

2020

ANNUAL REPORT

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA COURTS

OPEN TO ALL, TRUSTED BY ALL, JUSTICE FOR ALL



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MESSAGE FROM CHIEF JUDGE ANNA BLACKBURNE-RIGSBY



During 2020, the District of Columbia Courts faced unprecedented challenges due to the coronavirus pandemic. The Courts responded to this crisis with concern, first and foremost, for the safety of our judiciary and court employees, and with a deep commitment to ensuring that the community we serve would continue to have access to justice in a safe environment. These priorities guided our actions in the difficult months that lay ahead.

Following the Mayor's declaration of a state of emergency in the District of Columbia on March 11, the Joint Committee on Judicial Administration, the Courts' governing body, invoked emergency authority under the D.C. Code which granted the chief judges of the Court of Appeals and Superior Court the authority to take all steps needed to change court operations to address the coronavirus risk. The Courts established a Pandemic Working Group to coordinate our response to the pandemic and to monitor the status of the pandemic in the District and surrounding jurisdictions.

The Court of Appeals limited on-site operations by cancelling oral arguments, closing the Historic Courthouse to the public, cancelling appellate mediations, and suspending, tolling, or extending all filing deadlines, while remaining open to the public for new case filings. Within weeks, the Court transitioned to a remote work environment with judges and staff teleworking to ensure the continuity of certain operations. In addition, alternative means to ensure access to justice for the public were established. The Court permitted self-represented litigants to submit pleadings via email, as well as by mail or drop box in the lobby of the Historic Courthouse (available 24 hours seven days a week) and set up a special email address for emergency matters, such as the large number of appeals for compassionate release from jail due to the pandemic. By May, the Court resumed hearing oral arguments via remote videoconferences, which were live streamed on YouTube to provide public access. The Court also conducted appellate mediations remotely via telephone conference or videoconference. In October, the Committee on Admissions successfully administered the first ever remote D.C. Bar Exam to over 1,600 applicants. I thank all of the attorneys and litigants who have worked hard to adapt to these changes.

Finally, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the judges and employees of the D.C. Courts who pulled together and demonstrated great flexibility and resourcefulness to ensure access to justice during this difficult year. They have truly demonstrated that they are deeply committed to public service and the excellent administration of justice.

Chief Judge Anna Blackburne-Rigsby
District of Columbia Court of Appeals

MESSAGE FROM CHIEF JUDGE ANITA JOSEY-HERRING



The year 2020 will be remembered for the world-wide coronavirus pandemic which disrupted life as we knew it. Government agencies, businesses, schools, and other organizations were forced to shut down completely or to dramatically change their business practices in order to continue operating safely.

In March, the Superior Court limited on-site operations while remaining open for filings of pleadings, motions and new cases. Staff transitioned to teleworking full-time to ensure that core functions were carried out. All deadlines and time limits in statutes, court rules and standing or other orders were suspended, tolled or extended. The Court heard only felony presentments, misdemeanor arraignments, juvenile initial hearings and petitions for writ of habeas corpus, initial hearings and requests of removal in abuse and neglect matters, and emergency matters. Trials were suspended, as were mediations. Gradually, the Court began expanding the types and number of cases that it would hear, and by June, 37 courtrooms were operating remotely. In July, mediations were resumed. By the end of the year, 78 courtrooms were operating remotely, and plans were underway to resume jury trials in 2021.

Mounting a sufficient response to the coronavirus pandemic required tremendous collaboration by the Courts' leadership team, judiciary, and court employees as well as with our partners in the justice system. Many new business practices were implemented which may be appropriate to retain as we move beyond the pandemic, as they enhance access to justice and court services for the public. We will be examining what has worked well during the pandemic with an eye towards permanently implementing some of the most successful changes to the way we operate in the future.

The Superior Court is committed to ensuring access to justice during and beyond this deadly pandemic. I thank my colleagues and all court employees for their tremendous efforts to ensure the Court's continuing operations this year. Thanks also to our justice system partners, without whom we could not have met the challenges of this pandemic.

Chief Judge Anita Josey-Herring
Superior Court of the District of Columbia

FROM THE EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA COURTS



This year has been challenging for the Courts and the citizens of the District. We have encountered unprecedented times - a pandemic that significantly impacted the way we conducted business. This report highlights the innovative initiatives undertaken in collaboration with our partners in response to the coronavirus pandemic. The report details the alignment of such activities with the goals of the Courts' 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, Open to All, Trusted by All, Justice for All. On pages 8 and 9, the report highlights strategies targeted for implementation this year.

Despite being closed to the public since March due to the pandemic, the Court of Appeals continued to provide the public with access to justice by using technology to conduct all oral arguments via Zoom and to administer the Bar Exam in October, with over 1,600 applicants. The Superior Court continued to provide access to justice through innovation and technology, operating 78 courtrooms remotely and posting WebEx access information and tip sheets for the scheduled remote hearings on the internet. The Courts established five remote sites throughout the District to enable court users without computers or internet access at home to participate in court hearings, file documents, and obtain information on other services. At the outset of the pandemic, the Courts successfully transitioned to a remote telework environment in a matter of days and instituted enhanced cleaning and disinfecting protocols in the buildings.

The DC Courts' judiciary and court personnel have worked tirelessly to deliver excellent service to our community and to achieve the Courts' mission to protect rights and liberties, uphold and interpret the law, and resolve disputes fairly and effectively.

We invite you to learn more about the DC Courts' efforts and accomplishments during the pandemic outlined in this report and at www.dccourts.gov.

Dr. Cheryl Bailey
Acting Executive Officer

GOVERNANCE OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA COURTS

The Joint Committee on Judicial Administration (Joint Committee) governs the District of Columbia Courts, as designated in the District of Columbia Court Reform and Criminal Procedure Act of 1970. The Joint Committee sets policy for the Courts and is responsible for administrative and financial activities, including capital projects to maintain safe and functional courthouse facilities; budget submissions; acquisition, spending and auditing; grant administration; general personnel policies; information management; statistical reporting; and performance monitoring. Five judges serve on the Joint Committee. The Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals serves as Chair; other members include the Chief Judge of the Superior Court and three other judicial members, one elected by the Court of Appeals and two elected by judges of the Superior Court. The Executive Officer, who is responsible for administrative management of the District of Columbia Courts, serves as Secretary to the Joint Committee.

The Joint Committee governs the District of Columbia Courts, as designated in the District of Columbia Court Reform and Criminal Procedure Act of 1970.

ORGANIZATION OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA COURTS

The District of Columbia Courts comprise the Judicial Branch of the District of Columbia Government. The Court of Appeals, an appellate court of last resort, is the highest court in the District of Columbia. The Superior Court is a trial court, and the Court System includes the administrative offices of the DC Courts. The DC Courts are a unified court system, which means that there is one level of trial court in which all cases are filed.

Uniquely among state-level courts, the DC Courts' judges are nominated by the President of the United States and confirmed by the United States Senate. They serve 15-year terms and are eligible to be re-appointed. Magistrate judges are appointed by the Chief Judge of the Superior Court with the approval of the Board of Judges. The DC Courts are financed by the Federal Government. The Courts' budget is submitted to the U.S. Office of Management and Budget for the President's recommendation and then forwarded to the United States Congress for final consideration.

The **Court of Appeals** is the District of Columbia's highest court. Unlike many states, DC does not have an intermediate appellate court, so the Court of Appeals hears all appeals from the Superior Court. The Court of Appeals also reviews decisions of DC Government agencies. Final judgments of the Court of Appeals are reviewable by the U.S. Supreme Court. The Court of Appeals manages the admission of attorneys to the DC Bar, which is the largest unified bar in the United States, with over 100,000 members. The Court handles attorney discipline through the Board on Professional Responsibility. In addition to the Chief Judge, eight associate judges serve on the Court of Appeals. Senior judges, who are retired, also serve the Court on a part-time basis. Most cases are heard in three-judge panels, and on rare occasions the entire court sits to hear a case (called an en banc hearing). The administrative functions and day-to-day operations are managed by the Clerk of the Court of Appeals.

The **Superior Court** is the trial court of general jurisdiction, which means that the Superior Court hears virtually all local legal matters, other than administrative adjudications. The Superior Court is comprised of divisions and offices that handle civil, criminal, domestic violence, family, probate and tax cases; juvenile pretrial and probation supervision; alternative dispute resolution services; financial determinations in cases involving assets and property; and crime victims' compensation. In addition to the Chief Judge, 61 associate judges serve on the Superior Court. Senior judges serve on a part-time basis. Twenty-four magistrate judges also serve in Superior Court, hearing criminal arraignments and presentments; child welfare, child support and new juvenile cases; DC misdemeanor and traffic cases; small claims; temporary protection orders; and other cases. The associate judges of the Superior Court rotate assignments in all divisions based on assignments made by the Chief Judge. The administrative functions and day-to-day operations are managed by the Clerk of the Superior Court.

The **Court System** provides services to both the Court of Appeals and the Superior Court under the direction of the Deputy Executive Officer. The Court System consists of a variety of administrative divisions that provide technical and support services, including contracting and procurement, legal counsel, capital projects, facilities management, budget and finance, human resources, training, strategic management, information technology and court reporting.

2020 STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE

The DC Courts' 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, entitled Open to All, Trusted by All, Justice for All, identifies five strategic goals which are essential to fulfilling our mission: Access to Justice for All, Fair and Timely Case Resolution, A Professional and Engaged Workforce, Resilient and Responsive Technology, and Effective Court Management and Administration. The judiciary and court personnel are working hard to implement over 35 strategies contained in the Plan.

For 2020, the Plan identified 9 strategies to be accomplished or initiated. Below is a brief update on each of these strategies and the key results achieved.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR ALL

- Informational web-based videos for the public will explain key trial and appellate court processes.

Status: A set of informational web-based videos was released to provide the public with essential information about how the courts work, how to conduct business with the courts, and what to expect in the courtroom. Approximately 11 videos, available in English and Spanish, describe processes related to starting an appeal and navigating the trial court.

- Electronic check-in for court participants will reduce wait times.

Status: Electronic sign-in systems were implemented or enhanced in the Domestic Violence, Criminal, and Civil Divisions. As the DC Courts expand post-pandemic operations, electronic check-in systems will enhance efficiency for court users and provide data to track wait times.

