

**JUDICIAL COUNCIL MEETING
Minutes**

July 27, 2026

Hybrid Meeting (in person and Webex)

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

Honorable Associate Chief Justice Jill Pohlman presiding

Members:

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

AOC Staff:

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

Excused:

Chief Justice Matthew
B. Durrant
James Peters

Presenters:

Hon. Rick Westmoreland
Hon. Troy Little
Hon. Kara Petit
Hon. John Luthy
Shonna Thomas
Cris Seabury
Katy Erickson
Cade Stubbs
Jon Puente
Ramon Rudecindo
Matthew Barraza
Morgan Hansen
Emily King
Chris Talbot

1. WELCOME AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES (Associate Chief Justice Jill Pohlman)

Justice Jill Pohlman welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked whether there were any questions or corrections to the June 22, 2026, meeting minutes. Justice Pohlman noted that a duplicate paragraph in the Chair's Report should be removed.

Motion: Judge Amber Mettler moved to approve the June 22, 2026, minutes with the proposed amendment. Judge David Mortensen seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

2. CHAIR'S REPORT (Associate Chief Justice Jill Pohlman)

Justice Jill Pohlman reported that the Governor is expected to announce two appointments to the Utah Supreme Court near the end of August. If the timeline remains unchanged, the new justices could join the Court in September or October.

3. STATE COURT ADMINISTRATOR REPORT (Ron Gordon)

Ron Gordon provided an update regarding the ongoing legislative audit. A draft of the audit report is anticipated in late August or early September, with the final report expected to be presented to the Legislature on September 23. The Judiciary will have opportunities to review draft versions, provide input, and submit a response to the final report.

Mr. Gordon reported that the Administrative Office of the Courts continues to explore options for addressing current and future courtroom and facility needs, including the potential use of space in Sandy Justice Court. No decisions have been made. Options will continue to be evaluated in light of increasing space needs and the limited likelihood of obtaining funding for new facilities.

Mr. Gordon reported that the new director position authorized by the Council to lead the Department of Programs and Services is expected to be posted shortly. In addition, the Commissioner position in the Debt Collection and Housing Division will be posted once approved by the Council.

Mr. Gordon also reported on requests from the districts to meet with local legislators and policymakers during years in which statewide district meetings are not organized. The Liaison Committee recommended that local meetings occur only after the Council establishes its budget priorities in August and judges receive guidance at the Annual Conference regarding those priorities and appropriate legislative engagement. Such meetings would not occur during the general legislative session but instead would take place in the fall or after the session.

Michael Drechsel reported that meetings with legislators are valuable and that he will continue to coordinate with the boards of judges to identify judges who can provide legislators with information regarding the anticipated operational impacts of potential policy changes.

4. COMMITTEE REPORTS

Management Committee: Nothing to report.

Budget & Fiscal Management Committee: Judge Rita Cornish reported the work of the committee will be discussed later in the meeting.

Liaison Committee: The Liaison Committee report was incorporated into the State Court Administrator's report.

Policy, Planning, and Technology Committee: Judge James Gardner reported the work of the committee will be discussed later in the meeting.

Bar Commission: Katie Woods reported that the Utah State Bar Summer Convention would be held the following week in Sun Valley, Idaho. Chief Justice Matthew Durrant would receive the Bar's Lifetime Service Award, with Justice Paige Petersen accepting the award on his behalf. Ms. Woods also reported that the Bar exam was scheduled for the following two days, with approximately 300 examinees expected to participate.

5. BOARD OF JUVENILE JUDGES REPORT (Judge Rick Westmoreland, Judge Troy Little and Daniel Rincon)

Judge Rick Westmoreland presented the Board's report and introduced Judge Troy Little, who will

assume the role of Board Chair in October.

Judge Westmoreland reported on the juvenile court's continuing need for law clerk resources and expressed appreciation to the Council for funding two additional law clerk positions. The current ratio is approximately one law clerk for every six juvenile court judges, and the Board intends to seek funding for additional law clerk attorneys in the future.

Judge Westmoreland also discussed concerns regarding judicial workload and burnout. The Board anticipates requesting two additional juvenile court judicial officers, one in the Third District and one in the Fourth District. He identified increases in termination of parental rights trials and transfer cases as significant contributors to judicial workload. Judge Westmoreland reported that the Board is leading an update of the juvenile judicial workload study, last revised in 2021, to better reflect the time required for current case types and judicial responsibilities.

