

September 2015

# ARKANSAS COURT NEWS

a publication of the Arkansas Administrative Office of the Courts *"Supporting Courts, Ensuring Justice"*

## CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS

**Act 496: The Creation of the Judicial Department**

**Employee Spotlight • The AOC Through the Years • and more**

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Supreme Court courtroom circa 1976.

## Going Digital



The Administrative Office of the Courts has eliminated the paper version of *Friends of the Court* and gone to an online-only format. This allows room for regular content, more diverse court-related news, and more features on *you*, the people who do the work of the Judicial Branch.

The newsletter has been completely reformatted to utilize the new medium. It has undergone a name change as well, and will now be called *Arkansas Court News*, a title more fitting for its content.

The electronic version of the newsletter will be published on the Judiciary website:

[www.courts.arkansas.gov/forms-and-publications/newsletters/friends-court](http://www.courts.arkansas.gov/forms-and-publications/newsletters/friends-court)

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Contributions, comments, and inquiries are always welcome.

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*from the desk of*  
**JD Gingerich**

On March 20, 1965, Governor Orval Faubus signed Act 496 of 1965, creating the Arkansas Judicial Department. Arkansas's creation of a state office for court administration came during a time of significant court reform efforts across the United States. During the early 1960s similar offices were created by state legislatures in Arizona, California, Connecticut, Michigan, Minnesota and North Carolina.

The initial appropriation for the first year's operation of the agency totaled \$34,294. This sum included the cost of the agency's two employees, an Executive Secretary and a Stenographer. Arkansas's statute was consistent with the reform efforts in other states in that it charged the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court with the responsibility of managing the administrative affairs of the state court system and created a staff to assist the Chief Justice in those efforts. The reform movement suggested that, in order to foster judicial independence, state judicial systems should assume more responsibility for the effective management of the judicial branch and take steps to increase the quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of state court judges, employees, and operations. The primary task initially given to the Arkansas Judicial Department was the collection of court statistics and the development of court management processes to assist state court judges with the timely and effective management of their dockets.

Over the years the profession of judicial administration has grown and court administrative offices in Arkansas and other states have been assigned more extensive responsibility. In Arkansas, as a result of subsequent legislation and rules of the Supreme Court, the Arkansas Administrative Office of the Courts (so re-named in 1989) has grown to include fiscal and personnel management, judicial branch education, sign and foreign language interpretation, legal research, public information and education, legislative outreach, juvenile programs, court security, alternative dispute resolution, jury management and public policy research.

Throughout this change, the AOC has remained true to its original purpose, enacted fifty years ago, of assisting the Chief Justice with the "efficient operations" of the courts, the "efficient dispatch of litigation" and the "proper conduct of business." The formal mission statement of the AOC provides that "our mission is to support the Arkansas judiciary and employees of the judicial branch and to assist attorneys and members of the public who rely upon an independent court system that is efficient, accessible and fair to all."

We have assembled a talented and dedicated group of court professionals who are leaders in their areas of expertise and who understand the direct connections between their daily activities and the provision of justice to our citizens. I am extremely proud of the accomplishments of the last fifty years and look forward to the future as we "Support Courts and Ensure Justice."



# Act 496: The Creation of the Judicial Department

The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) is the agency within the judicial branch that works to serve Arkansas's state courts on behalf of the Arkansas Supreme Court. The agency's mission is to support the Arkansas Judiciary and employees of the judicial branch and to assist attorneys and members of the public who rely upon an independent state court system that is efficient, accessible, and fair to all. At its inception, the agency looked very different than it does today. Although the heart of the agency remains the same, the AOC has evolved over the years to offer services to courts including alternative dispute resolution, foreign and sign language interpretation, attorneys ad litem, and many other beneficial programs in addition to its original duties.

