

**JUDICIAL COUNCIL MEETING**  
**Minutes**

**January 20, 2026**

Hybrid Meeting (in person and Webex)

**Matheson Courthouse – Council Room**  
450 S. State Street Salt Lake City, Utah 84111

*Chief Justice Matthew B. Durrant, Presiding*

**Members:**

Chief Justice Matthew B.  
Durrant, Chair  
Hon. David Mortensen, Vice  
Chair Hon. Suchada Bazzelle  
Hon. Samuel Chiara  
Hon. Rita Cornish  
Hon. Susan Eisenman  
Hon. Michael Leavitt  
Hon. James Gardner  
Hon. Amber Mettler  
Justice Paige Petersen  
Hon. Christine Johnson  
Hon. Michael DiReda  
Hon. Angela Fannesbeck  
Hon. Chris Bown  
Hon. Brendan McCullagh  
Hon. Jon Carpenter  
Kristin K. Woods

**AOC Staff:**

Ron Gordon  
Neira Siaperas  
Michael Drechsel  
Keisa Williams  
Nick Stiles  
Shane Bahr  
James Peters  
Brody Arishita  
Daniel Meza Rincon

**Presenters:**

Cris Seabury  
Katy Erickson  
Karl Sweeney  
Alisha Johnson  
Jace Willard  
Chris Talbot  
Matilda Willie

**Excused:**

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

Chief Justice Matthew B. Durrant welcomed everyone to the meeting and called for any questions or corrections to the December 15, 2025 meeting minutes. None were raised.

**Motion:** Judge Amber Mettler moved to approve the December 15, 2025 meeting minutes. Judge Rita Cornish seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

**2. CHAIR’S REPORT (Chief Justice Matthew B. Durrant)**

Chief Justice Durrant reported that a State of the Judiciary would be delivered on January 20, 2026.

**3. STATE COURT ADMINISTRATOR REPORT (Ron Gordon):**

Ron Gordon reminded Council members to finalize and submit travel plans for the March Judicial Council Meeting as soon as possible in order to complete logistical arrangements.

Mr. Gordon acknowledged the recent retirement of Suzy Lee, recognizing her significant contributions and years of service to the Judiciary.

Mr. Gordon reported that the legislative session had begun and noted that it would present several challenges, including policy considerations and budgetary challenges. He affirmed his commitment to representing the Judiciary and advocating for the Judicial Council's decisions throughout the session.

Mr. Gordon provided a report on the town halls completed recently. A town hall was conducted in the Matheson Courthouse and the Judiciary answered many questions from the public. Judicial officers spoke with members of the public and it was a great opportunity to show how the Judiciary is reaching out to the public. There was a high level of engagement by all parties in attendance.

Mr. Gordon reported the new Interpreter Training Program will start at the end of the month. The curriculum is in place and a Memorandum of Understanding has been completed with Utah State University. Interest in the program was strong, with over 350 individuals expressing interest in the program. Mr. Gordon reported there have been many new improvements and advances in the Self-Help Center Department, particularly with the improvements in the MyCase program.

#### **4. COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

**Management Committee:** Nothing to report.

**Budget & Fiscal Management Committee:** The work of the committee will be discussed later in the meeting.

**Liaison Committee:** The work of the committee will be discussed later in the meeting.

**Policy, Planning, and Technology Committee:** The work of the committee will be discussed later in the meeting.

**Bar Commission:** Katie Woods reported that the Government Relations Committee commenced meeting on January 20, 2026. She noted that the Utah State Bar anticipates opposing a number of items included on the Legislature's agenda for the current session.

Ms. Woods reminded Council members that they are welcome to attend the Utah State Bar Convention in March and their presence is greatly valued by bar members. She further reported that Thomas Balyes will be sworn in as the next President of the Utah State Bar during the Convention.

#### **5. BUDGET AND GRANTS (Karl Sweeney, Alisha Johnson):**

Alisha Johnson presented the financial reports.