The Board has also received reports from presiding judges regarding conditions in each district and continues to promote professionalism between attorneys and the courts. The Board received 24 applications for positions on the Guardian ad Litem Oversight Committee and submitted its recommended candidates to the Council.

Judge Westmoreland also reported on Opportunity Nights held in the Third District to increase community engagement and understanding of the juvenile courts. He concluded by expressing the juvenile court's willingness to assist the Court of Appeals where legally and operationally appropriate.

6. BUDGET AND GRANTS (Karl Sweeney and Alisha Johnson)

Alisha Johnson presented the financial reports.

FY 2026 Ongoing Turnover Savings- Period 12

#		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)	1,106,549	1,187,379	1,187,379	80,830	80,830
1	Ongoing Turnover Savings FY 2026 (forecast \$65,000 / month x 0 months, Salary Differential only)	65,000	-	-	(65,000)	(65,000)
	TOTAL SALARY RELATED ONGOING SAVINGS	1,310,131	1,325,961	1,325,961	15,830	15,830
	Benefit Differential Savings FY 2026 (will be recognized in this row starting in Q4)	6,137	72,720	72,720	66,583	66,583
	TOTAL SAVINGS	1,316,269	1,398,681	1,398,681	82,413	82,413
2	2026 Annual Authorized Hot Spot Raises	(200,000)	(200,000)	(200,000)	-	-
	TOTAL USES	(200,000)	(200,000)	(200,000)	-	-
	Total Actual/Forecasted Unencumbered Turnover Savings for FY 2026	1,116,269	1,198,681	1,198,681	82,413	82,413

FY 2026 One-Time Turnover Savings- Period 12

#		Funding Type	Actual
			Amount
1	One Time Turnover Savings (from actual payroll data versus budget as of PPE 06/19/2026)	Internal Savings	1,308,597
2	Est. One Time Savings for remaining pay hours (56 @ \$600 / pay hour)	Internal Savings (Est.)	33,600
	Total Potential One Time Savings	3	1,342,197

FY 2026 Year End Requests and Forecasted Available One-Time Funds- Period 12

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 06/19/2026	Turnover Savings	1,308,597			
Turnover savings Estimate for the rest of the year (\$600 x 56 pay hours)	Turnover Savings	33,600			
Total Potential One Time Turnover Savings		1,342,197			
Less: Judicial Council Delegated to State Court Administrator for Discretionary Use		(250,000)			
(a) Total Potential One Time Turnover Savings Less Discretionary Use		1,092,197			
Operational Savings From TCE / AOC Budgets - mid-year forecast	Internal Operating Savings	649,910			
Expected additional operational savings for balance of fiscal year	Internal Operating Savings	250,000			
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) Total Operational Savings, Reserve, Unclaimed Property and Prior Year Adjustments		838,610			
(c) Total of Turnover Savings & Operational Savings = (a) + (b)		1,930,807			
Uses of YE 2026 Funds					
(d) Carryforward into FY 2027 (Anticipate request to Legislature for \$3,200,000)	FY 2027 Carryforward	(1,930,807)			
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.		-			

Last reported expected carryforward: \$2,010,819

FY 2027 Carryforward and Ongoing Requests - Period 12

	One Time	Ongoing
Ongoing Turnover Savings carried over from FY 2025		\$ 138,582
Forecasted YE Ongoing Turnover Savings from FY 2026		\$ 1,260,099
Unused Ongoing Investing in Our People Comp Track Increase, FY 2026		\$ 126,705
Subtotal		\$ 1,525,386
Unobligated Fiscal Note Funds - District Court (net)	\$ 94,100	\$ 439,900
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	\$ 1,930,807	\$ -
Total Available Funding	\$ 2,021,307	\$ 1,794,786
Less: Judicial Council Delegated to State Court Administrator for Discretionary Use		\$ (200,000)
Net Available for Use	\$ 2,021,307	\$ 1,594,786

Domestic Violence Program VAWA Report (Amy Hernandez)

Amy Hernandez provided the annual update on the STOP Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) grant. Grant funding supported judicial training, domestic violence courts in Grand and Wasatch Counties, and enhanced programming related to protective-order proceedings. The domestic violence courts monitored 68 defendants, and approximately 590 individuals received training.

Justice for Families Training Subaward (Amy Hernandez and Karl Sweeney)

Amy Hernandez requested authorization to accept \$6,000 in grant funding from the Citizens Against Physical and Sexual Abuse (CAPSA) to support training for First District judicial officers provided by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges.

