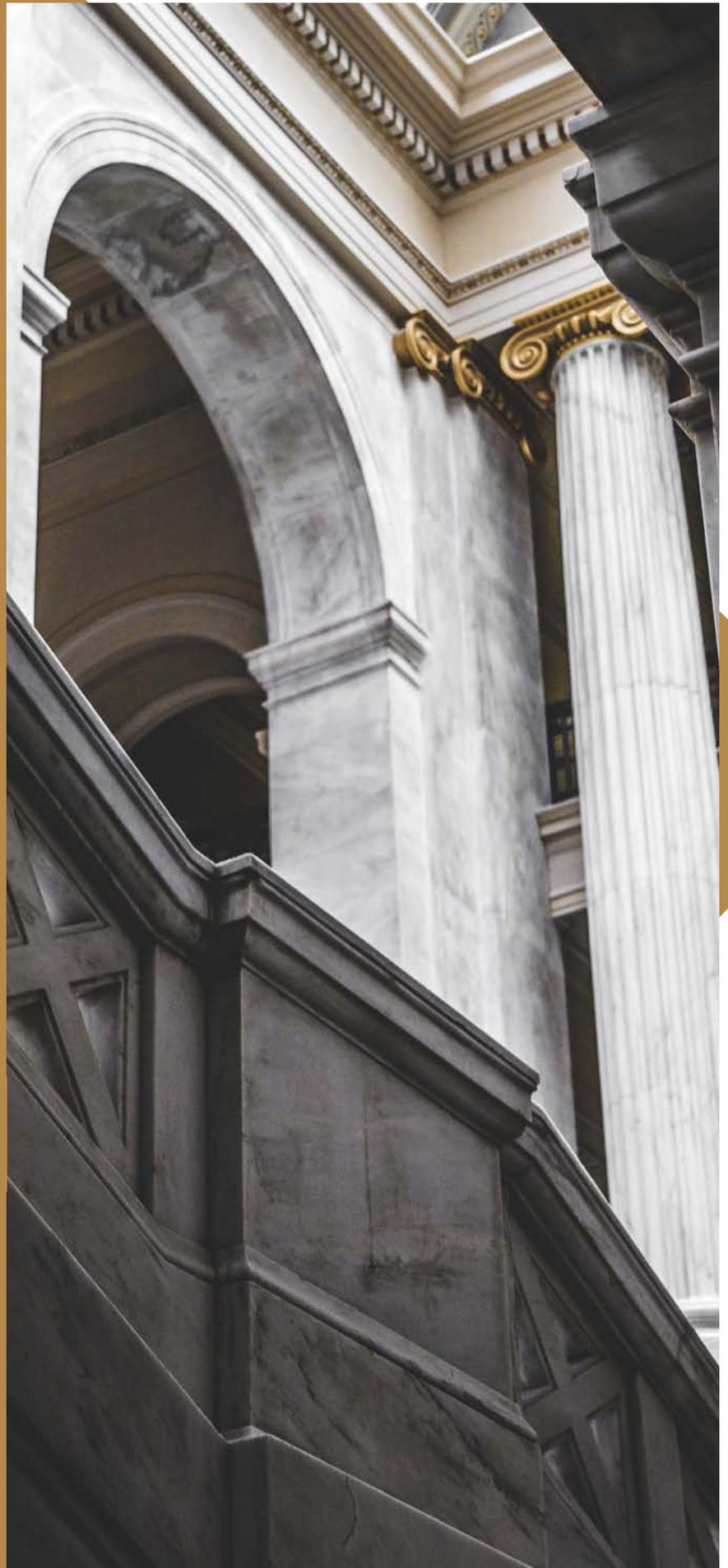


**STRATEGIC
PLAN
OF THE
ARKANSAS
JUDICIARY
2018-2025**

*Delivering Justice:
A Vision for 2025*



2018 STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

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Circuit Clerk, 22nd Cir.

Dena Ross
District Court Clerk, Polk County

Jennifer Lopez-Jones
District Court Clerk, Benton County



Delivering Justice: A Vision for 2025

My fellow Arkansans,

I am pleased to share with you Arkansas's first long-term strategic plan for the judiciary. This document represents the thoughtful and determined work of representatives from the bench, court staff, and the state's legal community.

The Strategic Planning Committee has worked tirelessly over the past year to deliver this vision for what Arkansas's courts may – and in many cases *must* – become. Equipped with this vision, it is our ardent hope that the courts will both improve the service that they provide to the public, attorneys, and other branches of government, while simultaneously protecting the judiciary's vital and independent role.

We thank you for taking the time to read this document and for helping to foster the spirit of cooperation necessary to better our judiciary.



