



Hon. Matthew J. Fader, Chair
Chief Justice, Supreme Court of Maryland

Matthew Barrett
*Chair, Conference of Circuit Court
Administrators*

Hon. Bibi M. Berry
Circuit Court for Montgomery County

Hon. Wayne A. Brooks
*District Court of Maryland
Howard County*

Hon. Yvette M. Bryant
*Chair, Standing Committee on Rules of
Practice and Procedure*

Hon. Debra J. Burch
Vice-Chair, Conference of Circuit Court Clerks

Hon. Yolanda L. Curtin
Vice-Chair, Conference of Circuit Judges

Hon. Heather S. DeWees
Chair, Conference of Circuit Court Clerks

Nancy Faulkner
Secretary, Deputy State Court Administrator

Maria Fields
*Administrative Clerk, District 8
Baltimore County*

Hon. Fred S. Hecker
Chair, Conference of Circuit Judges

Hon. Geoffrey G. Hengerer
*District Court of Maryland
Baltimore City*

Hon. James A. Kenney, III
Chair, Senior Judges Committee

Hon. Stacy A. Mayer
Circuit Court for Baltimore County

Hon. John P. Morrissey
Chief Judge, District Court of Maryland

Hon. Harris P. Murphy
Circuit Court for Kent County

Kara Pollak
*Vice-Chair, Conference of Circuit Court
Administrators*

Judy Rupp
State Court Administrator

Rebecca Sloane
*Administrative Clerk, District 3
Cecil County*

Hon. Shaèm C. P. Spencer
*District Court of Maryland
Anne Arundel County*

Roberta Warnken
Chief Clerk, District Court of Maryland

Hon. E. Greg Wells
Chief Judge, Appellate Court of Maryland

MARYLAND JUDICIAL COUNCIL

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Meeting Minutes
March 26, 2025

Judicial Council Members Present:

Hon. Matthew J. Fader, Chair
Matthew Barrett

Hon. Bibi M. Berry

Hon. Wayne A. Brooks

Hon. Debra J. Burch

Hon. Yolanda L. Curtin

Nancy Faulkner

Maria Fields

Hon. Fred S. Hecker

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Hon. James A. Kenney, III

Hon. Stacy A. Mayer

Hon. John P. Morrissey

Hon. Harris P. Murphy

Kara Pollak

Judy Rupp

Rebecca Sloane

Hon. Shaèm C.P. Spencer

Roberta Warnken

Hon. E. Greg Wells

Others Present:

Warren Hedges

Hon. Karen A. Murphy Jensen

Sarah Kaplan

Hon. Sherri D. Koch

Amanda Miller

Pamela Ortiz

Eliana Pangelinan

Sharon Reed

Hon. Cathy H. Serrette

Hon. Michael W. Siri

Nisa Subasinghe

Gillian Tonkin

Hon. Mark Tyler

Kyle Unnewehr

Unique Wright

1. Welcome – Hon. Matthew J. Fader

Chief Justice Fader called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m. He acknowledged that today marks the one-year anniversary of the tragic incident involving the Baltimore Key Bridge. He initiated the meeting with a moment of remembrance for the event, emphasizing that this tragedy would continue to affect Marylanders for the years ahead.

2. Approval of Minutes of the January 29, 2025 meeting.

Chief Justice Fader opened the floor for comments on the previous meeting minutes. Judge Berry pointed out that her name had been omitted. Justice Fader said that her name would be added to the minutes. No additional comments were made on the previous meeting's minutes. Chief Justice Fader requested a motion for approval of the revised minutes. The motion was made, and all present were in favor of approving the notes.

3. Executive Committee Updates

- **Chief Justice Matthew J. Fader, Supreme Court of Maryland:**

Chief Justice Fader shared that the Supreme Court held oral arguments earlier this month at Montgomery College. Students from six high schools attended, and a Q&A session followed the arguments. This was the Court's fourth session held outside of Annapolis. The justices also enjoyed a lunch with students provided by the college's culinary program.

- **Chief Judge E. Greg Wells, Appellate Court of Maryland:**

Chief Judge Wells provided updates on the Appellate Court, noting that 46 cases are scheduled for oral arguments in May. He also highlighted that the number of opinions over 9 months old has decreased, marking a positive trend that they hope to continue.