- The Juvenile Behavioral and Diversion Program will support youth who are victims of commercial sexual exploitation.

Status: The Family Court continued its HOPE "Here Opportunities Prepare You for Excellence" specialized treatment court to serve court-involved youth who are suspected of being,

confirmed to be, or at risk of becoming victims of commercial sexual exploitation. The HOPE Court is tailored to the needs of each participant, who help set their own treatment goals. The HOPE Court offers a path to case closure for youth in the delinquency system and specialized services to help youth and their families achieve their permanency goal for youth in the neglect system. In 2020, HOPE Court served 40 CSEC youth, an increase of 5% over last year.

FAIR AND TIMELY CASE RESOLUTION

- All case types will have time standards.

Status: All major case types within Superior Court have time to disposition standards to track and monitor efficiency.

- More courtroom calendars will use staggered or time-certain scheduling approaches and/or team assignments of panel attorneys.

Status: Courtroom hearings/operations during the pandemic utilized time-certain scheduling via an electronic platform.

- The length of time elapsing between jury summons for District residents will be increased from 2 years to 3 years.

Status: The Court continued its efforts to make jury service more convenient for the citizens of the District of Columbia. The Jurors on Call system uses a predictive model to more closely align juror demand with juror supply, thereby increasing juror utilization. The system sends alerts to jurors the evening prior to inform whether they must report for service on the following day.

- Rules amendments responding to changes in federal procedural rules will be adopted within 15 months.

Status: Rules amendments responding to changes in federal appellate and trial court procedural rules are being adopted within 15 months.

RESILIENT & RESPONSIVE TECHNOLOGY

- Court personnel will have remote access to core court operations.

Status: In March 2020, the Courts successfully transitioned to remote operations in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Over 1,000 personnel currently perform core court operations via telework.

EFFECTIVE COURT MANAGEMENT & ADMINISTRATION

- Enhanced data quality metrics and reports will be available.

Status: With the implementation of IJIS2, the new Superior Court case management system, metrics to enhance data quality and reports are being examined and modified as appropriate. The Data Governance Council is developing a data inventory that will include an assessment of data quality for key metrics. The Courts' Business Intelligence initiative is developing dashboards for the Court of Appeals to facilitate data review and use to guide decision-making.



STRATEGIC PLAN
OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA COURTS

OPEN TO ALL
TRUSTED BY ALL
JUSTICE FOR ALL

2018–2022

DC COURTS' RESPONSE TO COVID PANDEMIC

The DC Courts faced unprecedented challenges in 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic which emerged in the U.S. and worldwide in January and February. In response to health and safety concerns for court litigants, partner agencies, members of the public, and court personnel, as well as the Mayor's declaration of a state of emergency in the District of Columbia on March 11, the Courts temporarily suspended most on-site operations, sent employees home to telework until further notice, and began planning for continuing operations during a pandemic of unknown duration.

The Courts established a Pandemic Working Group to coordinate its response to the pandemic and to monitor the status of the pandemic in the District of Columbia and surrounding jurisdictions. The Joint Committee on Judicial Administration, the Courts' governing body, invoked emergency authority under the D.C. Code to give the Chief Judges the authority to take all necessary steps to toll deadlines and make other changes to court operations to address the coronavirus risk. The Joint Committee Order authorized the Courts to remain operational, as modified, during this emergency period to carry out the administration of justice while balancing the health and safety needs of litigants, court visitors and personnel, with the need to ensure continued access to justice. The Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals, as Chair of the Joint Committee, released a public statement on March 16 concerning the Courts' response to the pandemic.

The Chief Judges of the Court of Appeals and Superior Court issued two sets of Orders in March addressing court operations through May. The Court of Appeals cancelled oral arguments (considering cases on the written materials instead), closed the Historic Courthouse to the public, cancelled appellate mediations, and suspended, tolled, or extended all filing deadlines, while noting that the Court was open for new filings. Self-represented parties who were not registered for electronic filing could submit their filings by email, by mail, or by depositing their filings in a drop box located in the lobby of the Historic Courthouse. In addition, the Court established an email box for emergency matters, such as appeals for compassionate release from custody due to the pandemic. The Superior Court Orders clarified the status of

operations for all case types, noting that all divisions and the Family Court were open for filing of pleadings, motions, and new cases with limited staff. Unless otherwise ordered by the Court, all deadlines and time limits in statutes, court rules and standing or other orders were suspended, tolled or extended. The Court would hear only felony presentments and misdemeanor arraignments other than citation arraignments; juvenile initial hearings and petitions for writ of habeas corpus; initial hearings and requests of removal in neglect and abuse matters; and emergency matters. All jury trials in progress were to proceed as scheduled while most other trials were suspended. All evictions of tenants and foreclosed homeowners were stayed. Wedding ceremonies in the Marriage Bureau were suspended.

Also in March, the Superior Court established procedures for the filing of emergency motions for release from custody due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and suspended weekend jail sentences until June 5 and the execution of certain misdemeanor bench warrants. The Civil Division issued an Order extending deadlines concerning statutes of limitations and rule-based deadlines such as for service of process, responding to discovery requests, and events leading to a pretrial conference.

In April, the Superior Court Board of Judges authorized increased maximum awards for temporary emergency food and temporary emergency housing for the Crime Victims Compensation Program until further notice. The Criminal Division issued an Order clarifying the status of expiration dates for deferred prosecution agreements and deferred sentencing agreements and probationary terms in matters pending in the Criminal and Domestic Violence Divisions.

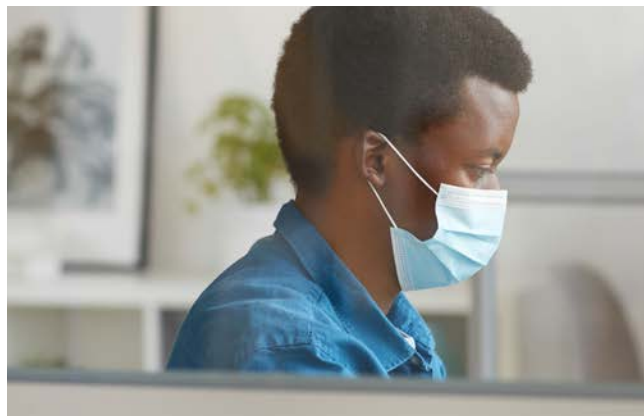


In May, the Court of Appeals announced that it would resume oral arguments via videoconference and would live stream them on YouTube to provide public access. This May 21 Order also noted that the Court would no longer suspend or toll filing deadlines and that appellate mediations had resumed via telephonic or video conference. The Superior Court expanded the types and number of cases it would hear, through June 19. To ensure the safety and well-being of court staff, counsel, parties and members of the public, all case types would be heard remotely, with the exception of the adult arraignment court. The Court would provide members of the public with real-time access to remote hearings upon request, as allowed by law. No trials would be conducted except in selected Family Court matters. All divisions and the Family Court would be open in a remote filing status for filing of pleadings, motions, and new cases. Wedding ceremonies in the Marriage Bureau resumed via Webex. The Multi-Door Dispute Resolution Division began offering remote mediation for civil actions cases.

A May 29 Order of the Joint Committee stated that the D.C. Courts would remain operational as modified by the May Orders of the Chief Judges, and granted the Chief Judges the authority to issue additional orders extending the period of judicial emergency during which deadlines are tolled or extended for all statutory and rules-based time limits.

In June, the Court of Appeals announced that it would administer the D.C. Bar Exam remotely in October. The Superior Court expanded the number of courtrooms and types of cases that would be heard, through August 14. All divisions and the Family Court would be open in a remote status for the filing of pleadings, motions, and new cases. Electronic filing would continue and the Court would begin to accept electronic payments in certain circumstances. The Court would operate 24 courtrooms remotely, and anticipated having 37 courtrooms available by the end of June and 57 courtrooms available by the end of July. Trials continued to be suspended. At the end of the month, the Court of Appeals extended remote operations through August, and the Joint Committee ordered that all persons were required to wear cloth face coverings in court buildings.

In July and August, the Multi-Door Dispute Resolution Division began offering remote mediation for small claims (non-debt collection), landlord and tenant, and probate cases. Also in August, the Court of Appeals and Superior Court issued updated Orders addressing court operations, through November.



In September, the Courts established five remote hearing sites in the community for use by persons without access to computers or WIFI in their homes. The remote sites are located at the Court's Balanced and Restorative Justice Centers in all four quadrants of the city as well as at the D.C. Government's Franklin D. Reeves Municipal Center. At these sites, persons can obtain court information and services online, participate in appellate mediation or oral arguments, or participate in trial court hearings remotely. Between September and December, 43 persons accessed the remote sites for court services. In addition, in light of the uncertainty and hardships inflicted by the pandemic on recent law school graduates, the Court of Appeals expanded authorization for the temporary practice of law and instituted admission to the bar based on COVID-19 Emergency Exam Waiver, coupled with three years of supervised practice of law.

In October, the Court of Appeals successfully administered the first ever remote D.C. Bar Exam, testing over 1,600 applicants, to assure the competence of persons admitted to the practice of law, while protecting the health and safety of applicants and staff, protecting the integrity of the exam, and assuring equity for applicants. The Committee on Admissions arranged reciprocity agreements with the 12 other jurisdictions that administered the same examination, to give examinees flexibility in their employment opportunities and careers.

In November, the Court of Appeals and Superior Court issued updated Orders concerning the status of court operations, through January. In light of the increased need during the pandemic for representation of indigent persons seeking reduced sentences or compassionate release from incarceration, the Court of Appeals issued an order

permitting law students participating in certain clinical programs to serve clients in such cases.

At the end of December, the Court of Appeals was continuing to hear oral arguments remotely and to live stream oral arguments on YouTube for viewing by the public. Between May and December, the Court heard oral arguments in approximately 85 cases and had more than 400 subscribers on the channel. Appellate mediations were conducted in 39 cases, with 31 cases reaching a resolution. In Superior Court, 78 courtrooms were operating remotely or partially remotely by the end of the year, with posted WebEx access information, tip sheets and the scheduled remote hearings on the internet to enhance access to these hearings. Guides on scheduling remote hearings were provided to judicial officers and court staff, as well as guidance to indicate the remote status of all hearings on notices. Plans were underway to resume jury trials in the second quarter of 2021. Although the Clerks' Office continued to operate with limited staff on-site and most staff performing their functions remotely from home, additional services were implemented to assist customers such as a new electronic payment platform that allows customers to pay for services remotely including fines and court ordered payments. The Family Court Self-Help Center has been instrumental in providing access for self-represented litigants and the Probate Division recently opened their self-help center remotely to support self-represented litigants with the increasing number of estate administration matters.