The Administrative Office of the Courts was created with the passing of Act 496 of 1965 and was originally created to "bring up to date and maintain a current flow of statistics on the work of the courts in order that the 1967 and subsequent General Assemblies, and those interested in the work of the courts, might have reliable data upon which to base future action." At the time, the agency was called the Judicial Department and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court was appointed to be the Administrative Director. With the help of an Executive Secretary, the

Chief Justice was responsible for the efficient operation of the state courts and for seeing that their business was conducted properly and in a timely manner. The role of Executive Secretary, which would later be named the Director of the AOC, was tasked with:

- Examining the administrative methods of the courts
- Collecting and analyzing the statistical data and reports of the business of the courts
- Acting as the Secretary of the Judicial Council
- Advising and assisting trial court clerks in the keeping of records of proceedings

The Judicial Department was originally housed in the basement of the Justice Building and was comprised of two staff members, including the first Executive Secretary, C.R. Huie. Over the next few years, the agency would see many changes including five Executive Secretaries (C.R. Huie, 1965 – 1979; Jim Petty, 1980; Robert Lowery, 1981 – 1984; Chris Thomas, 1985 – 1988; and J.D. Gingerich, 1988 – present), increases in staff, and improvements in the promptness and accuracy of statistical data collected from state courts. In 1989, the agency underwent a name change and became known as the Administrative Office of the Courts. During that time, the title

"Executive Secretary of the Judicial Department" was also changed to "Director of the Administrative Office of the Courts."

Under the direction of J.D. Gingerich (1988 – present), the AOC has experienced tremendous growth. Act 673 of 1995 created the Arkansas Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Commission. The ADR Commission promotes the use of mediation and other forms of alternative dispute resolution to resolve disputes, cases, and controversies. Act 576 of 2007 created the Security and Emergency Preparedness division. This division is responsible for providing assistance and support to courts in adopting court security plans, providing training for court security officers, and administering grants for court security purposes. Act 328 of 2009 created the Arkansas Court Automation Programs (ACAP). ACAP provides technical support to the state courts, makes court information available to the public, and develops online, court-related services including CourtConnect, Contexte, eFiling, eTraffic, and eCitation. ACAP also provides support to the state courts through jury management.

Today, the Administrative Office of the Courts has evolved into a large, multi-faceted organization, solely dedicated to serving the judiciary, meeting the needs of its employees,



more than  
**56,000**  
served through  
continuing education  
programs

# AOC by the numbers

as of 2015



\$1,955,599 awarded  
through federal  
grants to improve  
court security  
statewide



9,500 documents  
filed using the  
eFiling system



26 certified foreign and  
sign language interpreters



More than 45,000  
juveniles helped  
through Ad Litem  
and CASA  
programs



55 million  
dockets in the  
Contexte case  
management  
system



**41,694**  
hits to  
[www.courts.arkansas.gov](http://www.courts.arkansas.gov)  
per month



More than 3,600  
Contexte and Court  
Connect users

More than 300  
AOC employees

More than 4,000  
parties affected by  
more than 10,000  
hours of alternative  
dispute mediation

**1** only certified  
Marshallese  
interpreter in the  
nation



and improving the administration of justice. The agency has grown from the first two employees in the basement of the Justice Building to more than 300 with the addition of circuit court trial court assistants and official court reporters in 2015. AOC employees now operate from

more than three different locations. From its initial days of strictly collecting statistical data, the AOC now offers a myriad of services to those it serves including continuing legal education opportunities for court staff, court mediation, support for domestic violence

victims, foreign and sign language interpretation, technical support, civics education and outreach, attorneys ad litem, court appointed special advocates (CASA), legal research, court security, and of course, statistical data collection.

# Through the Eyes of Judges

## The Administrative Office of the Courts Through the Years



**The Justice Building, home to the Arkansas Administrative Office of the Courts.**

From its inception, the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) has existed to serve the courts of Arkansas. It was created to collect and report statistic data but through the years has evolved into a full-service support system for judges and their court staffs. As we celebrate 50 years of this service, we turn to these members of the judiciary to give them the opportunity to share what the AOC has meant to them.

### **From the Beginning**

Many of our judges remember the days when the AOC was a much smaller agency than it is today. Although it had grown from a staff of two in the basement of the Justice Building, it still employed considerably few employees and therefore was “an excellent resource for judges” but “not as diversified and responsive as today.”

### **Evolution of Service**

Over the years, the AOC has changed “in response to all of the new challenges in the Judiciary.” The support offered to Arkansas court staff has evolved. From the beginning, the AOC existed as a “source of information and support and remains so today.” As the agency grew, so did its services. It is able to “respond more quickly both to inquiries and to notices of interest sent to judges across the state” while remaining “one of the most reliable sources of information on what’s going on in the legislative and executive branches that may impact the Judiciary.”



