

**JUDICIAL COUNCIL MEETING
Minutes**

April 27, 2026

Hybrid Meeting (in person and Webex)

**Matheson Courthouse – Council Room
450 S State Street, Salt Lake City, UT 841110**

Honorable David Mortensen Presiding

Members:

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

AOC Staff:

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

Excused:

Chief Justice Matthew
B. Durrant, Chair

Presenters:

Karl Sweeney
Alisha Johnson
Judge Coral Sanchez
Shonna Thomas
Jennifer Yim
Chris Talbot
Cris Seabury
Katy Erickson
Justice Jill Pohlman
Jonathan Puente
Mark Paradise

1. WELCOME AND THE APPROVAL OF MINUTES (Judge David Mortensen):

Judge David Mortensen welcomed everyone to the meeting and called for any questions or corrections to the March 12, 2026, meeting minutes. None were raised.

Motion: Judge Amber Mettler moved to approve the March 12, 2026, minutes. Judge Samuel Chiara seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

2. CHAIR’S REPORT (Judge David Mortensen):

Judge Mortensen shared that Chief Justice Durrant recently underwent kidney transplant surgery and is doing well.

3. STATE COURT ADMINISTRATOR REPORT (Ron Gordon):

Ron Gordon reported on implementation efforts related to recent legislation, including SB 270 State

Collections and Housing Court Amendments. He stated that the Management Committee has established a steering committee and finalized its membership. The committee will make future recommendations to the Judicial Council. Mr. Gordon also reported that additional implementation work will be needed for HB 540 Judicial Transparency, Information Access, and Transition Amendments. That work includes audio release requirements and redesign efforts related to the Xchange program. Staff leads for those efforts are Brody Arishita and Michael Drechsel.

Mr. Gordon reported that the Judiciary continues to receive increasing numbers of assignments and projects that have increased the workload in some departments. Mr. Gordon will return to the Council with recommendations regarding possible organizational restructuring.

4. COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Management Committee: Nothing to report.

Budget & Fiscal Management Committee: Nothing to report.

Liaison Committee: Nothing to report.

Policy, Planning, and Technology Committee: Nothing to report.

Bar Commission: Katie Woods reported that Tyler Young was elected as the Utah State Bar President and Tom Bayles as President-Elect. She reported that the Bar is preparing to raise bar dues which have not increased since 2010. She reviewed the upcoming 95th Anniversary of the Utah State Bar, which will be held in conjunction with the 250th anniversary of the Constitution at the Grand America Hotel. She invited and encouraged all judicial officers to attend. Ms. Woods additionally reported efforts to support judicial retention elections through voter education regarding JPEC evaluations.

5. WINGS COMMITTEE REPORT (Judge Coral Sanchez and Shonna Thomas)

Judge Coral Sanchez reported on the 2025 WINGS Committee's efforts to improve guardianship and conservatorship practices statewide. She reported successful collaboration on legislative amendments to Utah Code § 75-5-303, which updated statutory criteria to align with current medical standards and clarified requirements for attorneys and court visitors in guardianship proceedings. The legislation passed during the 2025 Legislative Session and became effective in May 2025.

Judge Sanchez also discussed the Committee's work on the development of training materials and forms related to the new Severe Intellectual Disability guardianship case type. In addition, the Committee revised and created guardianship and conservatorship forms for emergency, temporary, and adult-child case types, and provided statewide judicial education through conference presentations and judicial trainings. The WINGS Committee also completed substantial revisions to the Basic Guidelines to Serve as Guardian and Conservator of an Adult manual, including updates for accessibility and readability using court AI resources.

Judge Sanchez further reported on ongoing initiatives to address systemic challenges and expand public education efforts. The Committee supported funding requests for additional attorneys to assist courts in meeting statutory obligations in guardianship proceedings and continued work toward implementing universal criminal background checks for prospective guardians and conservators.

Upcoming projects include partnerships to develop interactive public education resources regarding alternatives to guardianship, updated volunteer attorney training materials with potential CLE accreditation, new educational resources for minor guardianships, and enhanced judicial training for new judges.

Judge Sanchez also expressed appreciation for Judge Keith Kelly’s leadership and service as WINGS Chair from 2019 through his retirement in 2025 and recognized his contributions to improving guardianship processes and advocacy for vulnerable individuals.

6. BUDGET AND GRANTS (Karl Sweeney, Alisha Johnson, Jim Peters, Amy Hernandez, Jordan Murray, Nick Stiles, and Ron Gordon)

Alisha Johnson presented the financial reports.