Throughout the year, the nine divisions of the Court System effectively supported the changing operations of the Court of Appeals and Superior Court, providing essential support services. At the outset of the pandemic, the Information Technology Division worked around the clock to deploy equipment and tools to enable the Courts to establish remote operations. The Administrative Services and Capital Projects and Facilities Management Divisions ensured that court facilities and procedures were modified to support safe limited operations during the pandemic and when the Courts return to full operations post-pandemic. Among the modifications made, the Courts installed plexiglass barriers in courtrooms, placed signage for physical distancing in all buildings, converted courtrooms to facilitate remote operations, purchased personal protective equipment, and augmented the Courts' cleaning protocols in alignment with CDC guidelines. The Courts procured the services of an epidemiologist and industrial hygienist, who provided expert advice and guidance on needed



modifications to facilities and protocols to ensure safe operations. The Courts also developed informational videos to educate prospective jurors, court staff and members of the public about health and safety protocols. The Court Reporting Division collaborated with Courtroom Technology and Central Recording to develop a method for delivering digital audio of court proceedings to continue the production of transcripts during the pandemic, and developed protocols to utilize the voice-to-text software in the remote environment and provide reporting of remote courtroom proceedings. The Human Resources Division worked to expeditiously process employees' Flexplace (telework) program applications, increasing the number of telework participants from 117 participants to over 600 in a matter of days. HR also created the first ever virtual New Employee Orientation to onboard new employees hired during the pandemic so that the acclimation process could continue uninterrupted. The Center for Education and Training quickly pivoted to offering a plethora of online training during the pandemic. Finally, other Court System divisions, including the Office of General Counsel and the Strategic Management Division, transitioned to fully remote operations with staff teleworking full-time and continuing to provide vital services throughout the year.

Despite the unprecedented challenges of the past year, the pandemic has also provided a unique opportunity for the Courts to reexamine its business processes and collaborate with justice system agency partners to improve access to justice and court services for the public. As of the end of 2020, the Courts were planning a Reimagining the DC Courts initiative, to be launched in 2021, to re-imagine the Courts' operations in light of lessons learned during the pandemic. The Courts plan to conduct outreach with both internal and external stakeholders to gather information about what worked well during the pandemic, what challenges were encountered, and what could be implemented in a post-pandemic environment to enhance the administration of justice. We envision many changes to the Courts' operations in the future.



GOAL I

ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR ALL

The Courts have a responsibility to eliminate barriers to meaningful participation in the justice system and to accessing court services. Such barriers may include a lack of legal representation, limited literacy or limited English language skills, limited financial resources, and physical or mental disability. In collaboration with justice and community partners, the Courts will work to ensure full access to the justice system and court services.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE SERVICES FOR COURT PARTICIPANTS

Court services for self-represented litigants. Court participants often face challenges when engaging in the court process, including a lack of knowledge and information about the law and processes of the court, difficulties in preparing forms and pleadings, lack of funds for an attorney, and the need for childcare while attending court proceedings. These access to justice challenges hinder litigants' abilities to participate meaningfully in the judicial process, thereby affecting the outcomes of cases and reducing perceptions of access and fairness. The D.C. Courts provide a myriad of services aimed at reducing barriers to access to justice.

- 8,000 court users visited the Court Navigator Program which serves the small claims and landlord tenant courts, the Family Self-Help Center, and Probate Self-Help Center.
- The Family Self-Help Center and Probate Self-Help Center transitioned to virtual operations after the courthouse reduced onsite activities due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The centers use phone, mail, and email to interact with users. The Court Navigator Program transitioned to supporting the DC Courts Remote Hearing Sites.
- 5 Remote Hearing Sites were developed to address the digital divide, or the gap in access for community members without consistent availability of information technology and internet services.

FAMILY SELF HELP CENTER

- 6,085 served
- Type of assistance provided:
 - General legal information about D.C. family law matters such as divorce, custody, visitation, and child support
 - Information on legal rights and obligations
 - Descriptions of legal options
 - Assistance in completing forms
- Assisted self-represented litigants with filing court documents when they did not have access to email



PROBATE SELF HELP CENTER

- 700 served between April 1 and September 30
- Type of assistance provided:
 - General legal information about probate matters and assistance with completing forms
 - Limited services provided virtually via livechat and email
- In October, the center began piloting online virtual appointments for self-represented filers to receive one on one opportunities to address special challenges in completing forms

COURT NAVIGATOR PROGRAM

- 1,214 served from Jan 1 to March 17
- Type of assistance provided:
 - General legal information about Landlord & Tenant and Small Claims matters
 - Escorting and directing court users to where they need to go
 - Guiding litigants through how to complete their business with the court
 - Ensuring court participants know about services and how to access them
- Developed self-guided materials called Process Plans to help guide self-represented litigants through common court processes

REMOTE HEARING SITES

- 43 served from September – December
- Community members without computers or internet service at home can visit one of the five remote hearing sites that were established throughout the community to enable members of the public to access the courts. The sites are located in all four quadrants of the city at the Superior Court's Balanced and Restorative Justice Centers as well as at the Franklin D. Reeves Municipal Center.
- Community members scheduled one of twelve stations to participate in their remote hearings and mediation sessions, or to complete and submit applications for the Crime Victims Compensation Program.

Electronic check-in to minimize wait times. Electronic sign-in systems were implemented or enhanced in the Domestic Violence, Criminal, and Civil Divisions. As the DC Courts expands post-pandemic operations, electronic check-in systems will enhance efficiency for court users and provide data to track wait times.

Expanded electronic filings. Self-represented litigants were given the option to file forms and documents electronically for matters including name changes, vital record amendments, marriage licenses, or by email for appeals. Online instructional videos were created to assist self-represented litigants with navigating and using the electronic filing process.

Videos and self-guided materials. A set of informational web-based videos was released to provide the public with essential information about how both the trial and appellate courts work, how to conduct business with the courts, and what to expect in the courtroom.



A LOOK AHEAD

Additional informational videos are scheduled to be produced to aid the public with navigating the Courts next year.

A LOOK AHEAD

In the Fall 2021, the Probate Division will bring back the Law Student Volunteer Program using a virtual format.

SUPPORT SERVICES FOR COURT PARTICIPANTS

The Courts offer a variety of support services for court participants, ranging from on-site child care to expedited fee waivers, interactive electronic court forms, assistance for persons with disabilities, and the like.

- 31 children were provided care while their parents and caregivers participated in court proceedings and conducted business with the courts, prior to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Child Care Center is located on the C Street level of the Moultrie Courthouse and offers free, licensed child care services to children of parents and guardians who have business in the courts. The Center is preparing for the safe resumption of operations next year in accordance with the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).
- Assisting customers by phone was an essential part of customer service amid the coronavirus pandemic. For example, 87,090 customers were served via phone by the Information Office which provides general information about court operations. The Family Court call center which provides general information about Family Court matters served 61,617 customers, a 48% increase over 2019.
- 16,606 court users accessed interactive court forms through Forms Help Online in 2020. The program found online and at computer stations throughout the court populates court forms using responses to a series of questions answered by court participants. An additional 2 forms were added to the program in 2020 for a total of 24 forms for matters in the Court of Appeals and Civil, Probate, Domestic Violence, and Family Court. The next phase of the initiative will include the development of 16 additional forms and is expected to be completed in 2021.
- The Superior Court library's automated system that allows the public, judicial chambers, and the legal community to search the library's collection online played a critical role in access to legal information

during the pandemic. Additionally, new licenses for the LexisNexis Digital Library enhanced the library's collection of eBook resources available to users.

- CART (Communication Access Realtime Translation) services were provided to deaf and hard-of-hearing litigants, attorneys, jurors, and witnesses, allowing them to fully participate in court proceedings and mediations.

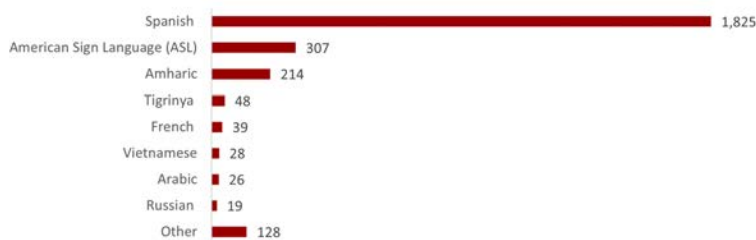
Access for persons with disabilities. To ensure participation in the justice system for persons with disabilities, including jurors, the DC Courts routinely accommodate court users and provide training on disability issues to new judges and to court staff. The Courts continued to remove barriers or provide programmatic access through accommodations such as scheduling or timing of events, appearance by telephone or computer, Assistive Listening Devices, wheelchairs, readers for blind persons, mobile devices in the courthouse, digital desk top and glass handheld magnifiers for court users with vision impairments, Braille, large print, navigation assistance, alternative security screening procedures, and service animals. In addition, the Courts provided reasonable accommodations in testing all court job applicants and bar examinees who made a request supported by sufficient medical documentation, as well as Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART), which provides a transcript for the court user to read as a court proceeding occurs.

A LOOK AHEAD

With the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the DC Courts in collaboration with its partners, began examining business processes and practices to improve services to the public. Recommendations on business process improvements are expected next year.

Language assistance. The Courts continued to provide access to justice for persons with limited English proficiency (LEP) by offering free interpreting services (in person, by WebEx videoconferencing and by telephone), publishing information on the Courts' website in Spanish and Amharic regarding the Courts' operational status during the Covid-19 pandemic, displaying signage in English and Spanish, and providing forms and information in multiple languages. Amid the pandemic, all interpretation services were provided via telephone or the WebEx videoconferencing platform. Most of the interpretation was conducted consecutively (i.e., one party speaks and the interpreter interprets immediately afterward) due to the short duration of most hearings.

Interpreting Events CY2020



However, the Courts did offer simultaneous interpretation (i.e., the interpreter interprets while another party is speaking) for longer and more complex hearings.

