

**JUDICIAL COUNCIL MEETING
Minutes**

September 09, 2025

Hybrid Meeting (in person and Webex)

Zermatt Resort

784 W Resort Dr, Midway, UT 84049 Basel Room

Chief Justice Matthew B. Durrant, Presiding

Members:

Chief Justice Matthew B. Durrant, Chair
Hon. David Mortensen, Vice Chair
Hon. Suchada Bazzelle
Hon. Brian Brower
Hon. Jon Carpenter
Hon. Samuel Chiara
Hon. Rita Cornish
Hon. Susan Eisenman
Hon. James Gardner
Hon. Michael Leavitt
Hon. Brendan McCullagh
Hon. Amber Mettler
Justice Paige Petersen
Kristin K. Woods
Hon. Angela Fonnesbeck
Hon. Thomas Low

AOC Staff:

Ron Gordon
Neira Siaperas
Esme Blanco
Michael Drechsel
Sonia Sweeney
Shane Bahr
Jim Peters
Nick Stiles
Keisa Williams
Brody Arishita
Todd Eaton

Presenters:

Katy Burke
Cris Seabury

1. WELCOME AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES: (Chief Justice Matthew B. Durrant)

Chief Justice Matthew B. Durrant welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked for any questions or comments on the previous month's minutes. Judge Jon Carpenter recommended an amendment on page 3, changing "above sustainable levels" to "unsustainable levels."

Motion: Judge Jon Carpenter moved to approve the August 15, 2025 meeting minutes as amended. Judge Thomas Low seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

2. CHAIR'S REPORT: (Chief Justice Matthew B. Durrant)

Chief Justice Durrant reported on a recent meeting with the Elected Officials and Judicial Compensation Commission (EJCC). The Commission expressed support for raising judicial salaries but cautioned that increases beyond a cost-of-living adjustment are unlikely. Ron

Gordon added that the Commission is concerned about the heavy judicial workloads and is considering ways to elevate those concerns during the upcoming legislative session.

3. STATE COURT ADMINISTRATOR’S REPORT: (Ron Gordon)

Mr. Gordon introduced Esme Blanco, the new Executive Support Coordinator, who succeeds Hilary Wood following her departure to the private sector. Ms. Blanco previously served as a Training Coordinator in the Second District Juvenile Court and brings 17 years of experience and valuable skills that will benefit the Judiciary statewide.

Mr. Gordon also highlighted upcoming public outreach efforts aimed at promoting understanding of the Judiciary’s role and independence. These events are designed to foster dialogue with community partners, other branches of government, and the public, ultimately strengthening trust and confidence in the Judiciary. Jon Puente, Director of the Office of Fairness and Accountability, shared plans for town halls, including an upcoming event at the Tooele Public Library featuring judges from district, juvenile, and justice courts. Similar initiatives are underway in the Fourth and Eighth Judicial Districts, with the goal of eventually hosting town halls in every district.

4. COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Management Committee Report:

Nothing to report.

Budget & Fiscal Management Committee Report:

Nothing to report.

Liaison Committee Report:

Judge Low reported that there were no new legislative developments or bills to update at this time.

Policy, Planning, and Technology Committee Report:

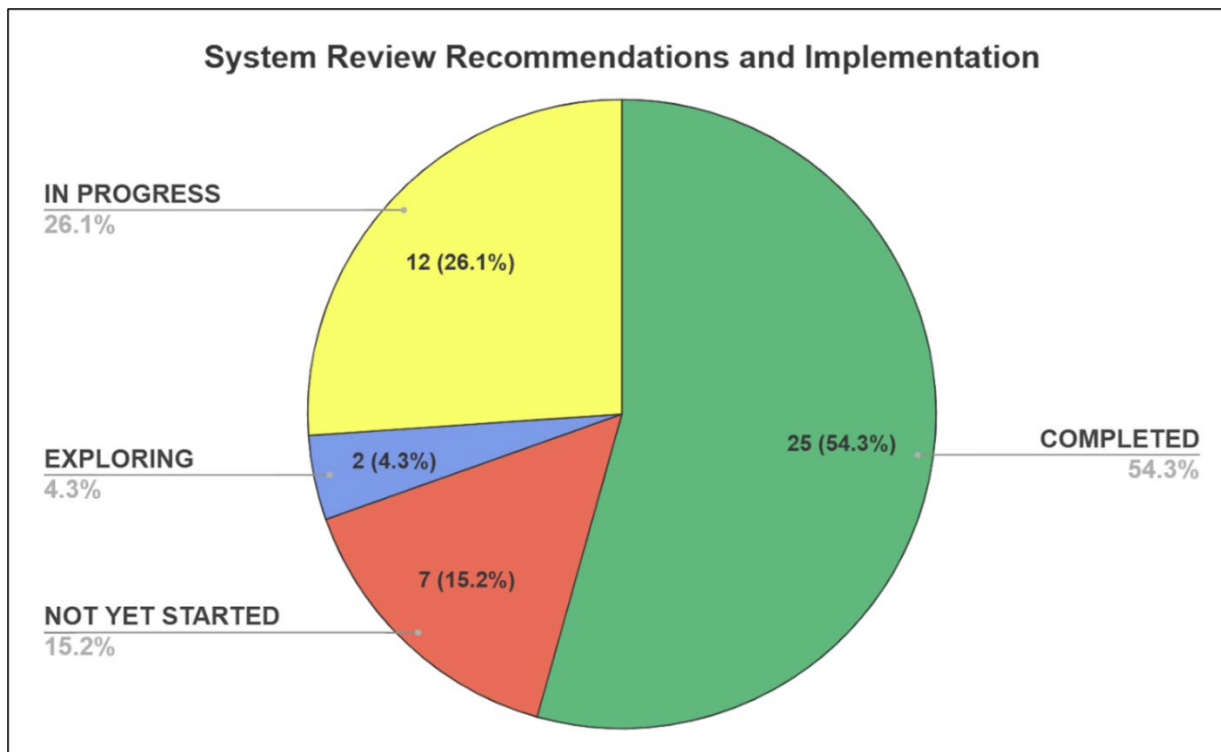
Nothing to report.