- **Ms. Rupp – Administrative Office of the Courts:**

Ms. Rupp shared data on Maryland Court Help Centers, which supported 28,909 instances of service in January and February, including 4,427 chat interactions, 1,127 email inquiries, and 8,000 walk-in sessions. She highlighted the continued robust support for self-represented litigants.

Ms. Rupp noted that staff from the Office of Problem-Solving Courts will facilitate the statewide summit on behavioral health, which is an initiative designed to improve the state's response to behavioral health issues within the criminal justice system. The summit is sponsored by the Maryland Judiciary, the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention Policy, and the Maryland Department of Health Administration.

She provided an update on the Judicial College's preparation for the Judicial Conference with the theme: "Navigating the Intersection of Artificial Intelligence and Judicial Integrity." The Leadership Conference scheduled for May 13, 2025, will focus on "Shaping Modern Leadership."

A workgroup has been formed to update the criminal law bench book, which has not been updated since 2017. Ms. Rupp acknowledged the work of the internal audit group, which conducted six audit engagements and two follow-up audits for the Period January 1, 2025 to March 17, 2025. Legal Affairs and Fair Practices

also reviewed 129 fiscal notes and 25 proposed bills. They also launched the “Preventing Sexual Harassment” training for circuit court employees and conducted a training for circuit court EEO Coordinators. She further noted the progress on data dashboards and the new data warehouse build. Additionally, the Mediation and Conflict Resolution Office is preparing for the launch of a statewide ADR practitioner application for the circuit and orphans courts and continuing education platform, set to go live by July 1, 2025.

- **Chief Judge John P. Morrissey, District Court of Maryland:**

Chief Judge Morrissey confirmed the finalized topics for the District Court breakout sessions at the Judicial Conference. He thanked Judge Siri for his significant contributions in coordinating these sessions. He expressed excitement about the presentation by the executive director of the Motor Vehicle Administration, who will discuss AI and autonomous vehicles at the conference. The Major Projects Committee sent out a survey to Judiciary personnel regarding potential names for the new Online Dispute Resolution platform. They received over 160 responses, with the winning name, Maryland Online Resolutions (MDOR), submitted by Obiora Dallah at the Circuit Court for Baltimore City. Mr. Dallah was recognized at the Major Projects Committee meeting and gave a speech about access to justice and the services provided to citizens.

- **Hon. Fred S. Hecker, Chair, Conference of Circuit Judges:**

Judge Hecker provided an update on the expanded voir dire project, noting that it is halfway through its pilot phase. The program has been robust, with the participating judges generating valuable data for a useful report. He called for increased attorney participation to improve the study’s outcomes.

Judge Hecker shared that the Conference of Circuit Judges met on Monday and invited Secretary Scruggs from the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services to brief the group on her department’s updates. He mentioned that Dr. Soulé also provided updates, and reports from Domestic Law Committee were discussed. Due to the elevation of Judge Stephen H. Kehoe to the Appellate Court, the Conference approved Judge Heather L. Price to take his place on the Committee on Complex Litigation.

4. Committee Updates

- a. **Senior Judges Committee – *Hon. James A. Kenney, III***

Judge Kenney began by providing an overview of the Senior Judges Committee, which currently consists of 16 members. The committee is supported by eight subcommittees and workgroups, including the Legislative Subcommittee, MDEC Access Subcommittee, and the Senior Judge Scheduling Workgroup. These subgroups play a crucial role in furthering the committee’s initiatives. The mission of the Senior Judges Committee is to integrate senior judges as seamlessly as possible into the operations of the Judiciary, especially in response to technological advancements and changes in how courts conduct business. As of December 30,

2024, Maryland has 181 senior judges, with specific designations across various court systems: 55 in the District Court, 67 in the circuit courts, 10 in the appellate courts, 9 cross-designated to both appellate and trial courts, and 40 cross-designated within the trial courts. This strategic distribution of senior judges is essential for maximizing their effectiveness within different levels of the Judiciary.