- 2,634 court events provided interpreter services.
- 8 top languages served by interpreters – Spanish, American Sign Language, Amharic, Tigrinya, French, Vietnamese, Arabic, Russian
- 30 designated bilingual (English-Spanish) positions maintained throughout the Courts.
- 364 documents such as judge's orders, forms, applications, brochures, workbooks, and notices were translated into another language for court users.

Amharic Court Interpreter Certification Examination.

Through a grant from the State Justice Institute, the Courts developed the nation's first Amharic court interpreter certification examination in collaboration with the National Center for State Courts. The exam ensures that available interpreters are qualified to effectively serve court users. The finalized exam materials included a scoring dictionary, simultaneous and consecutive audio recordings, sight translation documents, rating and proctor training materials, and a legal glossary. The Courts offered the first Amharic Skills-Building Workshop in December 2020 for interpreters who intend to take the exam.

Enhancing services for the deaf and hard-of-hearing.

The Courts hired an American Sign Language (ASL) Staff Interpreter in 2020. In addition to interpreting for various court proceedings, the ASL staff interpreter focuses on enhancing other court services for the deaf and hard-of-hearing. For example, the ASL interpreter assisted in creating informational videos in American Sign Language that describe the Courts' Covid-19 operating plans. These videos are available online.

Domestic violence intake centers. Located at the Moultrie Courthouse and in Southeast D.C., the Courts' Domestic Violence Intake Centers served more than 2,200 customers in-person and virtually during the pandemic. The Intake Centers also enhanced access to services for victims by co-locating court services with community resources to provide a "one-stop shopping" experience for victims. The Legal Aid Society, Bread for the City, and other volunteers assisted petitioners with obtaining legal services, writing pleadings, and finding legal information while community organizations facilitated safety planning for victims, including the DC Survivors and Advocates for Empowerment (D.C. SAFE).

A LOOK AHEAD

The name and location of the Southeast Domestic Violence Intake Center (DVIC) will officially change in 2021. The Family Justice Center, formerly the Southeast DVIC, will relocate to Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue in Southeast Washington.

Guardianship Assistance Program. The Guardianship Assistance Program in the Probate Division provides support to guardians, adults under guardianship, care providers and the public through training, referrals to community resources, and information regarding guardianship and alternatives to guardianship.

- 97 detailed case review reports were submitted by licensed social workers in alignment with current adult guardianship law. Court staff conducted periodic reviews of persons under guardianship and made recommendations to the court on whether the guardianship should continue, should be limited or adjusted, or should be terminated.
- 23 periodic review hearings were held in response to the case review reports submitted to the Court.

Mental Habilitation Advocates. The Mental Habilitation Advocate Program provides advocates for District residents with intellectual disabilities. Advocates review petitions and pleadings on behalf of the disabled person and ensure that constitutional rights of the individual are protected. Recruitment initiatives and training classes in 2020 yielded 22 new advocate applications and Continuing Education Credits for 53 current advocates.

Mental health initiatives. Increasingly, the judicial branch is called upon to address the needs of individuals with mental and behavioral issues, as such conditions can linger or worsen without treatment, increasing the likelihood of future involvement in the justice system. In response, the DC Courts continued engagement with community behavioral health partners and its court-based Urgent Care Clinic to ensure that many court participants with mental health issues are identified, assessed, and linked with appropriate services.

- 182 court participants were served by the Urgent Care Clinic. The Clinic provides mental health and substance use assessments for individuals who exhibit symptoms of mental illness during court appearances. Although the clinic was closed for new intakes for several months due to the pandemic, a remote intake services program was piloted in August and limited in-person walk-in hours resumed in September.

Services for crime victims. Victims of violent crime received \$5.4 million in compensation for financial losses related to the crime, in compliance with federal standards. The Court received 2,116 claims for compensation. The program transitioned to remote operations in March by implementing a new process allowing claimants to file applications by email. To assure that victims learn about the availability of compensation, the Court conducts outreach with numerous law enforcement and social service agencies as well as public interest organizations. The Crime Victims Compensation Advisory Commission (CVCAC) brings together key organizations in the District's victim assistance network, including the U.S. Attorney's Office, D.C. Office of the Attorney General, Metropolitan Police Department, D.C. SAFE, mental health providers, and hospitals, among others, to provide a unified voice and a coordinated response for all crime victims. This year, the Commission focused on updating the CVCP appeals process.

Services for juveniles. Family Court continued the Preparing Youth for Adulthood Initiative, which is funded through Court Improvement Program grants. The initiative is a collaboration with the CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) Program to provide specially trained advocates for teens in the child abuse and neglect system to ensure that they are prepared for the next phase of life. Advocates assist teens in learning life skills such as gathering and maintaining important documents, budgeting, writing college applications, choosing a vocational program, etc. Teens attend programs offered through the Office of Youth Empowerment. The program admission criteria have been expanded to include youth aged 14 and up with any permanency goal.

To enhance public safety and address the needs of the District's youth under pre-trial or probation supervision, the Courts' Social Services Division continued to offer an array of pro-social innovative services in collaboration with local juvenile and criminal justice, child welfare, health, behavioral health and education stakeholders.

- Winter Break - court-involved youth participated in a variety of activities during Winter Break, including tours of the Harriet Tubman estate and the Frederick Douglass estate, visits to historic landmarks and museums in the District of Columbia, and a community service initiative with the Children's National Hospital.

- **Civic Engagement** – Staff from the Court Social Services Division and court-involved youth participated in socially distanced educational activities to promote engagement in social justice issues, including creating signs and banners to display at Black Lives Matter Plaza and a virtual watch party commemorating the anniversary of the historic March on Washington.
- **Backpack Drive** – Back-to-school backpacks were delivered to youth in the community and included materials needed for virtual learning including head phones.

Racial Equality - Standing Committee on Fairness and Access.

In light of a tragic number of incidents in the past several years in which the nation witnessed a lack of equal treatment for persons of color, as well as immigrants and those of other races, the United States is awakening to the need to take active steps, together, to ensure that all lives matter because right now far too many Americans do not feel that their lives matter. The DC Courts are committed to making the necessary systemic changes to ensure equality under the law. In 1996, the Courts established the Standing Committee on the Fairness and Access with the mission of ensuring that the DC Courts are free of bias and other barriers to fairness and access to the judicial system. The Standing Committee has reached out to several segments of the community over the years, including Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, self-represented litigants, seniors, African immigrants, non-English speakers and others seeking to find ways to better address barriers to justice they may face. In 2020, the Joint Committee on Judicial Administration charged the Standing Committee to redouble its efforts to ensure that there are no policies, practices or procedures that have a disparate impact on racial/ethnic groups. The Courts are committed to continuing this work to ensure equal access to justice is a reality for all.

Targeted services. The Courts offer targeted services to individuals who may face barriers in accessing the judicial system, such as adults under guardianship, persons with mental health issues, juveniles, crime victims and victims of domestic violence.

Veteran's Navigator. The Veteran's Navigator Office continued to link criminal and civil court-involved veterans to agencies and programs that provide a wide variety of services, including transportation to the courthouse, civil legal assistance, emergency and transitional housing, mental health and substance use, employment and job training, healthcare, and benefits.



CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES

Many individuals cannot afford an attorney to represent them in court. While the Court provides an attorney free of charge to individuals in criminal and certain family proceedings, there is no right to counsel for civil matters. The gap or difference between the civil legal needs of low-income Americans and the resources available to meet those needs has resulted in a growing population of self-represented litigants in the District. The Court partners with local legal services organizations to facilitate court-based projects that make free or low-cost legal services more readily accessible to court users. These organizations provide legal information, and in some instances legal representation, to litigants without attorneys in civil cases.

Due to the COVID-19 public health emergency and the switch to mostly remote court operations, some of the assistance that was previously offered on-site was converted to a virtual setting for most of 2020. Many civil legal services providers came together to create innovative approaches to connect with court users including, new coordinated entry points for individuals to seek assistance, new outreach efforts to offer assistance to litigants, and immediate assistance for litigants during remote court hearings, as needed.

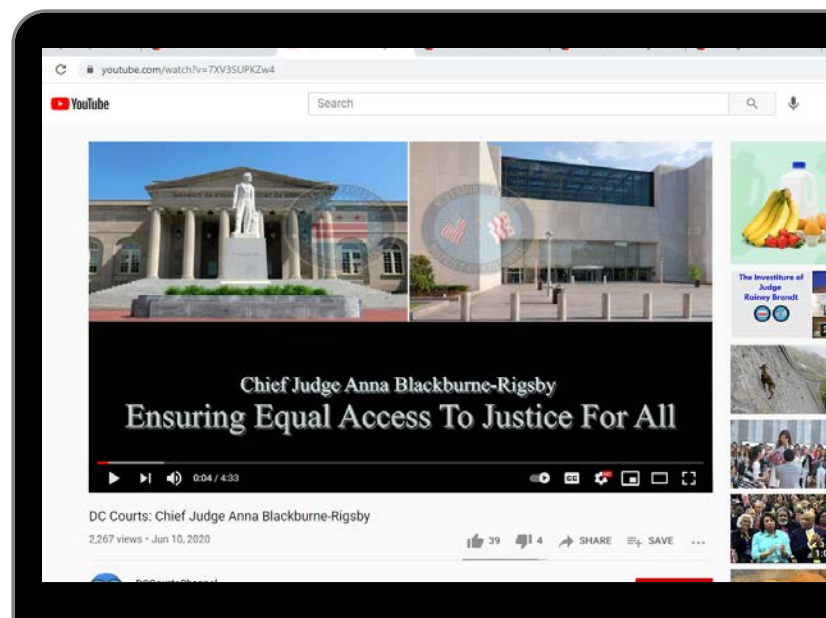
The following information provides details about the variety of civil legal assistance offered through court-based projects in 2020. The assistance provided involved a range of legal help – legal information, advice, brief service, limited representation, or full representation – provided at the time the litigant was at court or after that initial meeting at court. In some cases, a civil legal services organization provided support through partnerships with volunteer pro bono attorneys. This data only includes legal matters in which a litigant connected to the legal services organization through a court-based project, and is only a subset of the important work DC civil legal services organizations provide every day to support the legal needs of District residents.

Consumer, debt collection, and small claims. The D.C. Bar Pro Bono Center operates the Consumer Law Resource Center (CLRC), which provided legal information to 395 individuals (325 remotely).