Today, the AOC provides many services that are relatively new to the Judiciary but invaluable to judges. These services include “the interpreter division [which] has grown in response to the increased need in the trial courts for interpreters of many different languages, as well as for the hearing impaired” and “the AOC’s responsiveness to providing judges with thoughtful ideas, which advance the cause of justice.” Many courts utilize the “AAL, Parent Counsel, CASA and CIP” programs and since many state judges do not have law clerks, they often call on AOC staff to aid them their legal research.

There have been many significant changes to the Judiciary during this time as well, the most significant being the creation of “Amendment 80” and its effect of “benefit[ing] the citizens while making the Judiciary more efficient and stronger” and the “increase of women and minorities serving in all levels of the Judiciary.”

### **Significant Contributions**

The AOC is often times a silent supporter, operating in the background and through that support helps the Judiciary “maintain a fairly cohesive, organized, and identifiable branch of government” while keeping abreast of “all things impacting the Judiciary and promptly disseminat[ing] information to all judges.” Many judges agree that it is the people of the AOC that are its greatest assets and “help judges throughout the state of Arkansas on a day-to-day basis in a myriad of ways – always in the most professional and pleasant manner... these people are significant contributors to the Judiciary each and every day.”

### **Looking Ahead**

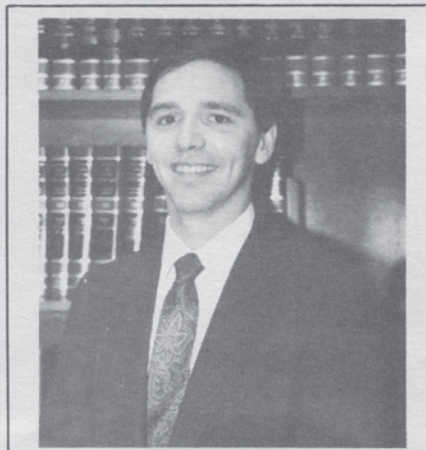
It’s difficult to predict what the AOC will look like in the future. With the increased push to court automation and technological advances, it’s likely to be very different. But one thing is certain, “the agency will continue to provide valuable supportive services and thereby assist in maintaining a modern, responsive, and efficient Judiciary.” And while the faces of the agency may change, “as long as there are committed staff members and a Director who view their top responsibility to serve the courts, the AOC will remain a premiere state agency.” The future is very bright, indeed.

## *From the archives...*

### **Gingerich Named to Head Department**

James D. Gingerich has been named Executive Secretary of the Arkansas Judicial Department by Supreme Court Chief Justice Jack Holt, Jr. Gingerich succeeds Christopher Thomas of Little Rock, who has been named Director of Professional Programs for the Supreme Court.

Gingerich has been university counsel and associate professor of political science at the University of Central Arkansas. He is a graduate of the University of Arkansas School of Law in Fayetteville. He received an LL.M. degree from the



**JAMES D. GINGERICH**

University of Bristol, England.

He is a member of the Arkansas and Faulkner County Bar Associations and is on the editorial board of the Arkansas Political Science Association Journal.

As Executive Secretary, Gingerich’s responsibilities will include managing the budget and employees of the Arkansas Judicial Department and overseeing the acquisition of statistical information from the state’s courts.

Gingerich and his wife, Janet, a professor at UCA, reside in Conway.

# SPOTLIGHT ON:

John Stewart



**John Stewart, Finance and Administration Director.**

Meet John Stewart, Finance and Administration Director, and the Administrative Office of the Court's longest-serving employee. Here he shares reflections on his nearly 40 years of service.

**You're currently the longest-serving AOC employee. How long have you been with the agency?**

I've been here since 1978. That's 37, almost 38 years.

**What was it like when you came to work for the AOC? What was the agency like? Where was it located?**

This [the Justice Building] is the original building. It was a very, very small office in the basement. It was the whole Judicial Department. We did eventually get a grant and we had a systems division, which was just a few people, located in the Executive Building over on Markham. It was a federally-funded group for statistical reporting. C.R. Huie was the first director, but he wasn't called a director, he was called the executive secretary to the Chief Justice.