FY 2026 Ongoing Turnover Savings as of 04/09/2026 - Period 9

#		Prior Month Forecast	Actual	Forecasted	Change in Forecast
		Amount @ YE	Amount YTD	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)	857,633	927,391	927,391	69,759
1	Ongoing Turnover Savings FY 2026 (forecast \$65,000 / month x 3 months, Salary Differential only)	260,000	-	195,000	(65,000)
	TOTAL SALARY RELATED ONGOING SAVINGS	1,256,215	1,065,974	1,260,974	4,759
	Benefit Differential Savings FY 2026 (will be recognized in this row starting in Q4)	-	(31,028)	(31,028)	(31,028)
	TOTAL SAVINGS	1,256,215	1,034,945	1,229,945	(26,270)
2	2026 Annual Authorized Hot Spot Raises	(200,000)	(191,455)	(200,000)	-
	TOTAL USES	(200,000)	(191,455)	(200,000)	-
	Total Actual/Forecasted Unencumbered Turnover Savings for FY 2026	1,056,215	843,491	1,029,945	(26,270)

FY 2026 One Time Turnover Savings - Period 9 Updated as of Pay Period Ending 03/27/2026 (1,552 out of 2,088 hours)

#		Funding Type	Actual Amount
1	One Time Turnover Savings (from actual payroll data versus budget as of PPE 03/27/2026)	Internal Savings	1,172,634
2	Est. One Time Savings for remaining pay hours (536 @ \$600 / pay hour)	Internal Savings (Est.)	321,600
	Total Potential One Time Savings	3	1,494,234

FY 2026 Year End Requests and Forecasted Available One-time Funds - Period 9

Forecasted Available One-time Funds			#	One-time Spending Plan Requests	Adjusted Requests Amount	Judicial Council Approved Amount
	Description	Funding Type				
	Sources of YE 2026 Funds					
*	Turnover Savings as of PPE 03/13/2026	Turnover Savings				
	Turnover savings Estimate for the rest of the year (\$600 x 616 pay hours)	Turnover Savings				
	Total Potential One Time Turnover Savings					
	Less: Judicial Council Delegated to State Court Administrator for Discretionary Use					
(a)	Total Potential One Time Turnover Savings Less Discretionary Use					
	Operational Savings From TCE / AOC Budgets - mid-year forecast	Internal Operating Savings				
	Expected additional operational savings for balance of fiscal year	Internal Operating Savings				
	Operational Savings from IT Budget - Timing of Contract Renewal Deferred to FY 27	Internal Operating Savings				
	Reserve Balance (balance from FY 2025 Carryforward)	Judicial Council Reserve				
	Use IT Budget Savings and Operational Savings to Increase Retro YOS Eligibility	Adjustments to CY Operations				
(b)	Total Operational Savings, Reserve, Unclaimed Property and Prior Year Adjustments					
(c)	Total of Turnover Savings & Operational Savings = (a) + (b)					
	Uses of YE 2026 Funds					
(d)	Carryforward into FY 2027 (Anticipate request to Legislature for \$3,200,000)	FY 2027 Carryforward				
	Total Potential One Time Savings = (c) less Carryforward (d)					
	Less: Judicial Council Requests Previously Approved					
	Less: Judicial Council Current Month Spending Requests					
	Remaining Forecasted Funds Available for FY 2026 YE Spending Requests, CCCF, etc.					
	Updated 04/09/2026					

Last reported expected carryforward: \$2,053,692

FY 2027 Carryforward and Ongoing Requests - Period 9, FY 2026

	One Time	Ongoing
Ongoing Turnover Savings carried over from FY 2025		\$ 138,582
Forecasted YE Ongoing Turnover Savings from FY 2026		\$ 1,091,363
Subtotal		\$ 1,229,945
Unobligated Fiscal Note Funds - District Court (net)	\$ 94,100	\$ 404,500
Unobligated Fiscal Note Funds - Juvenile Court	\$ (3,600)	\$ 3,600
Unobligated Fiscal Note Funds - Admin	\$ -	\$ 10,900
Legislative ongoing cut - reduce ongoing turnover savings		\$ (185,000)
Wellness Council Portion of Carryforward		
Expected Carryforward Amount from Fiscal Year 2026	\$ 1,932,844	\$ -
Total Available Funding	\$ 2,023,344	\$ 1,463,945
Less: Judicial Council Delegated to State Court Administrator for Discretionary Use		\$ (200,000)
Net Ongoing TOS Available for Use	\$ 2,023,344	\$ 1,263,945