Neighborhood Legal Services Program operates the Small Claims Resource Center and assisted 119 individuals. The Small Claims Resource Center began remote operations on July 1.

Before the pandemic and related court closures, the Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia and Tzedek DC provided outreach information to 114 individuals and provided legal advice or representation to approximately 114 litigants with debt collection matters through the court-based consumer debt collection project.

Civil legal services providers also came together in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic to provide other forms of assistance to litigants in debt collection matters. In September, the Debt Collection Defense Hotline was launched by the Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia and Tzedek DC in collaboration with Catholic Charities Legal Network, the D.C. Bar Pro Bono Center, Legal Counsel for the Elderly, and Neighborhood Legal Services Program. From September through December, 26 individuals were assisted through this hotline. This coalition of legal services providers also sent outreach letters to 1,086 defendants with pending debt collection cases to provide information on their legal rights during the pandemic and how to access free legal assistance.



Domestic violence. Bread for the City and the Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia advise and represent petitioners in civil protection order (CPO) proceedings through the Domestic Violence Intake Center (DVIC) at both the Moultrie Courthouse and a satellite site in Southeast DC. The DC Volunteer Lawyers Project (DCVLP) provides free legal services to low-income domestic violence victims through its Domestic Violence Protection Order court-based clinic. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, DC SAFE set up an electronic filing assistance referral system to connect petitioners with these legal service providers to get help filing petitions for CPOs and other related pleadings with the Court. It is worth noting that these providers often provide assistance to individuals identified through these court-based offices and the electronic filing referral system in related legal matters, such as child support and child custody. Through these court-based offices and referral system, Bread for the City assisted petitioners with approximately 23 legal matters, the Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia assisted petitioners with approximately 679 legal matters, and DCVLP assisted petitioners with approximately 481 legal matters. In a separate court-based project, Rising for Justice assisted 31 respondents.

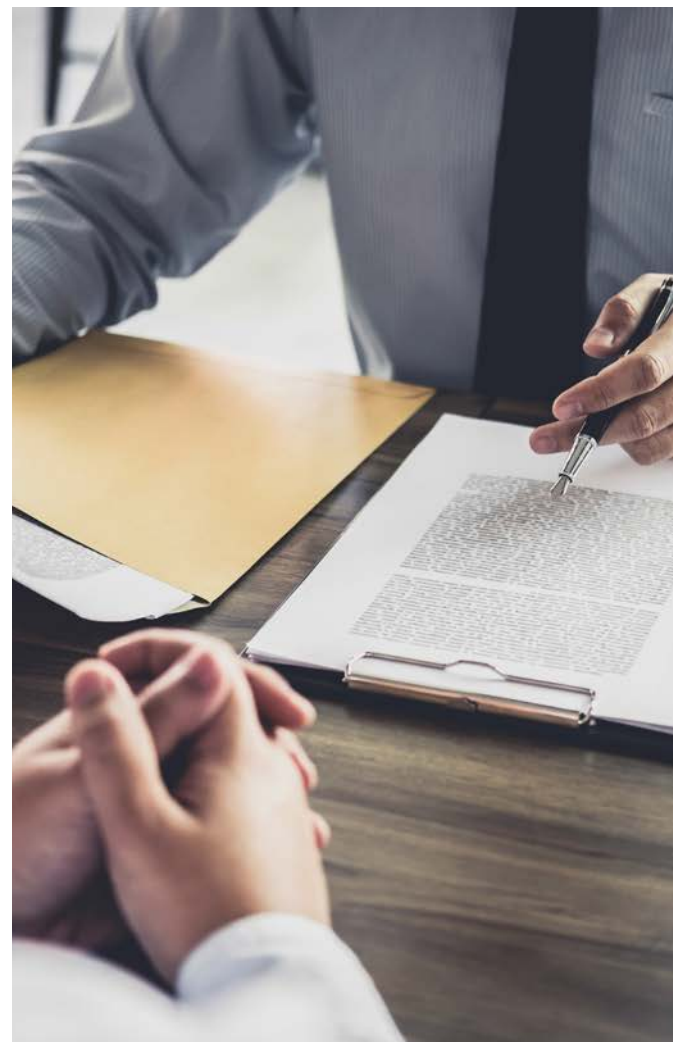
Family court. In late March, DC Affordable Law Firm, D.C. Bar Pro Bono Center, and the Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia came together to form and jointly staff the Family Law Assistance Network (FLAN) to provide rapid response, limited scope legal services to low-income, self-represented DC residents seeking legal assistance. Between March 27 and December 31, FLAN received a total of 580 referrals from litigants seeking assistance. Through collaboration with the Court's Domestic Relations Branch, FLAN was also able to engage in proactive outreach to self-represented litigants with upcoming hearings to notify them about the availability of FLAN's legal services. Through this proactive outreach and coordination with judicial officers, FLAN contacted 665 self-represented litigants.

The Court also relies on several legal services organizations to accept guardian ad litem court appointments in domestic relations cases. Children's Law Center provided support in 69 of these matters through its own staff or volunteer pro bono attorneys. DC Volunteer Lawyers Project provided support in 112 of these matters through its own staff or volunteer pro bono attorneys.

Through its weekly court walk-in legal clinic and legal helpline, DC Kincaid Alliance provided brief legal

advice and information to 72 relative caregivers raising at-risk DC children in family law and related matters.

Parentage and child support. Bread for the City and the Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia help staff a court-based office, the Child Support Resource Center (CSRC), in the Parentage and Child Support Branch to help custodial and noncustodial parents in child support and paternity matters. Through the CSRC, Bread for the City and the Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia assisted 153 litigants until mid-March. In July, Bread for the City and the Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia came together to form and jointly staff the Child Support Resource Center Hotline. A total of 59 individuals were assisted through this hotline. Through both the in-person court-based office and the CSRC Hotline, Bread for the City and the Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia provided a range of services, including advice, brief services, and representation. Additionally, an estimated 200 self-represented litigants were provided non-legal assistance, such as help accessing the remote courtroom via WebEx, through the CSRC Hotline.



Landlord and tenant. The D.C. Bar Pro Bono Center operates the Landlord Tenant Resource Center (LTRC), which provides legal information to self-represented tenants and small landlords, regardless of their income. From January 1 through March 13, the Pro Bono Center's LTRC served 1,140 individuals in-person at its court-based resource center, including 804 tenants and 114 small landlords. From March 16 to May 31 the Pro Bono Center's LTRC served 201 tenants and 106 small landlords remotely. The D.C. Bar Pro Bono Center also provided limited scope representation through its Housing Attorneys of the Day in the Landlord and Tenant Branch.

Attorneys from Bread for the City, the Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia and Rising for Justice are situated at the courthouse to meet with and offer free legal assistance to low-income tenants on the same day as their hearings. Attorneys from these organizations assisted tenants with approximately 637 rental housing matters by providing free legal advice or counsel, brief services, limited representation, or full representation through their court-based offices prior to the pandemic-related reduced court operations in March.

On June 1, six legal services providers – Bread for the City, D.C. Bar Pro Bono Center, the Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia, Legal Counsel for the Elderly, Neighborhood Legal Services Program, and Rising for Justice – jointly launched the remote Landlord Tenant Legal Assistance Network (LTLAN). Between June 1 and December 31, LTLAN helped 1,488 individuals, including 482 small landlords (through the Pro Bono Center's LTRC only) and 966 tenants.

Civil legal services providers also came together in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic to provide other forms of assistance to litigants in landlord and tenant matters. For example, civil legal services attorneys sat in on active court hearings to provide assistance to unrepresented litigants participating in those hearings, as needed. Providers also sent outreach letters to 1,561 tenants with open cases to provide information about their legal rights during the pandemic and how to access free legal assistance.

Tax and foreclosure. The Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia and Legal Counsel for the Elderly (LCE) provide assistance to individuals in foreclosure cases who are at risk of losing their homes. Through these projects civil legal services attorneys are physically present in and around the courtroom to conduct outreach and provide assistance to

unrepresented litigants participating in those hearings, as needed. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, attorneys from these organizations conducted pre- and post- hearing outreach and joined remote court hearings to provide assistance, as needed, to unrepresented litigants participating in those hearings. These providers connected with 182 individuals to provide legal information, advice, or representation in mortgage foreclosure matters through their court-based Foreclosure Prevention Project. Legal Counsel for the Elderly (LCE) assisted approximately 10 additional individuals with tax foreclosure matters through its tax foreclosure court-based project. Additionally, these providers together with Housing Counseling Services sent letters to 690 litigants with open foreclosure cases to provide important information to homeowners about their rights and available foreclosure prevention resources.

Pro bono representation. The DC Courts released the 2019 Capital Pro Bono Honor Roll last year, in partnership with the DC Access to Justice Commission and the D.C. Bar Pro Bono Center. The Honor Roll recognizes attorneys who each contributed at least 50 hours of legal services for the good of the public. The 2019 Honor Roll included 4,977 attorneys, 2,943 of whom were recognized with high honors for providing 100 or more hours of service. The list of honored attorneys reflected 176 law firms and solo practices and numerous corporations, government agencies, law schools, associations, and nonprofit organizations.





GOAL II

FAIR AND TIMELY CASE RESOLUTION

The Courts are committed to resolving legal matters in a fair and timely manner while providing due process and equal protection of the law, giving individual attention to each case, and applying the law consistently in all cases.