Judge Kenney discussed the representation of senior judges across various committees and workgroups. As of February 6, 2025, senior judges occupy a total of 118 seats across several important bodies, including committees such as Alternative Dispute Resolution, Court Access, Court Operations, Domestic Law, Education, and more. Their broad representation highlights the vital role senior judges play in shaping the Judiciary's direction and policies. Regarding training, Judge Kenney noted that senior judges, like incumbent judges, are required to complete annual education and training. In 2024, 100% of senior judges completed the security training, 80% completed the training on unconscious bias, and 77% met the 15-hour education requirement. While these numbers are strong, there is room for improvement, especially in meeting the education hours.

In terms of accomplishments for the year, Judge Kenney highlighted several key initiatives. The committee helped various Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) departments notify senior judges about required training, ensuring they meet their educational obligations. The committee also worked to inform both senior and retired judges, as well as their beneficiaries, about significant changes to the state prescription drug program. Additionally, the committee collaborated with the Judicial College to host a Senior Judge Tech Day. Another initiative involved working with the Public Education and Community Outreach Subcommittee to solicit volunteers for the Reading and Robes program, which allows judges to engage with the community.

Further reflecting the committee's accomplishments, Judge Kenney mentioned the collaboration with the Court Technology Committee to develop a circuit court senior judge scheduling application, which streamlined scheduling for senior judges and integrated them more efficiently into court operations. Due to a technology issue, the tool was unavailable briefly this year, but is now fully functional, again.

One of the year's most rewarding moments was awarding the 2024 Senior Judge Award to Hon. John F. Fader II, recognizing his significant contributions to the Judiciary. The *Hot Topics* newsletter continued to keep senior judges informed about important issues and developments within the Judiciary. Judge Kenney also took a moment to express his gratitude to the judges for their support, specifically Chief Justice Fader for his help with prescription drug updates. He also acknowledged Sharon Reed for her expertise in handling senior judge scheduling statewide for the District Court. Judge Morrissey also recognized Sharon Reed as an invaluable asset in ensuring that senior judge scheduling runs smoothly.

Justice Fader expressed gratitude to the senior judges. Judge Curtin echoed Justice

Fader's appreciation, noting that the judges' contributions across the state have been crucial for keeping dockets running smoothly.

Judge Kenney noted that the committee was seeking a court administrator or deputy court administrator. Mr. Barrett confirmed that he had already reached out to Ms. Rupp on the matter and would follow up accordingly.

In conclusion, Judge Kenney reiterated the committee's continued efforts to support senior judges, ensuring they are well-integrated, informed, and equipped to contribute meaningfully to the Judiciary. Their involvement across various subcommittees and workgroups strengthens the Judiciary's ability to address challenges and advance important initiatives.

b. Domestic Law Committee – Hon. Cathy H. Serrette

Judge Serrette introduced Judge Karen A. Murphy Jensen, Magistrate Mark Tyler, Sarah Kaplan, and Nisa Subasinghe. She highlighted the exceptional work of the Domestic Law Committee and AOC's Department of Juvenile and Family Services, which has gained national recognition, posting the Maryland Judiciary at the forefront in several areas of domestic law and guardianship. She acknowledged the collaboration with government agencies, non-profits, and justice stakeholders to improve public trust.

Judge Serrette indicated that she would focus on two major projects requiring approval. The first initiative is the Child Support Workgroup's *Problem-Solving Courts, Child Support: A Blueprint for Maryland's Judiciary*. This initiative emerged in response to a 2019 report by the Abell Foundation, which highlighted the cyclical instability caused by Maryland's current child support practices. The workgroup examined child support practices through an equity lens and developed guidelines for a child support problem-solving courts, focusing on rehabilitation rather than punitive measures. The blueprint, which includes four phases: orientation, stabilization, transformation, and maintenance, was presented to the Problem Solving Courts Subcommittee and Specialty Courts and Dockets Committee. Both supported the initiative.

Judge Wells inquired whether a county was identified as a pilot. Judge Serrette confirmed that a pilot could be launched upon approval of the report but there was not a specific court in mind. Magistrate Tyler explained that several states, including Colorado, Missouri, North Carolina, and Washington D.C., have implemented similar child support problem-solving courts. These programs have demonstrated positive outcomes, with information provided by these jurisdictions to support the blueprint. Justice Fader asked about the funding model for these courts. Magistrate Tyler emphasized that the blueprint allows flexibility for counties to tailor the program according to their available resources.

