

Hon. Fred S. Hecker
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Conference of Circuit Judges

Maryland Judicial Center
187 Harry S. Truman Parkway
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

A meeting of the Conference of Circuit Judges was held via Zoom on Monday, January 26, 2026, beginning at 9:30 a.m.

Members Present:

Hon. Fred S. Hecker, Chair
Hon. Yolanda L. Curtin, Vice Chair
Hon. James A. Bonifant
Hon. Audrey J.S. Carrión
~~Hon. DaNeeka V. Cotton~~
Hon. William W. Davis, Jr.
~~Hon. Jeffrey S. Getty~~
Hon. Wendy S. Epstein

Hon. ShaRon M. Grayson Kelsey
Hon. Julia A. Martz Fisher
Hon. Viki M. Pauler
Hon. S. James Sarbanes
Hon. Brian D. Shockley
Hon. Brenda A. Sexton
Hon. Anthony F. Vittoria
Hon. Lara C. Weathersbee

Guests:

Debra Burch (Chair, Conference of Circuit Court Clerks)
Nancy Faulkner (Deputy State Court Administrator)
Gregory Hilton (Clerk of Court, SCM)
Andrea Murphy (Staff)
Aimee Perez (Sr. Researcher, Research & Analysis)
Kara Pollak (Chair, Conference of Circuit Court Administrators)

Wonmai Punksungka (Sr. Researcher, Research & Analysis)
Rebecca Riemer (Sr. Assoc. Legal Counsel, Legal Affairs)
Hon. Mark F. Scurti (Chair, Court Operations Committee)
Jamie Walter (Director, Research & Analysis)
Hon. H. James West (County Admin. Judge, Charles County)
Hon. Brett R. Wilson (Acting Circuit Admin. Judge, Washington County)

Welcome – Hon. Fred S. Hecker

Judge Fred S. Hecker welcomed conference members and reminded them that the meeting was being livestreamed for the public.

Approval of the Minutes of the November 17, 2025, Meeting

The Conference approved the November 17, 2025, meeting minutes.

JIS Jury Management Operating Directive – Hon. Mark F. Scurti

On behalf of the Court Operations Committee, Judge Mark F. Scurti presented the *JIS Jury Management Operating Directive* (“the directive”) to the Conference for review prior to its submission to the Judicial Council for approval. The directive formalizes current, longstanding practices regarding the relationship and areas of oversight among the Jury Use and Management Subcommittee, the Jury Operations Roundtable, and Judicial Information Systems (JIS). Judge Scurti noted that the directive does not introduce new guidelines but instead codifies existing practices.

A question was raised regarding what falls under the jurisdiction of the Jury Use and Management Subcommittee. Rebecca Riemer explained that, in addition to other responsibilities, the Subcommittee develops manuals such as the Jury Office Manual that address internal policies and best practices, with the goal of allowing flexibility for individual jurisdictions while promoting statewide uniformity to the extent possible.

The Conference requested clarification on the definition of “statewide jury policy” as referenced in section 3a of the Operational Guidelines on page 4 of the directive and suggested considering more permissive language for that section. The Subcommittee will make the requested updates and present the revised directive to the Conference at its March 23, 2026, meeting.

Public Perceptions Survey – Gregory Hilton, Wonmai Punksungka & Jamie Walter

Gregory Hilton, along with Wonmai Punksungka and Jamie Walter, presented on the Public Perceptions Survey, which was commissioned by the Operations Subcommittee of the Equal Justice Committee. The purpose of the survey is to understand how court users perceive the Maryland court system, including perceptions of court access and procedural fairness. The survey will allow individual courts to see how well they are serving litigants and other community members, compare their results to the state average, and identify areas for improvement.

Research and Analysis (R&A) is developing an interactive dashboard to report the survey results. The dashboard will include aggregated statewide average scores on perception of access and fairness.

Individual court results will be shared with the respective courts. R&A is also exploring ways to display open-ended comments. Ms. Punksungka provided a demonstration of the dashboard.

The Operations Subcommittee is working to increase the number of valid survey responses. Mr. Hilton encouraged Conference members to advertise the survey to court users, display marketing resources in high-traffic areas of courthouses, and ask employees who work directly with court users to invite users to complete the survey. The Operations Subcommittee will send a poll to members asking what marketing resources their courts need. Conference members may also contact R&A to request marketing resources.

Judicial Needs Assessment Study – Hon. H. James West & Jamie Walter

Judge H. James West and Dr. Walter provided an overview of the Judicial Needs Model and shared information about the upcoming Judicial Needs Assessment Time Study. The Judiciary relies on a weighted caseload model that accounts for differences in case complexity by measuring judicial time from pre-trial through post-judgment activities, as well as non-case activities. In 2025, the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) engaged NCSC to conduct a full statewide model update.

A core component of the model update is a time study of work performed by trial court judicial officers. Data collected from the time study will be used to develop a model estimating the expected annual workload in each jurisdiction and the number of judicial officers needed to meet that workload. Judge West noted that he is a member of the Judicial Needs Assessment Workgroup, which was formed to provide study oversight and guidance.

From March 2, 2026, through March 27, 2026, all circuit and District Court judges, senior judges, and magistrates will be asked to track and record all working time, including on-and off-bench case-related work, as well as non-case related activities such as administrative duties and continuing education. Dr. Walter requested that members contact her if there is anyone else performing related duties in their jurisdiction of whom R&A may not be aware and who should participate in the study.

Judge West and Dr. Walter emphasized the importance of participation in the time study and encouraged Conference members to communicate this to their benches. They also requested that administrative judges provide reminders during bench meetings and perform check-ins mid-study and toward the end of the study to support continued participation. Weekly updates on participation rates for individual jurisdictions will be sent to each administrative judge.

Judicial officers will attend a training session prior to the time study, with sessions offered in mid-to-late February. NCSC Workload will send a welcome email containing training registration and session links. Judge Yolanda L. Curtin recommended the potential development of training schedule assignments for each jurisdiction. This topic will be added to the February 12, 2026, County Administrative Judges meeting agenda for discussion.

Old Business – DOC Attorney Visitation – Hon. Fred S. Hecker

Judge Hecker inquired whether Conference members had experienced any additional issues or learned new information regarding attorney access to visitation with detained clients since the discussion at the November 17, 2025, meeting. Judge Vicki M. Pauler advised that she contacted members of the Office of the Public Defender (OPD) to ask whether they were aware of the issue or taking any action. It was noted that private attorneys are experiencing the same issue. Judge Hecker will discuss the matter with the OPD and the Maryland State Bar Association (MSBA) and will report back at the March 23, 2026, meeting.

For the Good of the Order

Judge Hecker reminded members of the request he submitted to the Rules Committee, on behalf of the Conference, to amend [Rule 16-104](#). The proposed amendment would allow a circuit administrative judge to designate a county administrative judge within the same circuit to serve as acting circuit administrative judge during the circuit administrative judge's temporary absence. He informed members that the matter will be considered by the Supreme Court of Maryland at the Open Meeting on the [227th Report of the Rules Committee](#) on February 11, 2026.

Judge Hecker also asked whether members wish to request similar amendments to [Rules 4-344\(d\)](#), [2-551\(a\)](#), and [2-327\(d\)](#) to allow a circuit administrative judge to designate a county administrative judge in the same circuit to serve as acting circuit administrative judge during a temporary absence. The Conference agreed to request amendments to these rules as well.

No additional matters were raised, and the meeting was adjourned at 11:05 a.m.