## FY 2026 Ongoing Turnover Savings as of 01/05/2026- Period 6

#		Prior Month	Forecast	Actual	Forecasted	Change in Forecast
		Amount @ YE	Amount YTD	Amount @ YE	Amount @ YE	Amount @ YE
	Net Carried over Ongoing Savings (finalized from FY 2025)	138,582		138,582	138,582	-
	Ongoing Turnover Savings FY 2026 (actual year-to-date, Salary Differential only)	400,047		603,954	603,954	203,907
1	Ongoing Turnover Savings FY 2026 (forecast \$65,000 / month x 6 months, Salary Differential only)	455,000		-	390,000	(65,000)
	<b>TOTAL SALARY RELATED ONGOING SAVINGS</b>	993,629		742,537	1,132,537	138,907
	Benefit Differential Savings FY 2026 (will be recognized in this row starting in Q4)	-		-	-	-
	<b>TOTAL SAVINGS</b>	993,629		742,537	1,132,537	138,907
2	2026 Annual Authorized Hot Spot Raises	(200,000)		(191,455)	(200,000)	-
	<b>TOTAL USES</b>	(200,000)		(191,455)	(200,000)	-
	<b>Total Actual/Forecasted Unencumbered Turnover Savings for FY 2026</b>	<b>793,629</b>		<b>551,082</b>	<b>932,537</b>	<b>138,907</b>

## FY 26 Ongoing Funding Net of Commitments/Reserves- Period 6, FY 2026

### Funding Sources

Available Funds	Net Available
Ongoing Turnover Savings carried over from FY 2025	\$ 138,582
Actual Ongoing Turnover Savings from FY 2026 (as of period 6) - Note: Does not include CY benefits differential until Q4 or forecasted amounts	\$ 603,954
<b>Total Available Ongoing Funding - Cash Basis</b>	<b>\$ 742,537</b>

### Commitments/Reserves

1 Judicial Council Delegated to State Court Administrator for Discretionary Use in FY 26	\$ (200,000)
2 Obligated/Committed Funds Needed by June 30, 2026 for use in 7.1.2027 fiscal year for Investing in our People	\$ (370,000)
3 Director of Finance and State Court Admin. reserves for assumption contingencies (including a negative benefit differential) that enable meeting the investing in our People Ongoing Commitment	\$ (100,000)
<b>Total Commitments/Reserves</b>	<b>\$ (670,000)</b>
<b>Net Available Ongoing Funding - Cash Basis (Deficit)</b>	<b>\$ 72,537</b>

### Deferred Ongoing Requests

Requests are deferred until Net Available Ongoing Funding - Cash Basis exceeds these requested amounts	Judicial Council Approved
8th District Probation Training Coordinator - Russ Pearson	\$ 52,500
Juvenile Court ICJ Funding Increase	\$ 7,000
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>\$ 59,500</b>

## FY 2026 One Time Turnover Savings- Period 6 Updated as of Pay Period Ending 12/19/2025 (992 out of 2,088 hours)

#	Funding Type	Actual Amount
1	One Time Turnover Savings (from actual payroll data versus budget as of PPE 12/19/2025)	875,754
2	Est. One Time Savings for remaining pay hours (1,096 @ \$900 / pay hour)	986,400
<b>Total Potential One Time Savings</b>		<b>3 1,862,154</b>

Prior Report Totals (as of PPE 11/21/2025) 1,911,878  
FY 2025 Final 3,072,760

## FY 2026 Year End Requests and Forecasted Available One-Time Funds- Period 6

Forecasted Available One-time Funds			#	One-time Spending Plan Requests	Adjusted Requests Amount	Judicial Council Approved Amount
Description	Funding Type	Amount				
Sources of YE 2026 Funds						
* Turnover Savings as of PPE 12/19/2025	Turnover Savings	875,754				
Turnover savings Estimate for the rest of the year (\$900 x 1,096 pay hours)	Turnover Savings	986,400				
<b>Total Potential One Time Turnover Savings</b>		<b>1,862,154</b>				
Less: Judicial Council Delegated to State Court Administrator for Discretionary Use		(250,000)				
<b>(a) Total Potential One Time Turnover Savings Less Discretionary Use</b>		<b>1,612,154</b>				
Operational Savings From TCE / AOC Budgets - mid-year forecast	Internal Operating Savings	500,000				
Operational Savings from IT Budget - Timing of Contract Renewal Deferred to FY 27	Internal Operating Savings	400,000				
Reserve Balance (balance from FY 2025 Carryforward)	Judicial Council Reserve	700				
Use IT Budget Savings and Operational Savings to Increase Retro YOS Eligibility	Adjustments to CY Operations	(462,000)				
<b>(b) Total Operational Savings, Reserve, Unclaimed Property and Prior Year Adjustments</b>		<b>438,700</b>				
<b>(c) Total of Turnover Savings &amp; Operational Savings = (a) + (b)</b>		<b>2,050,854</b>				
Uses of YE 2026 Funds						
(d) Carryforward into FY 2027 (Anticipate request to Legislature for \$3,200,000)	FY 2027 Carryforward	(2,050,854)				
<b>Total Potential One Time Savings = (c) less Carryforward (d)</b>		<b>-</b>				
<b>Less: Judicial Council Requests Previously Approved</b>						
<b>Less: Judicial Council Current Month Spending Requests</b>						
<b>Remaining Forecasted Funds Available for FY 2026 YE Spending Requests, CCCF, etc.</b>						