Motion: Judge Rita Cornish moved to approve the request to accept grant funding from CAPSA, as presented. Judge Michael Direda seconded the motion, which passed unanimously

Bar Foundation Grant for Regulatory Reform Report Design (Nick Stiles and Karl Sweeney)

Nick Stiles requested authorization to pursue \$10,000 in grant funding from the Utah Bar Foundation to retain a graphic designer for the regulatory reform final report. The design work is intended to improve the report's accessibility and presentation.

Motion: Judge Cornish moved to approve the grant application, as presented. Justice Paige Petersen seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

State Asset Forfeiture Grant Renewal (Katy Erickson and Karl Sweeney)

Katy Erickson requested authorization to submit a grant renewal application to the Utah Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice (CCJJ) for \$50,000 in State Asset Forfeiture Grant (SAFG) funding. The proposed funding would support travel and training costs associated with treatment court conferences during the current fiscal year, as well as additional court-type and role-specific training.

Motion: Judge Cornish moved to approve the grant application, as presented. Judge Amber Mettler seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

7. BASIC GUIDELINES GUARDIANSHIP HANDBOOK FOR MINORS (Shonna Thomas)

Shonna Thomas, on behalf of the WINGS Committee, presented the proposed *Basic Guidelines: Serving as Guardian or Conservator of a Minor* handbook. She explained that UCJA Rule 6-501(3)(A) requires prospective guardians and conservators to complete a court-approved educational exam and affirm completion before appointment.

Following the Judicial Council's approval of the updated adult handbook, *Basic Guidelines: Serving as Guardian or Conservator of an Adult*, in December 2025, the WINGS Committee identified the need for a comparable resource addressing guardianships and conservatorships involving minors. The proposed handbook was developed from the adult handbook and revised to reflect statutory requirements and responsibilities specific to appointments involving minors. Ms. Thomas requested the Council's approval to provide the handbook to prospective guardians and conservators.

Motion: Judge James Gardner moved to approve the *Basic Guidelines: Serving as Guardian or Conservator of a Minor* handbook for circulation, as presented. Judge Christine Johnson seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

8. 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 courts met all certification criteria and were recommended for recertification:

- Second District - Weber County Adult Mental Health Court - Judge Conklin
- Third District Mental Health Court - Judge Brereton
- Sixth District - Kane County Adult Recovery Court - Judge Goble
- Sixth District - Sanpete County Adult Recovery Court - Judge Keisel
- Seventh District - Emery County Adult Recovery Court - Judge Humes
- Seventh District - San Juan County Adult Drug Court Certification - Judge Torgerson

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

9. DEBT COLLECTION AND HOUSING DIVISION UPDATE (Judge Rita Cornish and Judge Kara Petit)

Judge Rita Cornish and Judge Kara Petit provided an update on the Debt Collection and Housing Division. Judge Cornish reported that the Debt Collection and Housing ad hoc committee has been

meeting regularly since approximately mid-May and anticipates that much of the implementation framework will be established through amendments to the Utah Code of Judicial Administration. Given the January 1, 2027 implementation deadline, the committee is initially focusing on a streamlined operational model that satisfies statutory requirements, with the ability to add services such as mediation, alternative dispute resolution, and additional access-to-justice resources after implementation. The initial model contemplates two commissioners serving statewide, supported by an administrative team.

Judge Petit discussed proposed case assignment procedures, including automatic assignment of qualifying eviction matters and certain consumer debt cases to the division. Districts would retain flexibility regarding which judges participate in the division. Generally, contested cases would be assigned to commissioners after an answer or other response is filed, while default matters would remain primarily with judges because of their volume. Commissioners would manage pretrial proceedings and other authorized matters, with cases returning to judges when judicial action is required. Following implementation, the division's operations and feedback would be reviewed to determine whether adjustments are warranted.

Judge Cornish also discussed the statutory and rule changes necessary to establish a statewide process for selecting, supervising, and reviewing the division's commissioners. The committee recommended that the Board of District Court Judges, or a committee appointed by the Board, oversee the commissioners.

On behalf of the committee, Judge Cornish requested approval to begin recruiting for the two commissioner positions before all related rules are finalized.