Ongoing / One Time Requests - Directly from Unobligated Fiscal Note Funds

	Presented		Judicial Council Approved	
	One Time	Ongoing	One Time	Ongoing
Subtotal	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -

Ongoing Requests

	Presented		Judicial Council Approved	
	One Time	Ongoing	One Time	Ongoing
Prior Approved Ongoing Commitments				
Investing in Our People - Ron Gordon and Neira Siaperas		\$ 370,000		\$ 370,000
8th District Probation Training Coordinator - Russ Pearson		\$ 52,500		\$ 52,500
Juvenile Court ICJ Funding Increase - Daniel Meza Rincon		\$ 7,000		\$ 7,000
Ongoing Requests - For Consideration				
Subtotal to Approve and Fund Immediately	\$ -	\$ 429,500	\$ -	\$ 429,500
Balance Remaining After Judicial Council Approvals				\$ 834,445
Balance Remaining Inclusive of "Presented"		\$ 834,445		

Carryforward One Time Requests

	Presented		Judicial Council Approved	
	One Time	Ongoing	One Time	Ongoing
Subtotal	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Balance Remaining After Judicial Council Approvals			\$ 2,023,344	\$ 834,445
+ Balance Remaining Inclusive of "Presented"	\$ 2,023,344	\$ 834,445		

LEGEND

- Highlighted items are currently being presented to the Budget and Fiscal Management Committee.
- Highlighted items have been approved by the BFMC and are on track for being presented to the Judicial Council.
- Highlighted items have been previously approved by the Judicial Council.
- Highlighted items that are Fiscal Note Funds
- * - items have been presented and approved in prior years.
- + - One-time balance remaining is available to go into Judicial Council reserve. Ongoing balance remaining will be included in the beginning balance for ongoing turnover savings.
- ^ - Request to Legislature was Not Funded
- BFMC approval to submit request to Judicial Council does not imply Judicial Council must approve the recommendation.
- If more funds are available than the total of requests received, prioritization is optional.

ARPA Expenses as of 04/07/2026 (period 9)

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
	Judicial Council Approved	Actual FY 2022 Expended	Actual FY 2023 Expended	Actual FY 2024 Expended	Actual FY 2025 Expended	Actual FY 2026 Expended	Total Expended Amount	Balance Available	% Obligated
IT Access to Justice - Part I + II	12,373,400	3,042,468	4,613,255	3,075,857	1,090,631	519,815	12,342,025	31,375	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	
TOTAL	15,000,000	3,750,431	5,792,027	3,815,722	1,090,631	519,815	14,968,625	31,375	

Expenditures added since last report: 86,478

Additional JCTST Funds Request

Jim Peters requested authorization to expend an additional \$309,000 from the Justice Court Technology Security and Training (JCTST) Fund during the current fiscal year. The request includes programming projects benefiting both justice and district courts, including small claims bulk filing enhancements.

Motion: Judge Brendan McCullagh moved to approve the expenditure of an additional one-time amount of \$309,000 from the Justice Court Technology Security and Training Fund as recommended. Judge Rita Cornish seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Grants

- **VAWA Grant Update**

Amy Hernandez presented a progress report regarding the STOP Violence Against Women grant.

- **Appellate Pro Bono Bar Foundation Grant- Renewal**

Nick Stiles requested approval to renew a grant application through the Utah Bar Foundation supporting the Appellate Pro Bono Program. Mr. Stiles reported that grant funds are used primarily to cover appellate transcript costs for volunteer attorneys.

Motion: Judge Cornish moved to approve the grant application provided there is no change in scope from the previous year, and to require that all grant-related reporting be made to Mr. Stiles. Judge James Gardner seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Commissioner Salary for FY 2027

Ron Gordon requested a 2.5% salary increase for Court Commissioners, which has been funded by the legislature. This proposal maintains Commissioners' compensation at approximately 90% of trial court judges' salaries.

Motion: Judge Mettler moved to approve the increase in salary for Court Commissioners as recommended. Judge Cornish seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

7. DATA SHARING (Jennifer Yim)

Jennifer Yim presented a report on behalf of the Board of Pardons and Parole (BOPP). She expressed appreciation for the collaborative partnership with the Judiciary and acknowledged the successful development and implementation of new projects. Ms. Yim also provided an overview of the enhanced BOPP Intake Process, highlighting the efficiencies and positive outcomes achieved through improved data-sharing between the Board and the courts.

8. UNIFORM FINE SCHEDULE (Michael Drechsel)

Michael Drechsel reviewed updates to the Uniform Fine Schedule. He explained that the updates resulted from significant changes made during the 2026 General Legislative Session, as well as routine ongoing maintenance and corrections to existing Uniform Fine Schedule entries.