	Last reported expected carryforward: \$2,100,578
<b>Current Month One-time Spending Requests</b>	-
<b>Previously Approved 1x FY 2025 YE Spending Request</b>	-

Updated 01/06/2026

### ARPA Expenses as of 01/05/2026 (period 6 not closed yet)

	A Judicial Council Approved	B Actual FY 2022 Expended	C Actual FY 2023 Expended	D Actual FY 2024 Expended	E Actual FY 2025 Expended	F Actual FY 2026 Expended	G Total Expended Amount	H Balance Available	I % Obligated
IT Access to Justice - Part I + II	12,373,400	3,042,468	4,613,255	3,075,857	1,090,631	433,338	12,255,548	117,852	100.00%
Courts Case Backlog - Part I + II	2,302,100	707,963	1,007,135	587,002	-	-	2,302,100	Completed in FY 2024	
Legal Sandbox Response to COVID	324,500	-	171,636	152,864	-	-	324,500	Completed in FY 2024	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>15,000,000</b>	<b>3,750,431</b>	<b>5,792,027</b>	<b>3,815,722</b>	<b>1,090,631</b>	<b>433,338</b>	<b>14,882,148</b>	<b>117,852</b>	

Expenditures added since last report: 318,798

ARPA funds expended cut off date is 12/31/2026; ARPA funds obligated cut off date was 12/31/2024. The definition of obligation is not only budgeting money but also taking steps to create a contract, sub-award, or similar transaction that requires payment. Consider the time it takes to negotiate and execute a contract when planning to meet the obligation deadline.

Karl Sweeney reported that the Legislative Fiscal Analyst (LFA) has requested that the Judicial Branch prepare a pro forma five percent General Fund reduction. The proposed recommendation for the Judiciary includes reductions in Judicial Assistant positions, along with other reductions outlined in the submitted memorandum. The LFA indicated that revenue enhancements alone would not be sufficient and that a list of proposed budget reductions has been compiled, including an estimated reduction of approximately 25 Judicial Assistant positions.

Mr. Gordon clarified that other state agencies have also been required to submit similar proposals for five percent budget reductions. He reported that it is likely that some budget reductions will be required this year due to recently passed federal legislation that will result in reduced state revenues. Mr. Gordon noted that the Judiciary has reviewed court fees and determined that increasing some fees would be reasonable to support revenue enhancements. He reiterated that the Judiciary currently has a need for additional Judicial Assistants and stated that, should reductions occur, the Judiciary would require approximately 60 Judicial Assistants to meet operational needs.

## 6. CERTIFICATION OF TREATMENT COURTS (Cris Seabury, Katy Erickson)

Cris Seabury and Katy Erickson presented certification recommendations for treatment courts, as required by UCJA Rule 4-409. They reported that site visits, interviews, and document reviews were conducted as

part of the evaluation process. The following treatment courts met all certification criteria and were recommended for re-certification:

- Seventh District – Grand County Adult Recovery Court (Judge Cas White and Judge Craig Bunnell)
- Fourth District – Juab County Adult Recovery Court (Judge Anthony Howell)
- Fourth District – Millard County Adult Recovery Court (Judge Anthony Howell)
- Fifth District – Washington County Adult Mental Health Court (Judge Jay Winward)

**Motion:** Judge Michael Leavitt moved to approve the certification of these courts as recommended. Judge Cornish seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

#### **7. APPOINTMENT TO THE CCJJ (Shane Bahr)**

Shane Bahr presented a request to fill the district court judge vacancy on the Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice (CCJJ). He explained that the vacancy occurred when Judge Camille Neider stepped down from the Commission. The Board of District Court Judges solicited volunteers from the district court bench who were interested in serving on the CCJJ, and three judges expressed interest. After consideration, the Board of District Court Judges recommended Judge Jeremiah Humes to the Judicial Council for appointment to the CCJJ.