A TRANSITION TO REMOTE OPERATIONS

The Courts worked to resolve cases while confronted with the unprecedented challenges of a pandemic. In response, the Courts quickly made significant changes to case management practices and mediation in order to preserve fair and timely case resolution. These innovations were far-reaching across the Courts, and include:

- The Courts significantly increased the use of virtual appellate oral arguments and virtual trial court hearings across the operating divisions. Judges and staff quickly implemented new protocols for resolving a full range of case events in a virtual format.
- The onset of the coronavirus pandemic resulted in overall declines in case filings and dispositions. Appellate filings decreased by 39% to 510, but dispositions decreased by only 7%, to 1,219, resulting in a 31% decrease in pending cases (to 930) and a clearance rate of 151%. In the trial court, with the exception of the Tax Division, operating divisions reported more than a 50% decrease in such case activity. Specifically, new case filings decreased by 53% to 38,977 cases, while case dispositions decreased by 57% or 36,996 in 2020. Conversely, the number of pending cases increased by 9.6% or 3,000 cases. Further, the overall clearance rate dropped to 92%.
- Court-sponsored mediation is a vital tool for the timely and amicable resolution of cases. The Multi-Door Dispute Resolution Division in Superior Court transitioned to remote mediations and held 98 sessions in the Child Protection Mediation Program, and 625 sessions for civil, tax, probate, landlord & tenant and small claims cases. The mediation program at the Court of Appeals also successfully transitioned to remote operations. Of 39 cases ordered to mediation in 2020, 31 cases were remotely mediated – including cases involving pro se litigants served by a pro bono mediation counsel panel.
- In the wake of the pandemic, the Family Court began electronic processing of juvenile bench warrants and arrest warrants, including submissions to judicial officers and entries into the warrant database.
- While continuing the transition to online payments and applications, the Marriage Bureau conducted virtual ceremonies. In all, the Bureau administered over 1,054 civil marriages in 2020 and processed 8,048 marriage applications – a 29% increase from 2019.
- Court Reporting, with the permission of the Court of Appeals, moved to electronic transmission of official transcripts and, in collaboration with the IT Division, instituted a protocol for providing reporting of remote courtroom operations.

A LOOK AHEAD

The Family ADR Branch of the Multi-Door Division will launch the online Parenting Education Seminars (PAC) for parents in contested custody disputes in 2021.



OTHER INNOVATIONS IN CASE MANAGEMENT AND MEDIATION

The Courts also continued to implement a variety of innovations in 2020 that will have long-term, positive impacts on court operations.

- **Expanded E-Filing of Civil Cases** - The Civil Division partnered with an electronic filing vendor to rapidly expand the case types available for electronic filing, which now include name changes, vital record amendments, housing condition case initiations, and sealed cases.
- **Real-Time Court Reporting** - The Court Reporting Division expanded use of real time court reporting services to 36 judges in felony, family, probate, domestic relations, and civil cases. This instantaneous speech-to-text translation is invaluable in reviewing testimony and timely delivering same-day drafts of court proceedings.
- **Electronic Evidence** - An electronic evidence initiative was implemented in the Criminal Division. Prosecutors and defense attorneys will submit trial exhibits electronically, and the Court will preserve these exhibits electronically before transmitting them electronically to the Court of Appeals, as needed.



- **Permanency Mediation Program** - The Family Court in collaboration with the Multi-Door Dispute Resolution Division, Court Improvement Program, Child and Family Services Agency and the Office of Attorney General developed and implemented a Permanency Mediation Program. These mediations address issues in cases where the government recommends a change in a permanency goal from reunification to adoption. All parties are invited to express their positions and parents are empowered to engage in permanency planning for their children while resolving conflicts.
- **Enhancing Permanency in Abuse & Neglect cases** - To help address any issues or delays in achieving permanency in child abuse and neglect cases, judicial stakeholders are evaluating the process. In 2020, the Family Court Magistrate Judges, Court Improvement Program, Counsel for Child Abuse and Neglect, Children's Law Center, the Child and Family Services Agency, the Office of the Attorney General, and other stakeholders held a series of virtual permanency forums to collaborate on ways to strengthen the current abuse and neglect practice.
- **Appellate Business Process Review** - To streamline processes, enhance efficiency, and strengthen service to the public, the Court of Appeals initiated an interdisciplinary working group that is examining its operations and practices.

PROBLEM SOLVING COURTS

Problem-solving courts are central to fair and efficient resolution of cases. These courts hold criminal defendants accountable while providing resources for overcoming causes of criminal behavior, improving quality of life in the community, and administering justice.

- **Community Courts** - Community Courts apply a problem-solving approach to criminal justice by collaborating with local organizations to help offenders obtain needed services and give back through community service. In 2020, defendants in the Superior Court's Community Service Program performed approximately 15,802 hours of community service, and about 887 defendants were successfully diverted in the Community Courts.
- **Drug Court** - Serving nonviolent, substance-abusing defendants, the Drug Court employs intensive substance abuse treatment, drug testing, community supervision, graduated sanctions, and accountability to reduce recidivism. Successful completion of the program results in dismissal of misdemeanor cases or favorable sentencing and reduction of felony charges.
- **Family Treatment Court** - Family Treatment Court (FTC) remains a viable treatment option for families in the District of Columbia dealing with substance use disorders. In 2020, this problem-solving court enhanced its program model to include Recovery Support Services, which provide an additional layer of support to participants. Despite program modifications due to the pandemic, FTC continued to enter new participants and close cases with reunification. A virtual commencement ceremony honoring 6 graduates was held in October.
- **HOPE Court** - Serving the special needs of court-involved youth who are victims of or at risk for commercial sexual exploitation, the Juvenile HOPE Court ("Here Opportunities Prepare you for Excellence") enables participants to set

individualized goals and receive access to specialized services. In 2020, 16 youth were newly referred to HOPE Court, and it served a total of 40 youth.

- **Mental Health Community Court** - Aided by community resources and treatment that help court participants with mental illness, the Mental Health Community Court served 61 individuals. This past year, the problem-solving court expanded to provide services and supervision in D.C./Traffic and domestic violence cases in collaboration with the Office of Attorney General for the District of Columbia.





GOAL III

PROFESSIONAL AND ENGAGED WORKFORCE

The DC Courts will ensure a professional, engaged workforce that consistently achieves excellence and is agile to meet the demands of a changing environment. The Courts will continue to invest in education, training, and other development opportunities to enhance the knowledge and skills of its workforce. To advance our long-standing commitment to being a great place to work, the Courts strive to create a flexible and high-performing work environment where all personnel are positively engaged.

DC COURTS' WORKFORCE

The DC Courts strive to be an employer of choice, by recruiting, retaining, and supporting a diverse, highly qualified, and talented workforce. Despite moving to remote operations in March in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Courts continued to champion a strong judiciary and workforce consistent with the Courts' strategic goals. The Courts' Human Resources Division maintained its strong traditional outreach and continuity of services while adopting a more transformational role as a vital strategic partner in ensuring that the Courts have the capacity to meet its mission and vision for effective and efficient operations.

The Courts continue to strive for a diverse workforce. The Human Resources Division compiled and performed utilization and availability analysis of the DC Courts' non-judicial employees including the status of minorities and women. This utilization study was completed for each occupational category and indicated measurable progress with Hispanics, with employee participation rates parallel to the District's population. The commitment to diversity is evident in the DC Courts' workforce.



66%	61%	55%	85%
Female	JS 12 and below	Tenure 11+ years	Minorities

FLEXIBLE WORK ENVIRONMENT

To create a flexible work environment, DC Courts will offer programs and initiatives to enhance the well-being of the workforce and develop/expand flexible work processes and programs.

In March, the Courts responded to the COVID-19 pandemic with strategic steps to mitigate the spread of the virus by adopting an aggressive telework posture and enhancing the flexible work environment. In a matter of days, the Flexplace program increased its Flexplace applications from 117 participants to over 600 telework applications. By the end of 2020, over 1,000 court employees were teleworking full-time.

To further support the move to remote operations, the Human Resources Division:

- Created a new Pandemic Dashboard to provide real-time, relevant information to assist the Courts in effectively managing activities during the pandemic.
- Expanded work flexibilities including maxi + flex schedules and expanded telework.
- Communicated COVID-19 updates on the DC Courts intranet site to provide timely and relevant information and guidance on key programs such as Alternate Work Schedules, maxi-flex schedules, extended telework, administrative leave, and other options.

In response to new legislation related to COVID and family leave policies, DC Courts implemented policies that expanded sick leave and family and medical leave (FMLA). Under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) effective April 1st, DC Courts began providing employees with paid sick leave and expanded family and medical leave for specified reasons related to COVID-19. DC Courts also began offering paid parental leave. To operationalize the new mandates, DC Courts:

- Completed 5-year FMLA data analysis for presentation to the Personnel Advisory Committee to help inform policy decisions and practices.
- Developed a tool, the Emergency Paid Sick Leave Tracker, to capture all data necessary to track Emergency Paid Sick Leave usage and relevant personnel data.
- Developed a Paid Parental Leave (PPL) Form and Agreement for court-wide utilization.

With the shift to remote operations, the DC Courts pursued new and creative ways to enhance the physical and mental health and well-being of employees and judicial officers. The Working on Wellness Committee (WOW) continued offering virtual yoga and meditation classes via Zoom. In addition, the Courts offered several virtual webinars related to mental health and well-being. The Courts will also continue expanding work life balance initiatives such as flexible work options.

To honor employees for their outstanding job performance and achievements, the DC Courts holds an annual Employee Awards Ceremony. All court employees are eligible for Special Achievement Awards, which are given in the categories of public service, management achievement, unsung hero, and technical specialist. The Courts continued the tradition of the Employee Awards Ceremony with a virtual ceremony in 2020.



VALUES-BASED WORKPLACE

The DC Courts will promote a values-based workplace focused on high ethical standards and professionalism.

The Living Our Values initiative is a key element of the DC Courts workplace, and places a strong emphasis on Accountability, Excellence, Fairness, Integrity, Respect, and Transparency. The goal of the DC Courts' values is to create a culture that excels in public service, while enhancing professionalism and strengthening organizational performance.

Creating a values-based culture affects how employees treat one another, the public, and how employees shape and intentionally create the environment in which they work every day.

DC Courts continue to see improvements in the degree to which employees believe the values are being implemented. Out of a possible five, representing "always," Court employees assigned the following average rating to each of the values: Accountability = 3.7, Excellence = 4.0, Fairness = 3.4, Integrity = 3.6, Respect = 3.6, and Transparency = 3.3.

DC Courts' employees have a strong commitment to living the values. Recent pulse check surveys indicate that at least nine out of 10 employees have awareness and knowledge of the values and are committed to living the values in the workplace.



DC Courts' Employees Live the Values

94%	93%	91%
Awareness of the Values	Knowledge of the Values	Commitment to the Values

TRAINING AND EDUCATION

The DC Courts will provide professional development opportunities for judges and court employees.