He was the executive secretary when I started. Chief Justice Howard Brill is my 10th Chief Justice to serve under. My first one was Carleton Harris. We had maybe 3 or 4 state-funded positions and probably 4 or 5 that were federally funded. We had 10 total employees at the time. It was a small group.

**During that time, what was the agency's sole purpose?**

They were established to collect statistics for the courts. There were Supreme Court Committees then but not as many, so they had that on their plate as well.

**How have you seen the AOC evolve during your career?**

We've gotten more into, what I would term, modern court management and centralization. We were very decentralized and fragmented in the past. If you look at the maps of the circuits, you see that there was overlap of chancery and circuit courts. Those kinds of things were modernized and improved. Also, modern case management and trying to improve the flow of cases through the system in a timely manner. When I first started,





John Stewart (left), Chief of the Judicial Department's Systems Branch, Chris Thomas (center), Executive Secretary of the Judicial Department, and Jack Jarrett (right), Deputy Director of the Judicial Department, discuss the criminal case management system.

that was a big push from the American Bar Association and Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA), which had the grant money to try to modernize the courts. That's why I was brought over from LEAA to be the court planner here to try to help with that modernization.

**In the beginning the AOC existed to collect statistical information from the courts. Have you seen those interactions between the AOC and courts change? If so, how?**

I think they've been strengthened. There's more interaction on a daily basis between the judges and our office. Any time you have that more frequent, two-way communication, I think it helps a lot.

**What kind of services did the AOC provide then, if any, and what kind of services does it provide now that it didn't provide then?**

Because the Judicial Department was so small, we couldn't provide a lot because most of our time was spent trying to gather things and we did a lot of grant writing to try to get money. We didn't have a lot of state funds so we would have to go find the money and bring it in to do some of these projects. It was kind of a bare bones organization. We could only do a few things other than our statistical gathering and production of reports. When you look at us today, we've got Contexte, eFiling, and jury management. We're getting legislation to try to improve services to the public and giving money back to the counties. Our budget was very, very small and now you're talking about a multi-million-dollar operation.

**What's the most beneficial service and support that the AOC provides to the Judiciary?**

I would think it would be a central repository of knowledge and a staff that is available to assist when a judge, clerk, or another state agency has a problem or needs some information. Also with our CIS Division, being able to provide resources in docket automation, when counties wouldn't be able to afford it otherwise. Having a true state-wide system will be the biggest feather in our cap.

**What's the biggest overall change that you've seen to the Judiciary during your career?**

I would say it's the way it's been restructured and modernized. Whether it's through consolidation of circuits to make it more organizationally efficient, allowing judges to have a trial court administrator which they didn't have before, or being able to move the cases through the system, especially the bulk of cases that are coming in now. We've grown so much that way.

**Has the AOC made any significant contributions to the Judiciary? What do you think is the most significant contribution?**



John Stewart poses with his recognition award for 35 years of service.

It would have to be the administration. Being able to assist the Supreme Court in their court administration as we've seen in other states. Being able to centralize some of the duties to more efficiently assist the public in getting their cases speedily heard and dispensing the appropriate justice.

**Where do you think the agency is headed? What will it look like in 10, 20, or even 50 years?**

Well, you know it took a long time to get to this point. I would think being able to go out and getting the court fees to fund some of these programs like the CIS division and being able to provide the servers, infrastructure, and people with which to bring this data under one umbrella and start to be able to mine it, that's where you are going to be able to see the biggest improvement in the next 5-10 years. It's the mining of all this data and being able to use it for improvement of the system and for the executive management decisions to be made with more knowledge than we've had in the past.

**the AOC would look like it does today?**

**When you first started, did you ever imagine**

No. With the number of employees we have now, it's kind of mind boggling that we're here at this point. I would never have thought we would have the need for a department of court interpretation but now if you look at all the languages we send our folks out to interpret, it's amazing how many people are here that need that assistance. When I was growing up, that thought would have been totally alien to me. By next year we'll have all circuit courts on one system. Who would have thought that would be possible? And district courts are coming. E-filing is really going to fire people up. Electronic records, who would have thought? We were always fighting paper. We had a warehouse to store all these records and now that's all going electronic. There was no way to even see that coming. I saw the first PC in the AOC. We brought it in and started using it and when I first brought up the idea of a network in the Justice Building for the judges, their staff, and AOC, it got a lot of pushback because they were used to stand alone typewriters.