Magistrate Tyler also shared data from the Caroline County RISE Program, which reported that in 2023, 63 participants helped generate \$143,139 in child support payments, with 31 achieving full-time employment and 14 achieving part-time employment. He indicated that the Caroline County program utilizes Title IV(D) funds.

Justice Fader acknowledged the novelty of the proposal and the need for better ways to resolve child support disputes. Judge Hecker noted that the Conference of Circuit Judges raised questions about resource availability for such programs. The Conference supported the initiative, and he expressed optimism about the potential success of the initiative. Judge Berry asked about the involvement of the recipient parent in the process and the resources available to that parent. Magistrate Tyler detailed that access issues, such as parents not paying due to restricted visitation, could also be addressed, possibly through alternative dispute resolution methods. Judge Serrette added that the Office of the Attorney General participated in the workgroup, ensuring a comprehensive approach to the problem-solving court's design.

Justice Fader clarified that the committee is seeking approval for the guidelines for any courts that wish to implement a child support problem-solving court and asked for a motion. The motion was made by Judge Wells, seconded by Judge Kenney, and approved by all members present. Justice Fader thanked the committee for their innovative thinking and accepted the recommendation to approve the blueprint.

Judge Serrette introduced the second initiative, focusing on the work of the Guardianship and Vulnerable Adults Workgroup. Chaired by Judge Jensen and staffed by Nisa Subasinghe, the workgroup recommended the IDEAL approach to guardianship. Judge Serrette referenced the IDEAL approach to guardianship, a person-centered approach aimed at diverting the healthcare-to-guardianship pipeline. IDEAL stands for identify, evaluate, assess, and limit. The report offers an extensive review of guardianship practices in Maryland and provides recommendations for future reform.

The report was approved by the Conference of Circuit Judges, and the Domestic Law Committee is now seeking approval of the court-specific recommendations in the guardianship report. These recommendations will serve as the new roadmap for the workgroup's ongoing efforts. Judge Jensen shared that Maryland has been nationally recognized for its guardianship reform efforts. The workgroup's achievements have been featured at national conferences, such as the National Conference on Guardianship and the National Aging and Law Conference. In May, Senior Judge Patrick Woodward, and Nisa Subasinghe will present at the Pennsylvania Judiciary's Guardianship Summit.

In 2016, the Guardianship and Vulnerable Adults Workgroup presented 25 recommendations, which were approved by the Judicial Council and became the workgroup's roadmap. Judge Jensen is proud to report that the workgroup has

successfully implemented all of the recommendations. Maryland received an Elder Justice Innovation Grant from the Administration for Community Living, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This three-year project involved collaboration led by Nisa Subasinghe and was supported by the Circuit Courts for Carroll, Harford, and St. Mary's Counties. Judge Jensen asked the Judicial Council to adopt the recommendations from the Elder Justice Innovation Grant report as the workgroups and the Judiciary's new roadmap for outreach, education, and limiting guardianships.

Judge Hecker noted that the Conference of Circuit Judges had no concerns with the report and expressed appreciation for the guidance provided by the court in advancing the way guardianship cases are handled. Judge Stacey A. Mayer, who sits as a guardianship judge at the Circuit Court for Baltimore County, expressed gratitude for the work done by the workgroup. She shared that, prior to being a judge, she was not familiar with the high volume of guardianship cases, especially with the aging population. She emphasized the important work of the committee in addressing these issue. Justice Fader remarked that guardianships were the focus of the annual meeting of Joint Conference of Chief Justices and State Court Administrators, and while there are often stories of cases gone wrong in other jurisdictions, Maryland has managed to reform its approach without such circumstances.