Professional Development. The Courts' Center for Education and Training (CET) continued to provide the highest quality judicial branch education to meet the needs of the judiciary and all court employees. When the pandemic hit, CET quickly pivoted to offering virtual training classes in many subject areas. For judicial officers, CET provided training programs and conferences that kept them current on case law, societal trends, technological advances, and other issues that must be understood in order to make good judicial decisions. Specific trainings included Best Practices in Virtual Judging, Virtual Probate Panel training, and Managing Wellness during Covid-19 and in Times of Civil Unrest. For court employees, training topics included science and technology; vision and strategy in leadership; leading with empathy; resiliency, learning and adapting to new ways of working post Covid-19; empowering others; emotional intelligence; cultural competence; coaching; team building; innovation; career development; ethics; leadership; management, performance, and supervision skills; procedural justice, fairness, implicit bias and sexual harassment classes.

In response to remote operations, the Courts created the first ever virtual New Employee Orientation to onboard new employees hired during the pandemic to include a virtual Performance Management Overview. A new cohort of Management Training Program graduates had their first virtual team presentations and graduation this year.



Total Training Hours Provided by CET

331.5	239	97	135.5
Workplace and People Skills	Business and IT Skills	Court Matters	Other



GOAL IV

RESILIENT AND RESPONSIVE TECHNOLOGY

The Courts will continue to enhance information technology capabilities to provide the highest level of service to the public and state-of-the-art technology tools to its workforce. The Courts will develop, manage, and maintain an information technology infrastructure and services that are effective, efficient, and resilient in supporting the Courts' mission. The Plan focuses on providing exceptional customer service by expanding access to court information and services, enhancing technology capabilities, and ensuring optimal security for court data and information assets.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SYSTEMS ENHANCEMENTS

Cloud-based Fax. To improve operational performance, increase quality control procedures, and reliability of electronic records, the IT Division employed an internet (cloud) fax solution for the Courts' user community. The cloud-based fax solution allows users to send and receive faxes electronically using Microsoft Outlook. The traditional, paper-based fax machines have been decommissioned, eliminating the cost for paper, toner, and maintenance and support.

D.C. Courts Mobile App. A project team led by the Executive Office and the IT Division, collaborating with various stakeholders across the Courts, developed a web-based mobile application to meet user needs. The mobile app leverages high value features and information already present on the DC Courts website and provides an optimized format to make it easier for users to access information and navigate the courts.

New Trial Court Case Management System (CMS). The Courts continued data conversion and business process review activities with Tyler Technologies, the vendor selected to implement the Odyssey case management system (CMS). To ensure a robust exchange of information, a group of Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) from various court operations met with the Tyler team and the Courts' CMS integration services partner, RSM International, to review current business processes and better understand capabilities within the Odyssey system to satisfy any future-state needs. Once the business process reviews were completed, the configuration phase of the implementation commenced with SMEs working in teams with the Tyler and RSM resources to set up the Odyssey CMS. The configuration phase will allow for the first iterations of converted data from the Courts' current CMS to be loaded into the Odyssey database for validation. The development of electronic interfaces and other implementation components will continue, with user testing anticipated in the 2nd quarter of 2021, followed by training and go-live milestones.

Web Interpreter (and Translator (WITS)) System - Phase II. The IT Division in collaboration with Special Operations completed Web Interpreting System (WIS) Phase II with features to assign and invoice translations, customized notifications such as reminders for pending invoices, and provide interpreters with a more accurate half-day shift timings assigned to them. This upgrade also enables interpreters to upload certifications, other credentials, and proof of completed training, and enables the Office of Court Interpreting Services the ability to monitor interpreters' compliance with training and continuing education requirements.

Web Voucher System (WVS) 7.0. A redesigned and enhanced version of the web-based voucher processing system was deployed for the Court of Appeals and Superior Court CJA, CCAN, and Guardianship programs. The newly redesigned system replaces a 15-year-old system and includes all the latest programming features and server technology that was not available and or longer supported in the old WVS. The system provides the Courts with a state-of-the-art voucher management tool.



ENHANCED ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Online Briefs. The Court of Appeals began posting online the briefs in select cases as a pilot project and first step in a larger initiative to provide online access to appellate case documents. The parties in cases selected for posting provide the court redacted copies of their briefs, which contain factual information and legal arguments related to the case.

Case Initiation. Family Court began electronic case initiation in all case types using a variety of methods, including: box.com, CaseFileXpress, or, for mental health emergencies, through email and initiation in Courtview by the Central Intake Center. Box.com is also used to securely exchange confidential documents with agency partners and the public.

Civil e-Checkin /Calendaring System. A fully automated electronic check-in and calendaring system was deployed for Superior Court's Civil Division. This web-based application improves the customer check-in process synchronously across multiple high-volume courtrooms handling small claims and landlord and tenant cases. The application allows clerks to know which parties have checked-in, what time they checked in, and when a case is ready to be called by the judge or if a case needs to be called at a later time using color-coding. The electronic system also checks-in attorneys on all cases that they represent and records the location in which they checked in. The application provides streamlined and efficient customer check-in process, reduction in waiting times for the end-users, accurate record-keeping, better reporting, and improved communication.

Criminal e-Checkin System. A new electronic check-in system was developed for the Criminal Division to allow self-check-in of parties, including attorneys, police officers, probation officers, warrant processing clerks and defendants. Using some verifiable information in each courtroom, the electronic system allows courtroom clerks to check-in various parties/ individuals and attorneys assigned to a designated case based on the court calendar, as well as view parties or individuals who have already checked in. Regularly refreshed based on the court calendar in Courtview, the electronic system reflects changes in

party location should the party proceed to another location/courtroom and indicates the cases ready to be called by the judge using a color-coded system. The new electronic check-in system allows the Criminal Division to more accurately track measures such as wait and case processing times.

DCCA Live Oral Arguments. The Court of Appeals' Public Office began hosting live oral arguments, streamed over YouTube, using the Zoom teleconferencing platform. This approach has enabled appeals cases to be argued while protecting the health and safety of participants, judges, and court staff. To assure smooth proceedings and facilitate access, the court developed a protocol and posted it online, and court staff contact each participant in advance of the proceeding to provide training.

DC Courts Law Library. The Court of Appeals automated its library card catalog to facilitate access by judges and staff to library materials. Holdings of the Superior Court's Law Library were fully automated, allowing staff to track the number of library users and research requests received. Also, staff will be able to manage and monitor inventory, track subscription renewals, and monitor the delivery of Judicial Bench Materials to chambers, ensuring that these items are delivered within the time standard. This system will provide the judicial chambers, public, and the legal community with online searching capabilities for books, checking the status and availability of books and checking out books. This system will help the staff streamline their business process, track visitors to the library, and generate statistical and trend analysis on the end-users' library usage.



Digital Recording. The Court Reporting Division collaborated with the IT Division to develop a method for delivering digital audio of court proceedings to continue the production of transcripts during the pandemic. In addition, in collaboration with Courtroom Technology, the Division developed a protocol for providing reporting of remote courtroom proceedings during the pandemic.

Electronic Transmission of Certified Tax Orders. In collaboration with the IT Division, the Special Operations Division designed and implemented an electronic transmission system for final orders, eliminating manual processes and in-person delivery to the D.C. Office of Tax and Revenue.

eSummons Juror Notification. A new notification system to enhance the delivery of juror summons mailings was launched by the Jurors' Office. Based on a feature in the Courts' Clearview jury management system, eSummons Notification delivers electronic push notifications to prospective jurors, reminding them of upcoming jury service dates, confirming deferral requests, and alerting jurors when they are called off. Pulling from the database of jurors' email addresses already contained in the system, eSummons will advise the prospective juror that a paper summons has been mailed to the home address, and provide reporting details and hyperlinks to complete the juror questionnaire and visit the juror homepage on the Courts' website. After the initial eSummons is issued, jurors are given the choice to opt-out of receiving future electronic summons. eSummons is expected to increase juror yield by reaching prospective jurors that may not have received the paper summons.

Expanded Electronic Filings. The Civil Division partnered with its electronic filing vendor, File&ServeXpress, to rapidly expand the case types available for electronic filing which now include name changes, vital record amendments and housing condition case initiation filings. In addition, eFilings was expanded in sealed cases to increase timely case access and resolution. Further, online instructional videos were created to assist self-represented litigants with navigating and using the electronic filing process.

Juvenile Referrals Case Status Board. A new web-based case status board was developed for Family Court to provide real-time information to the parties on the status of the cases as they are being added and updated by the courtroom clerks on a daily basis. The parties can access the updated information such as

paper or no papered decisions by the Office of the Attorney General, and cases ready to be called through an easy to understand color-coded feature. This information is presented on a large display screen mounted in the courtroom, and allows the parties to readily obtain information from the display board without having to request it from the courtroom clerks.

Microsoft Teams Implementation. The IT Division configured and enabled Microsoft Teams with audio conferencing for the Courts, allowing users to collaborate, schedule and hold virtual meetings. Microsoft Teams proved to be an effective tool for the Courts to use in support of remote operations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

PaymentPort/PromptPay Online payment portals. The Superior Court began offering the option of online payment processing through secure hosted public-facing portals for the following transactions: document copy requests, protective order payments, select court filing costs, marriage license applications, bonds, transcripts, etc.

Remote Video Conferencing. In response to the pandemic, the IT Division implemented a process to allow court hearings to operate fully remotely using web-based videoconferencing. A remote solution also enabled the Courts to continue marriages, divorces, supervised visitation, grand jury returns, and mediations.