**What has been the greatest pleasure for you to be fortunate enough to witness during your time with the AOC?**

I'm a people person. We started out very small and even then we were divided from one location to another but I would say it's the people that I have met along the way. They've come in here and I've seen them grow and either leave us to do great things or stay on to help us do what we've done. That's what I've enjoyed the most.





An early group of AOC employees outside the Supreme Court courtroom.

# AOC EMPLOYEES \_\_\_\_\_ *through the years*



John Stewart, Finance and Administration Director; Mara Simmons, Interpretive Services Manager; and Dr. Tracy Stewart.



Mary Anne Rose, Receptionist, and Wade Hankins, Computer Support Manager.





**AOC employees having fun on the job.**



**AOC staff cultivate relationships outside the office as well.**



**Former Governor Mike Beebe signs into law Act 238 in 2009, which funded technology in the courts.**



**AOC employees circa 1990s.**



**ACAP employees at the first ACAP conference in 2014.**





**The Administrative Office of the Courts staff poses outside the Justice Building in celebration of the organization's 50th anniversary.**

The Arkansas Administrative Office of the Courts employs more than 120 people and with the inclusion of trial court assistants and official court reporters in 2015, that number has grown to more than 300. AOC employees now operate from more than three different locations and many work remotely from all corners of the state.

The AOC is made up of four different divisions: Finance and Administration, Legal Services, Court Information Systems (CIS) and Court Services. Each division contains groups that provide services and support to the Arkansas Judiciary.

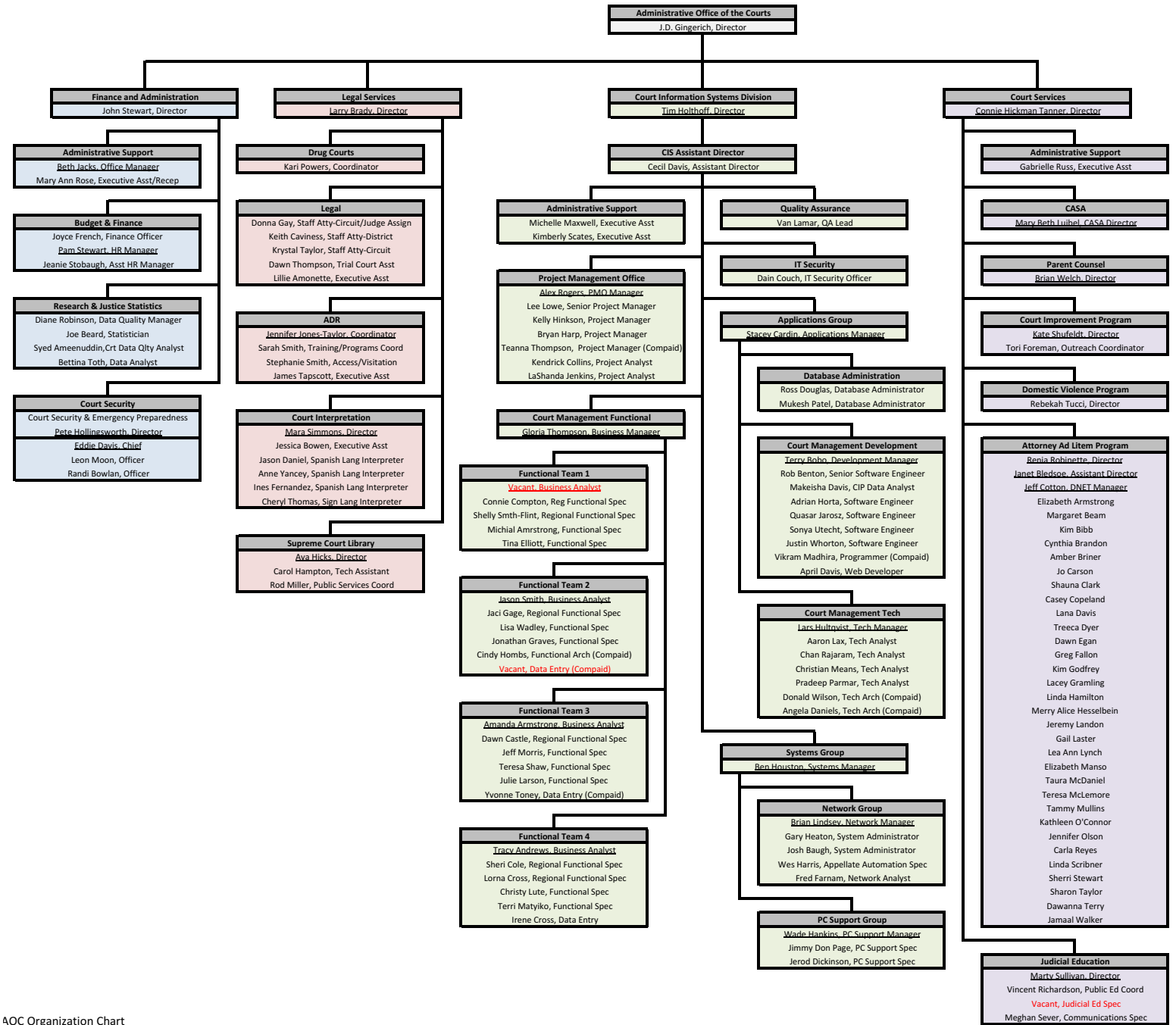
Finance and administration consists of human resources, the budget and finance office, research and statistics, and court security and emergency preparedness.