Motion: Judge Mortensen moved to approve posting two commissioner positions for the Debt Collection and Housing Division. Judge Susan Eisenmann seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

10. LANGUAGE ACCESS COMMITTEE REPORT (Cade Stubbs, Jon Puente, and Ramon Rudecindo)

Cade Stubbs and Jon Puente, on behalf of the Language Access Committee, presented the committee's annual update and introduced the new Language Access Program Manager, Ramon Rudecindo. Mr. Puente reviewed the Utah State University interpreter training partnership. More than 300 individuals applied for the first cohort, with 50 admitted, and a second cohort was scheduled to begin in August. The program is intended to better prepare candidates to successfully complete the interpreter certification examination.

Mr. Puente also reported on implementation of the BoostLingo interpreter scheduling platform. BoostLingo was implemented in district and juvenile courts in April, with implementation in justice courts anticipated in the fall. The statewide platform is intended to improve interpreter scheduling and assignment management, reduce double booking, and streamline invoicing and payment processing. The interpreter program also transitioned from district-based, part-time interpreter coordinators to three full-time regional coordinators.

Mr. Puente reported that proceedings requiring interpreters have approximately doubled since 2022 in most districts. Although the reasons for the increase are unclear, improved reporting may account for a portion of the growth. The Judiciary has added approximately 60 contract interpreters to its roster

and will continue efforts to expand interpreter availability.

Mr. Puente provided an update on the second-language stipend process, which has been streamlined statewide. Employees who receive TCE approval may now initiate testing through a centralized electronic process.

The committee also provided education to judges, staff, and attorneys regarding timely cancellation of interpreter assignments, translated exhibits, pre- and post-hearing meetings with patrons, scheduling practices, and effective courtroom communication.

11. OPEN AND PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT TRAINING (Keisa Williams)

Keisa Williams provided training on the Open and Public Meetings Act, which is intended to promote transparency in the actions and deliberations of state agencies and political subdivisions. She noted that this principle is also reflected in UCJA Rule 2-103 governing Judicial Council meetings.

Ms. Williams explained that although Judicial Council meetings are public, they may be closed for specific purposes and in accordance with established procedures. She reviewed the permissible grounds and procedural requirements for entering a closed session. During a closed meeting, the Council may discuss matters but may not take final action on contracts, appointments, rules, or resolutions. At the conclusion of the closed session, the Council may return to open session by majority vote and may rely on the closed session discussion when taking final action in the open meeting.

12. COURT FACILITIES PLANNING REPORT (Chris Talbot)

Chris Talbot provided the annual Court Facilities Planning Report and reviewed the proposed five-year capital development plan. He noted that projects exceeding \$3.5 million compete with other state agency capital projects for legislative funding. The proposed priorities were:

- Second District Davis County Justice Center
- Fifth District Cedar City Courthouse
- Fourth District Lehi Courthouse
- Seventh District Moab Courthouse
- Sixth District Richfield Courthouse
- Third District West Jordan Courthouse

Mr. Talbot reported that the Davis County Justice Center remains the Courts' highest facility priority, although its estimated cost has increased substantially. The Cedar City Courthouse remains the second priority. He intends to continue pursuing both projects because funding for either would address significant facility needs. Mr. Talbot reviewed the need for each project, presented images of the proposed plans, and discussed anticipated next steps in seeking legislative approval. Mr. Talbot then provided an update on the recently completed law library remodel.

Motion: Judge Cornish moved to approve the Court Facilities priorities as presented. Judge Gardner seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

13. **INDIGENT DEFENSE COMMISSION REPORT** (Matthew Barraza)

Matthew Barraza, Executive Director of the Utah Indigent Defense Commission (IDC), provided the Commission's annual update. Mr. Barraza reported that the IDC is marking its tenth year and continues to support indigent defense statewide through grants, training, the Aggravated Murder Defense Fund, and appellate defense services. Over the past ten years, approximately \$48 million has been distributed to counties and cities. The grant program currently serves 24 of Utah's 29 counties, representing approximately 98 percent of district court cases involving appointed public defenders.

Mr. Barraza discussed the IDC's administration of the Aggravated Murder Defense Fund and efforts to strengthen mitigation work in aggravated murder cases. The IDC hired an in-house mitigation specialist to begin mitigation work earlier in cases and coordinate with defense counsel.

He also reported on the expansion of the IDC's training program and substantial growth in the caseload of the Indigent Appellate Defense Division. The division's responsibilities have expanded beyond criminal appeals to include child welfare and post-conviction matters. Staffing has not kept pace with demand, resulting in backlogs and limits on the division's ability to accept post-conviction appointments. The IDC is documenting unmet demand and working with the Legislature to seek additional resources.

