat and Intelligence Resource Center that will provide technical assistance to judges and court personnel around the country; provide physical security assessments; and coordinate research and collect data. The legislation passed the U.S. Senate with unanimous consent, but stalled in the U.S. House of Representatives.

"A safe and secure judiciary is vital to upholding the rule of law and ensuring that all judges are well-positioned to make fair and impartial rulings, and that their decisions cannot be influenced or changed by any threats, intimidation, or retaliation," said Chief Judge Blackburne-Rigsby.



Awards

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

The Nebraska State Bar Foundation was recognized as the 2024 recipient of the Sandra Day O'Connor Award for the Advancement of Civics Education for its significant contributions to civics education and long history of public engagement, especially with students. The foundation's extensive outreach ranges from a 25-year-old high school mock trial program to a Bench Media Committee that seeks to increase public understanding of the legal system through open dialogue with the news media. The foundation also developed a juror orientation video to help the public understand courtroom procedures and responsibilities during jury service.



Nebraska State Bar Foundation

WILLIAM H. REHNQUIST AWARD FOR JUDICIAL EXCELLENCE

Texas District Court Judge Julie Kocurek received the 29th Annual William H. Rehnquist Award for Judicial Excellence. Judge Kocurek was honored for her remarkable courage and dedication, notably for returning to the bench after being shot in 2015 by a defendant she had previously sentenced. She has since become an advocate for increased judicial security in Texas and nationally. In 2017, Texas passed the Judge Julie Kocurek Courthouse Security Act to enhance judicial officer security through protection of personal information and stronger



Judge Julie Kocurek

courthouse security.

G. THOMAS MUNSTERMAN AWARD FOR JURY INNOVATION

The Ada County Jury Office in Idaho was awarded the 2024 G. Thomas

Munsterman Award for Jury Innovation for its dedication to improving the jury service experience by prioritizing juror comfort and efficiency. Notable improvement efforts include remodeling the jury assembly room, providing online services for jurors, and offering community-driven financial support for transportation, meals and childcare. The Ada County Jury Office is the busiest in Idaho and assists up to 3,000 jurors a month.



Ada County Jury Office

WARREN E. BURGER AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN COURT ADMINISTRATION

David Slayton, executive officer and clerk of court for the Superior Court of Los Angeles County, was named the recipient of the 2024 Warren E. **Burger Award for Excellence in Court** Administration. Recognized for his extensive court administration experience in local, state, and national leadership roles, Slayton is known for fostering collaboration, innovative solutions, and enthusiastic leadership. His leadership has introduced impactful changes to address multifaceted challenges, such as access to justice, statewide e-filing implementation, and crisis response to cyberattacks and the COVID-19 pandemic.



David Slayton

Warren E. Burger Society

The National Center for State Courts' Warren E. Burger Society honors those who have volunteered their time, talent, and support to NCSC 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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Kim M. Brunner
Michael L. Buenger
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Alan Carlson
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John J. Curtin*

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Rosalyn W. Frierson-Smith William H. Gates Vernon M. Geddy* Ronald M. George James D. Gingerich Laurie K. Givens Richard C. Godfrey Thomas A. Gottschalk John M. Greacen Maurice R. Greenberg Joe R. Greenhill*

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William K. Weisenberg
Brenda A. Williams
W. Wayne Withers*
Robert A. Zastany
Lynda Zeller
Guy A. Zoghby*

*Deceased

NCSC welcomed the following members into the Burger Society in 2024

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The General Counsel Committee of the National Center for State Courts facilitates the intellectual collaboration between the general counsel of America's leading corporations and NCSC experts on judicial issues that affect the public, business community, and state court leaders.

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Global General Counsel Bank of America

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General Counsel Hypertherm

Jeanne E. Walker

Former Senior Counsel Shell USA

Susan Whaley

Chief Legal Officer Procter & Gamble Company

Jennifer L. Zachary

Executive Vice President & General Counsel Merck & Co., Inc.

Joan K. Cochet Memorial Scholarship

The National Center for State Court recognizes the following individuals who made a gift to the Joan K. Cochet Memorial Scholarship for the Institute for Court Management (ICM). The scholarship helps deserving students achieve the status of ICM Fellow — the highest level of ICM's certification program.

Howard H. Berchtold Sally A. Holewa Eileen A. Kato Joy Keller Kenneth McClintock Amy M. McDowell Mandy Sarkissian J. D. Smith Linda R. Soles Robert D. Wessels

Presidents Legacy Society

Established by the National Center for State Courts in honor of its past presidents — Edward B. McConnell, Larry L. Sipes, Roger K. Warren, and Mary C. McQueen — the Presidents Legacy Society celebrates donors who have included the National Center for State Courts in their estate plans. Through a bequest or other planned gift, this generous support helps NCSC fulfill its mission of promoting the rule of law and improving the administration of justice in state courts and courts around the world.

Invest in the future of our courts with a planned gift. It is never too late to consider the legacy you want to leave behind. We know as supporters you care about the very important work we do. With the Presidents Legacy Society, you can continue to make a difference for years to come.



Lawyers Committee

As officers of the court, lawyers have a special commitment to help improve the performance of state courts for the benefit of their clients and the public. Membership on the NCSC Lawyers Committee furthers this goal. Our members actively engage with state chief justices and other court leaders on a range of issues affecting state courts.

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Elena BacaPaul Hastings, LLP



Patrick Malone
Patrick Malone & Associates, PC

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