Justice Fader asked for a motion to recommend approval of the report. The motion was made by Judge Mayer, seconded by Judge Hecker, and approved by all present. The recommendations from the Guardianship and Vulnerable Adults Workgroup will be adopted as the new roadmap for ongoing reform in Maryland's guardianship system.

c. Court Access Committee – Hon. Michael W. Siri

Judge Siri provided an update on the work of the Court Access Committee, focusing particularly on two areas requiring the Judiciary's attention. The first issue involves the implementation of the Maryland Sign Language Act of 2023, which mandates that all sign language interpreters in Maryland hold a state license. This act created the State Board of Sign Language Interpreters (SBSLI) within the Governor's Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing, which is tasked with developing licensing requirements by July 1, 2024. Licenses were to be required by January 1, 2025. However, SBSLI has not yet published the proposed regulations or opened a public comment period. Nor is there an online portal for interpreters to apply for licensing. As a result, it is expected that the licensing requirement will be delayed until July 1, 2025. There are concerns about how SBSLI will accomplish the necessary steps, including the 30-day comment period.

The Judiciary is taking a cautious approach and is preparing to require licensing for all sign language interpreters once the process is in place. A potential challenge involves finding Maryland-licensed interpreters, especially since Birnbaum, the remote sign language interpreter vendor used by the Judiciary, relies on interpreters

from outside Maryland. The Judiciary will continue to monitor the situation and report any concerns.

The second area of focus for the Court Access Committee report is the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1AA, which provide technical standards to ensure websites and public-facing web applications are accessible to individuals with disabilities.

The U.S. Department of Justice adopted regulations in June 2024, making compliance with these standards mandatory by April 24, 2026. This will impact various Judiciary applications, including court forms, audio and video content, Case Search, and land records. The Major Projects Committee established a workgroup to help facilitate compliance with these new standards.

Judge Siri also reported that the Court Access Committee has revised and updated a document titled *"Can We Help You?" A Guide for Maryland Judiciary Court Staff: How to Distinguish Legal Information from Legal Advice*. Originally created in 2010 by the former Maryland Access to Justice Commission, the guide was vetted and approved by the then-Judicial Executive Committee. The new guide was reviewed and updated by the Court Access Committee. If approved, the updated document will be distributed to court staff as a resource for better serving the public and will serve as the basis for future staff training. The Judicial Council approved the report without amendment.

Judge Siri also highlighted two important annual reports: *Resources for the Self-Represented in Maryland Courts* and *Language Services in Maryland Courts*. The first report; a collaborative effort of the Department of Juvenile and Family Services, the Thurgood Marshall State Law Library, and the Conference of Law Librarians; outlines the various resources available to self-represented litigants. The second report focuses on language services, including in-person interpreters, telephonic and remote ASL interpretation, and translation services. Both reports are available in public and internal versions, with the latter providing detailed data to help courts use these resources effectively.

Judge Siri also discussed the expansion of the Bilingual Staff Pilot Program. After a successful pilot in Montgomery County, the program was expanded to other jurisdictions with demonstrated need. This program invites existing court employees who are bilingual in English and Spanish to take an oral proficiency exam. Those who pass the exam are authorized to serve as qualified bilingual staff, providing services directly in Spanish, without the use of an interpreter. These employees receive a stipend in recognition of their language skills. The expansion aims to enhance the Judiciary's ability to serve the Spanish-speaking public.

Judge Siri reported that the Judiciary's Court Help Centers provided a total of 233,161 instances of service in Fiscal Year 2024. The Maryland Court Help App, which was recently updated to version 3.0, continues to be an important tool for self-represented

litigants, providing access to legal information and resources on both Android and iOS devices. The application's video library was expanded to include new series on topics such as victims of crime, remote proceedings, and expungement. Additional content was added, including information on the declaration of gender identity and a Spanish language version of the parenting plan series.

In addition to the video content available in the application, Access to Justice is currently developing a separate video series specifically for judges. This series, which focuses on working with interpreters, will be available on Courtnet so judges can view the short videos on demand. While it is not part of the application, it aligns with broader Access to Justice initiatives.

Finally, Judge Siri updated the Council on the kiosk program pilot, which was initially implemented to assist with wayfinding and answering frequently asked questions at certain court locations. The project team, which includes Judiciary Information Systems and Access to Justice, is exploring additional uses for the kiosks, such as: automating the marriage license application process, providing wayfinding for more complex court buildings, and assisting with high-volume docket "check-ins". The group will report back to the Major Projects Committee with further updates on these potential uses.

5. For the Good of the Order

No additional matters were raised by the members and the meeting was adjourned at 11:13 a.m.