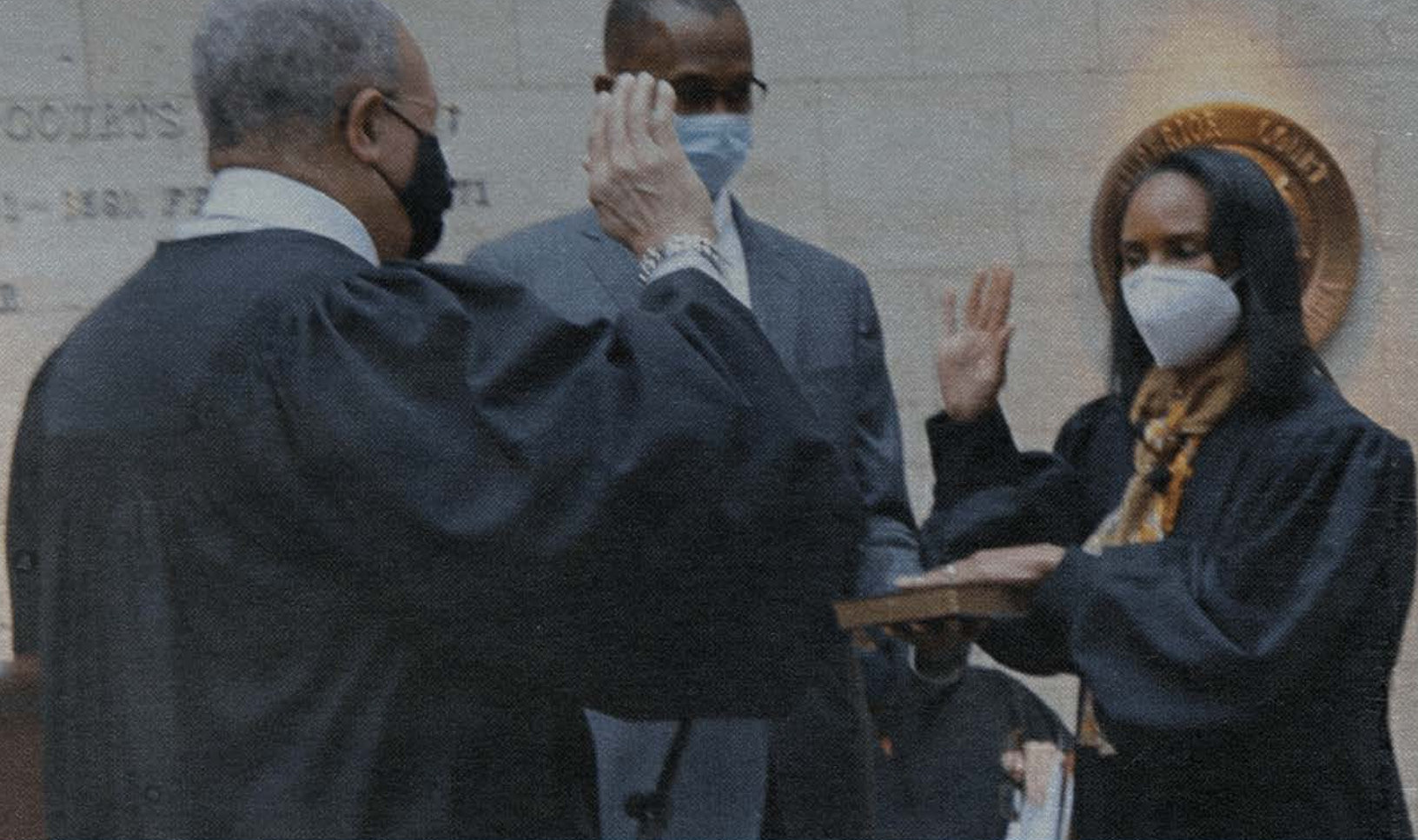
Web Transcript Tracking System enhancements. Enhancements were implemented to the Court Reporting Division transcription order services permitting the use of credit cards to process payments. The upgrade required significant changes in business processes, as well as collaboration with the Budget and Finance Division to ensure all involved parties have been adequately trained and certified for PCI-DSS compliance.

INFORMATION SECURITY

DC Court of Appeals Cybersecurity Assessment. The Court of Appeals performed an Information Security program review based on the NIST Framework for Improving Critical Infrastructure Cybersecurity. This assessment evaluated the Court of Appeals' cybersecurity program, including its compliance with regulatory requirements, industry best practices, and its capability to protect, detect and respond to the latest advanced threats.

FISMA Compliance Project. To protect the vital court information and computer systems and to maintain the availability, confidentiality, and integrity of information against threats, the DC Courts continued the Federal Information Security Management Act (FISMA) Compliance Project. The goal is to become a Federal Information Security Information Security Modernization Act (FISMA) compliant organization and to obtain an Authorization to Operate. The Courts are implementing safeguards to prevent and mitigate security risks from threats and strengthen internal controls.





GOAL V

EFFECTIVE COURT MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

Effective management and operation of the justice system for the District of Columbia requires a team of knowledgeable professionals with a common mission and shared resources, collaborating to achieve results that best serve the public. The Courts are committed to fiscal accountability with respect to all Courts' resources. Confidence in the judicial system necessitates that each case management function – trial and appellate – understands the individual responsibilities and unique role of the other while leveraging opportunities for shared approaches to administrative functions.

EFFECTIVE COURT MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

Courthouse Construction. The Courts revised and updated the Facilities Master Plan and continued to carry out major construction and facilities renovation projects.

Construction continued on the C Street addition to the Moultrie Courthouse as well as other facilities upgrades such as roof replacement at the Historic Courthouse. The Moultrie Courthouse construction will yield a six story addition to the south face of the Courthouse, that will enable the full consolidation of the Family Court in one location, as well as modernized courtrooms, judicial chambers and office space.

Court of Appeals Operational Assessment. The Court of Appeals received a grant from the State Justice Institute to partner with the National Center for State Courts to conduct an operational assessment of the Court that will address access to justice, caseload management, performance reporting, management and staffing structure.

Educational Outreach Program. The Court of Appeals held oral arguments at the District's public law school, the University of the District of Columbia David A. Clarke School of Law. The court heard three cases in the law school's moot courtroom, giving students and the public the opportunity to observe appellate proceedings in the community.

The Court of Appeals' Mediation Program held an online informational session for Catholic University law students regarding the program's law school initiative. This initiative pairs interested law students with members of the pro bono mediation counsel panel. Law students assist attorneys with preparing for mediation and then have the opportunity to observe the mediation, remotely during the pandemic.

The Court of Appeals' bar admissions staff addressed students at several local law schools, at their invitation, providing an overview of the process for licensure to practice law in the District of Columbia and answering questions from students and faculty.

Emergency Preparedness. The Courts developed a Pandemic Plan as a component of the Continuity of Operations Plan and implemented the plan during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The goal was to balance public health and safety needs with the community's need to have access to justice and parties' rights to due process. The following three overarching goals guided the development of the Courts' pandemic response included: 1) ensure the health and safety of the public, court staff, attorneys and agency partners, 2) provide access to justice, and 3) operate the Courts efficiently in the continued delivery of service to the public. Court leadership emphasized "health and safety" first throughout the pandemic planning and implementation process.

Historic Courthouse 200th Anniversary. In August, the Courts marked the 200th anniversary of the Historic Courthouse. The building's cornerstone was laid on August 22, 1819, and it began service as the seat of the municipal government and court system in the following years. The Courts released a video highlighting its 200 years of history.

Managing the Courts' Data as a Strategic Asset. The Courts conduct formal program evaluations on an ongoing basis to ensure effective services for the public and inform evidence-based decision-making. The Strategic Management Division completed evaluations of the Mental Health Court and the Supervised Visitation Program this year.

In compliance with the Evidence-Based Policy Making Act of 2018, the Strategic Management Division developed a learning agenda for the Courts which will assess four areas: data quality, performance measures, assistance for self-represented litigants, and the impact of a values-based workplace.

The Courts' Data Governance Council identified three priority projects to be undertaken over the coming months: the development of a data inventory assessing accuracy, completeness, timeliness, accessibility, ease of use, maintainability and data integrity for key court metrics; the conduct of a data governance maturity model assessment; and the exploration of an open data policy for the Courts.

Regulation of the Bar. The Court of Appeals regulates the activities of attorneys licensed to practice law in the District of Columbia. The Court is assisted in this function by committees of attorneys and the public who generously volunteer their time. The Clients' Security Trust Fund reimburses clients for losses caused by dishonest conduct of their lawyers. The Committees on Admissions and the Unauthorized Practice of Law work to ensure that the public can trust that attorneys providing legal services in the District of Columbia are qualified, and held to the highest standards of professional conduct. The Board on Professional Responsibility administers the attorney discipline system, protecting the public and the judicial system from attorney misconduct and preserving the integrity of the legal profession. In 2020, 3,733 newly licensed attorneys were admitted to the practice of law in the District, and 811 applicants sat for the February DC Bar Examination. In October, 1,682 applicants sat for the remote Bar Examination. The first virtual swearing-in ceremonies were held for more than 800 new attorneys. In addition, the Court of Appeals adopted D.C. App. R. 46-A, Admission to the Bar Based on COVID-19 Emergency Exam Waiver, which provides licensure to qualified applicants without sitting for a bar exam.

34th Annual Adoption Day in November with a virtual ceremony due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The ceremony is designed to celebrate the joys of adoption and encourage area residents to consider adopting or fostering a child in the District's welfare system. Forty-five children were adopted by 33 families. NBC4 Anchor Barbara Harrison, who has presided over every adoption ceremony since D.C.'s first in 1987, interviewed the families and shared their stories with the audience.



A LOOK AHEAD

The Committee on Admissions will launch a new application management system that will help to expedite the certification of applications, facilitate the reporting of bar exam results and create efficient means for generating statistical reports.

Strategic Partnerships. In collaboration with the District Government and community agencies, planning is underway for the establishment of a DC Courts' Justice Resource Center (JRC), which will provide the public with essential information and selected services such as job readiness training, school and child care resources, mental health counseling, emergency housing, and access to public benefits. The JRC is slated to open in interim space at the Moultrie Courthouse once the Courts are in a post-pandemic operational status. City and community partner agencies will have representatives available at the Center to provide information and immediate services to individuals and families visiting the courthouse.

Superior Court Adoption Day. The Superior Court and the D.C. Child and Family Services Agency hosted the

Superior Court Reform of High Volume Calendars.

The Superior Court received a grant from the State Justice Institute to partner with the National Center for State Courts on a project to reform the high volume Landlord and Tenant Calendar, the Mortgage Foreclosure Calendar, and the Debt Collection Calendar to enhance the customer experience, improve access to justice, and increase the efficient operations of these Calendars.

Supporting the Rule of the Law. The Courts are proud to serve as a model of best practices and to support efforts to strengthen the rule of law and development of justice systems around the world by hosting international judicial delegations sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the World Bank, and international and cultural exchange organizations as well as domestic organizations. This year, the Courts hosted visitors and international delegations of judges and lawyers from Moldova and Nepal (pre-pandemic) and from Pakistan in September (virtually). The Courts tailor the educational program to the needs of each delegation, arranging discussions with judges and court administrators, tours, and observations of proceedings or mediations related to their interests.