Legal services consists of staff attorneys, drug court coordinator, the alternative dispute resolution commission, and court interpretation.

The Court Information Systems (CIS) division is comprised of project management, IT security, quality assurance, database administration, court management tech and development, and the systems group, which includes PC support.

Court services consists of the CASA program, parent counsel, Court Improvement Program (CIP), domestic violence, attorney ad litem program, and judicial education.

For more on these divisions and their programs, please visit [www.courts.arkansas.gov](http://www.courts.arkansas.gov).



AOC Organization Chart

Arkansas Court Automation Programs

**ELECTRONIC FILING**

**CASE MANAGEMENT**

**JURY MANAGEMENT**

**ONLINE PAYMENTS**

**ONLINE PUBLIC ACCESS**

**ELECTRONIC CITATIONS**

**INTERGOVERNMENTAL DATA EXCHANGES**

make plans to attend this year's

# ACAP SYSTEMS CONFERENCE

This conference, hosted by the Administrative Office of the Courts, will be held November 9-10, 2015, at the Marriott Hotel in downtown Little Rock. This will be an opportunity for court employees to learn more about the Arkansas Court Automation Project and its applications, including Contexte, CourtConnect, eFlex, Juror, and MyJuryInfo.

For more information and to register for the conference, please visit [www.courts.arkansas.gov/acapsConference](http://www.courts.arkansas.gov/acapsConference).

Arkansas Supreme Court  
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# New Faces

## Supreme Court

Howard W. Brill - Chief Justice

## AOC

Inez Fernandez - Spanish Language Interpreter

## Circuit Judges

2nd Circuit - Tommy Fowler

## Trial Court Administrators

6th Circuit - Paula Gibson

## Court Reporters

11th E. Circuit - Jordan Boston

17th Circuit - Tonia Ray

# in the Judiciary



Are you a new court employee or know someone who should be featured in this section? We want to know!

Contact Meghan Sever at [meghan.sever@arcourts.gov](mailto:meghan.sever@arcourts.gov)

**October**

Oral Proficiency Exam for Certification (Little Rock) 3

Fall Judicial College/ Judicial Council (Texarkana) 14-16

CME After Cut-Off Date (Little Rock) 16

Court Reporters' Annual Conference (Texarkana) 16-17

ADR Commission Retreat (Morrilton) 22-23

**November**

ACAP Systems Conference (Little Rock) 9-10

Juvenile Division Judges Meeting (Heber Springs) 12-14

District Court Clerks Certification (1st & 3rd Districts) (Fort Smith) 20

**December**

Juvenile Court Overview for Mediators 3

Have a conference or program you would like to have added to the calendar? Email it to [meghan.sever@arcourts.gov](mailto:meghan.sever@arcourts.gov)