**Motion:** Judge Samuel Chiara moved to appoint Judge Humes as the District Court Judge on the CCJJ. Judge Cornish seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

#### **8. TRIBAL LIAISON COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT (Matilda Willie)**

Matilda Willie provided an update on the Tribal Liaison Committee. She reported that Judge Randy Steckel has stepped down as the Tribal Judge representative on the committee. Efforts to fill the vacancy have been challenging, and the position remains open at this time.

Ms. Willie reported that the committee has met three times since its creation, with meetings held on August 25, 2025; September 22, 2025; and November 24, 2025.

On December 12, 2025, the Tribal Liaison presented at the Utah Tribal Leaders meeting held at the Urban Indian Center. During that meeting, the committee expressed its desire to meet directly with tribal leaders and will move forward with this plan.

The committee plans to meet on a quarterly basis moving forward.

#### **9. NEW COURTHOUSES (Chris Talbot)**

Chris Talbot shared the FY 2027 priority plan outlining proposed projects to be presented to the Legislature for funding approval. He reported that the committee is preparing to present two courthouse projects during the upcoming legislative session: the Davis County Justice Center and the new Cedar City Courthouse.

Mr. Talbot provided an overview of both projects and shared images of the proposed plans for each facility. He discussed the need for the projects and the anticipated next steps in seeking legislative approval.

Regarding the Davis County Justice Center, Mr. Talbot highlighted a proposal for Davis County to share in the cost of the project with the Judiciary. He explained that a cost-sharing partnership would allow for the issuance of a bond to finance the project.

#### **10. LEGISLATIVE UPDATES (Michael Drechsel)**

Michael Drechsel provided legislative updates, reporting that the Liaison Committee has met four times since December and reviewed numerous bills affecting the Judiciary.

Mr. Drechsel discussed several measures addressing judicial resources and court structure, highlighting SB 134, which would expand the Supreme Court by two justices and the Court of Appeals by two judges. Discussions are also underway to advocate for the addition of district court judges as part of the same legislation.

Additional legislation addresses judicial oversight and procedural requirements, including notice obligations to the Judicial Conduct Commission, potential changes to judicial retention thresholds, and proposed amendments to rules of evidence and procedure. Other bills would affect court operations, including authorization of step supervision courts in justice courts, reauthorization of ADR programs subject to sunset review, statutory speedy trial timeframes with significant fiscal implications, and new requirements for judicial review of court records in custody and parent-time matters.

#### **11. RULES FOR FINAL APPROVAL (Keisa Williams)**

Keisa Williams presented Rules 3-109, 4-202.10, and 4-906 for final approval. All rules completed the public comment period without receiving any comments.

The Policy, Planning, and Technology Committee (PP&T) recommended that the rules be adopted as final with a May 1, 2026 effective date:

- CJA 3-109. Ethics Advisory Committee (AMEND) The proposed amendments: 1) clarify the process by which ethics advisory opinions are requested and issued; and 2) make non-substantive formatting changes.
- CJA 4-202.10. Record Sharing (AMEND) The proposed amendment adds the Office of Professional Conduct to the list of entities authorized to access nonpublic juvenile court records.
- CJA 4-906. Guardian ad litem program (AMEND) The proposed amendments: 1) change annual reporting from August to October in (3)(I) to allow the director and chair to report on legislative grants and requests more accurately; 2) increase compensation for conflict guardians ad litem in (6)(D) to attract experienced attorneys to handle conflict cases; and 3) make grammatical and stylistic changes.

**Motion:** Judge Christine Johnson moved to approve the amendments to Rules 3-109, 4-202.10, and 4-906 as final, with an effective date of May 1, 2026. Justice Paige Petersen seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

**12. CONSENT CALENDAR (Chief Justice Matthew B. Durrant):**

**Motion:** Judge Johnson moved to approve the items on the consent calendar. Judge Mettler seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

**13. SENIOR JUDGE APPOINTMENT (Neira Siaperas):**

Motion: Judge David Mortensen moved to enter executive session for the purposes of discussing the character, professional competence, or physical or mental health of an individual. Judge Cornish seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously. An executive session was held. Following the session, the Council made the following decision:

**Motion:** Judge Chiara moved that the Council find Judge Barry Lawrence meets the qualifications for appointment as an active senior judge. Judge Mettler seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

**14. ADJOURN**

The meeting was adjourned.