The Council expressed appreciation for the IDC's work.

14. **WEIGHTED CASELOADS** (Ron Gordon, Shane Bahr, Daniel Rincon, Morgan Hansen and Emily King)

Ron Gordon provided an overview of district and juvenile court judicial and clerical weighted caseloads in advance of the Council's annual budget meeting. He emphasized that weighted caseload data provides an important foundation for evaluating judicial resource needs but does not capture every aspect of judicial workload. Judicial workload may increase even when raw case filings do not.

Shane Bahr reported that district court weighted caseloads are based on an average of the prior three years and reflect the judicial resources needed to perform the work completed during that period. He noted that the study does not yet account for anticipated workload associated with justice court closures, the Debt Collection and Housing Division, three-judge panels, or other developing changes. The statewide District Court Weighted Caseload Study reflected a shortage of approximately 11.5 judicial officers. When district-specific needs are considered, the anticipated request is approximately 13 judicial officers, plus two additional positions associated with absorbing work from justice court closures.

The Council discussed the need to evaluate the weighted caseload methodology, including the length of the judicial workday, administrative responsibilities, committee assignments, rural travel, and the potential effects of legislation such as speedy-trial requirements.

Daniel Meza Rincon reviewed the juvenile court judicial weighted caseload study, which reflected an overall need for approximately 32.5 judicial officers, compared with approximately 32.1 the prior year. He identified particularly significant workload concerns in the Third and Fourth Districts. Mr. Rincon reported that the juvenile court will also evaluate its weighted caseload methodology.

Mr. Gordon reviewed the clerical weighted caseload study, which reflected an overall need for approximately 42 additional staff positions. He noted that even if all identified judicial positions were

funded, additional clerical staffing needs would remain. Mr. Gordon expressed appreciation to the data and research team for its work on the weighted caseload studies.

Motion: Judge Cornish moved to approve the District and Juvenile Court Judicial Weighted Caseloads as presented. Judge Johnson seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

15. RULES FOR FINAL APPROVAL (Keisa Williams)

Keisa Williams presented recommended amendments to CJA Rules 3-306.04 and 3-409. Ms. Williams stated the rules are back from a 45-day public comment period with no public comments received. She recommended that the rules be approved with a November 1, 2026, effective date.

Motion: Judge Brendan McCullagh moved to approve CJA Rules 3-306.04 and 3-409 as recommended, with a November 1, 2026, effective date. Judge Cornish seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

16. COURT COMMISSIONER CONDUCT COMMITTEE REPORT (Judge John Luthy and Stacy Haacke)

Judge John Luthy presented the annual Court Commissioner Conduct Committee report. He reported that the Committee reviewed nine complaints during his first year as chair. Most involved factual or legal issues appropriately addressed through the appellate process or allegations of bias stemming from misunderstandings of court procedures.

Judge Luthy reported that most complaints are resolved at the chair-review stage. One complaint during the current year was expected to proceed to full committee review. He also noted that his review of commissioner proceedings indicated that commissioners are generally performing their responsibilities appropriately and that findings of actual bias are uncommon.

17. CONSENT CALENDAR (Associate Chief Justice Jill Pohlman)

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

18. CERTIFICATION OF COURT COMMISSIONERS (Shane Bahr)

A discussion was held in Executive Session.

Motion: Judge McCullagh moved to recertify Commissioner Maran Ito. Judge Direda seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

19. GUARDIAN AD LITEM OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE (Daniel Rincon)

A discussion was held in Executive Session.

Motion: Judge Cornish moved to approve the Board of Juvenile Court Judges' recommended appointments to the Guardian ad Litem Oversight Committee, with staggered terms in accordance with the Rules of Judicial Administration. Judge Gardner seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

20. OLD BUSINESS/NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Gordon clarified that, although the Legislature funded a significant number of new FTEs during the most recent session, many of those positions are tied to newly imposed statutory responsibilities and therefore do not substantially reduce the approximately 42-position clerical need identified in the weighted caseload study.

21. EXECUTIVE SESSION

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

Justice Pohlman and Justice Petersen recused themselves from the litigation discussion and left the meeting during that portion of the executive session.

22. ADJOURN (Associate Chief Justice Jill Pohlman)

The meeting was adjourned.