Bar Commission Report:

Katie Woods reported that the Utah State Bar recently met with legislators to discuss licensing fees, focusing on how fees are determined. Legislators also signaled interest in potentially restructuring the Bar. Ms. Woods noted that the licensing fee has remained \$425 since 2009 and funds CLEs and attorney wellness resources. The Bar Commission is preparing to enhance engagement and communication with legislators ahead of the next session. She also reminded the Council that the Bar’s Fall Forum is scheduled for November 13–14, 2025, and expressed appreciation for judicial participation.

5. SYSTEM REVIEW UPDATE: (Ron Gordon, Neira Siaperas, Esme Blanco)

Ron Gordon, Neira Siaperas, and Esme Blanco presented an update on the implementation of the System Review recommendations, covering progress in the areas of Administration and Leadership; Culture and Work Environment; Communication; Workload, Turnover and Compensation; Training and Onboarding; and IT Support. The current progress on implementation is summarized in the chart below.



The full presentation can be accessed on the [Judicial Council's Website](#).

6. CERTIFICATION OF A JUSTICE COURT JUDGE: (Jim Peters)

Jim Peters recommended that the Judicial Council certify Dustin Erickson as a new justice court judge for Box Elder County. Mr. Erickson has completed required training and passed the exam.

Motion: Judge Brian Brower moved to certify Dustin Erickson as the new justice court judge for Box Elder County. Judge Angela Fannesbeck seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

7. BOX ELDER JUSTICE COURT'S TERRITORIAL JURISDICTION: (Jim Peters)

Jim Peters requested approval to expand Box Elder County's territorial jurisdiction to include Garland City, effective October 1, 2025. Following a judicial vacancy, Garland City chose to discontinue its justice court and contract with the county for services. The Council received a resolution from Garland City and an interlocal agreement to support the request.

Motion: Judge Brower moved to approve the expansion of the Box Elder County’s territorial jurisdiction to include Garland City. Judge Low seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

8. CERTIFICATION OF TREATMENT COURTS: (Cris Seabury)

Cris Seabury presented certification recommendations for treatment courts, as required by UCJA Rule 4-409. Site visits, interviews, and document reviews were conducted. The following treatment courts met all certification criteria and were recommended for re-certification:

- Third District – Salt Lake County Adult Recovery Court (Judge Chelsea Koch)
- Third District – Salt Lake County Adult Recovery Court (Judge Diana Gibson)
- Fourth District – Utah County Veterans Treatment Court (Judge Kraig Powell)

Motion: Judge Suchada Bazzelle moved to certify the three treatment courts as presented. Judge Michael Leavitt seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

9. OLD BUSINESS/NEW BUSINESS: (All)

None.

10. CONSENT CALENDAR ITEMS: (Chief Justice Matthew B. Durrant)

Motion: Judge Leavitt moved to approve the items on the consent calendar. Judge Samuel Chiara seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

11. JUDICIAL RETENTIONS: (Jim Peters, Nick Stiles, Sonia Sweeney, Shane Bahr)

Jim Peters led a discussion on the Council’s role in certifying judges as eligible to stand for retention in 2026. All judges completed self-declaration forms; 63 of 67 judges reported meeting all performance standards, while four reported not meeting one or more standards. The Council must certify each judge as Compliant, Compliant with an Explanation, or Non-Compliant, with results submitted to JPEC by October 1, 2025.

Motion: Judge Low moved to enter executive session only to discuss the character, professional competence, or physical or mental health of an individual and legal advice of counsel. Judge David Mortensen seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

12. EXECUTIVE SESSION

An executive session was held. Following the executive session, the Council made the following decision:

Motion: Judge Leavitt moved that the Council find all justices and judges standing for retention in 2026 to be Compliant with performance standards, with the exception of Judge Blaine Rawson. Judge Rawson will be asked to provide additional information, including the reasons

for holding cases under advisement for more than two months, to the Management Committee for a final decision on compliance.

Amendment 1: Judge Low proposed an amendment directing the Management Committee to set a deadline for Judge Rawson to provide the information.

Judge Leavitt accepted the amendment to his motion. Judge Rita Cornish seconded the motion.

Amendment 2: Judge Fannesbeck proposed a second amendment requesting that Judge Rawson also report the number of days each case was held under advisement beyond the two-month standard.

Judge Leavitt and Judge Cornish accepted the second amendment. The motion passed, with Judges Mortensen, Low, Eisenman, Carpenter, and Brower abstaining from voting on their own certifications.

13. ADJOURN

The meeting was adjourned.