Motion: Judge Michael Leavitt moved to approve and publish the updated Uniform Fine Schedule as recommended. Judge Christine Johnson seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

9. ART POLICY (Chris Talbot)

Chris Talbot reviewed the draft Courthouse Artwork Display Policy and highlighted changes made since the previous draft, including provisions addressing juvenile court spaces, justice court and leased spaces, and standards for public areas of court buildings. Additional changes included standardizing artwork size limits and establishing processes for when judicial officers change courtrooms. Mr. Talbot stated that the Policy, Planning & Technology Committee reviewed and supported the proposed changes. He emphasized that existing artwork would be grandfathered under the prior policy.

Judge McCullagh recommended edits to the section of the policy that cites the HR policy. Specifically, he recommended removing the quoted policy language and retaining only the policy citation, so that any future changes to the HR policy would not require corresponding amendments to the Courthouse Artwork Display Policy.

Mr. Talbot requested approval of the policy as recommended in the memorandum, with the following exceptions: (1) the addition of language in paragraph 2(a) clarifying that Justice Courtrooms are exempt from the policy, and (2) the addition of language in paragraph 5(b) specifying that artwork will not be provided in leased spaces.

Motion: Judge Jon Carpetner moved to approve the art policy with the additional edits as recommended. Judge Cornish seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

10. CERTIFICATION OF TREATMENT COURTS (Cris Seabury and 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:

- First District, Box Elder County Adult Recovery Court (Judge Brandon Maynard)
- First District, Cache County Adult Recovery Court (Judge Brian Cannell)
- Second District DUI Court (Judge Camille Neider)
- Third District Adult Mental Health Court (Judge Vernice Trease)
- Third District Track B Court (Judge Charles Stormont)

Motion: Judge Gardner moved to approve the certification of the presented treatments courts as recommended. Judge Cornish seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

11. COMMITTEE ON FAIRNESS AND ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT (Justice Jill Pohlman and Jon Puente)

Justice Pohlman presented the Committee on Fairness and Accountability (CFA) Annual Report to the Judicial Council. She highlighted ongoing initiatives focused on equity, inclusion, and public trust within the Judiciary.

Justice Pohlman reported that the Jury Equity Workgroup continued its review of jury-related processes under CJA 4-404 and Utah Code § 78B-1-106, examining jury pools, juror selection and

service, compensation, and peremptory challenges. Additionally, the Racial and Ethnic Disparities (RED) Workgroup advanced efforts to identify potential disparities in criminal proceedings and is finalizing the transfer of data to Georgetown University for analysis. The Racial Equity and Fairness (REF) Workgroup also continued work on the Juvenile Data Project, studying whether similarly situated youth receive comparable outcomes in court proceedings.

Justice Pohlman also summarized outreach and strategic initiatives undertaken throughout the year, including the implementation of Court Connect town halls across Utah, the Judicial Inclusion Mentorship Program, and the All-Rise Utah pipeline. Finally, she discussed the relaunch of the Community Court Program at the Kearns Public Library, providing court services for eviction and debt collection matters directly within the community.

12. **THIRD DISTRICT COMMISSIONER VACANCY** (Mark Paradise)

Mark Paradise presented a request to fill the Third District Court commissioner vacancy created by Todd Olsen's appointment as a Third District Court Judge. Mr. Paradise reviewed the current commissioner caseload and noted the position has been instrumental to the district's operations.

Motion: Judge Mettler moved to approve filling the commissioner vacancy in the Third District. Justice Paige Petersen seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

13. **CONSENT CALENDAR** (Judge David Mortensen)

Motion: Judge Cornish made a motion to approve the items on the consent calendar. Judge McCullagh seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

14. **SENIOR JUDGE APPOINTMENT** (Neira Siaperas)

Motion: Judge McCullagh made a motion that Judge John Walton meets the qualifications for appointment as an active senior judge. Judge Cornish seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

15. **EXECUTIVE SESSION** (Judge David Mortensen)

Motion: Judge Cornish made a motion to move into executive session for the purpose of discussing the character, professional competence, or physical or mental health of an individual and to receive legal advice of counsel. Judge McCullagh seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Following the closed session, Judge Mortensen noted that at 11:48 a.m., Justice Petersen recused herself and left the meeting before the second item discussed in the closed session.

Motion: Judge McCullagh moved to instruct Ron Gordon to retain independent counsel for the second matter discussed in executive session. Judge Cornish seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

16. **ADJOURN**

The meeting was adjourned.