Chief Justice John Dan Kemp



*Justice Building
Little Rock, Arkansas*

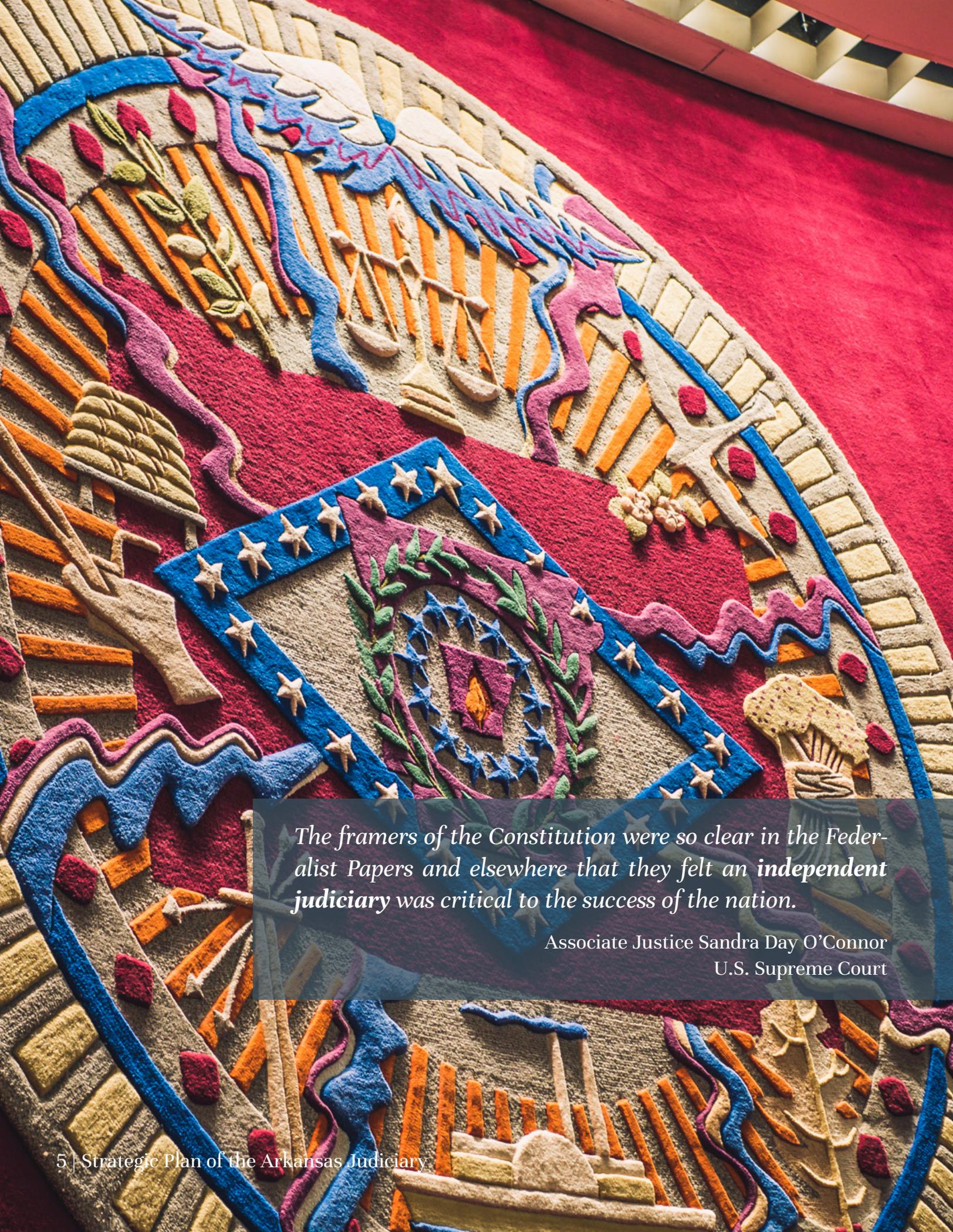


Mission Statement

As an equal and independent branch of government, the Arkansas Judiciary, acting with integrity, shall provide a safe, accessible, transparent, efficient, and impartial system of justice by fairly resolving disputes, protecting the public interest, and preserving individual rights while maintaining respect for the rule of law.

Vision Statement

The Arkansas Judiciary will embody integrity, transparency, and accountability to the public, which it serves.



*The framers of the Constitution were so clear in the Federalist Papers and elsewhere that they felt an **independent judiciary** was critical to the success of the nation.*

Associate Justice Sandra Day O'Connor
U.S. Supreme Court

Foster Judicial Independence

The Arkansas Judiciary is committed to maintaining a positive relationship with the legislative and executive branches of government and to ensuring that the Judiciary remains an equal and independent branch of government. We strongly believe that communication among the three separate but equal branches of government is of paramount importance.

To achieve this goal, we offer the following action plan:

ACT RESPONSIBLY

We will hold ourselves and those that come before us to the highest standards of conduct and integrity.

We will maintain strict adherence to the Arkansas Code of Judicial Conduct, the Arkansas Rules of Professional Conduct, and all other applicable statutes and rules governing the practice of law.

We will ensure that our oath to uphold the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the State of Arkansas is placed above all other duties.

COMMUNICATE RESPECTFULLY

We will communicate respectfully, clearly, effectively, and cordially with the public in a timely manner.

We will communicate respectfully, clearly, effectively, and cordially with the other branches of government to preserve the integrity of the judicial branch and to enhance the work and success of the courts.

We will promote public awareness of the Judiciary and judicial ethics through programs, publications, and other media that are designed to facilitate an understanding of the roles and limitations of the courts.¹

ENSURE FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE

We will work with the legislative and executive branches of government to ensure that the judicial branch can secure adequate funding through sources independent of court costs, fines, and fees.

We will work to ensure that the judicial branch is not dependent on or subject to improper influence from the other branches of government or from private or partisan interests.

Improve Access to Justice



The Arkansas Judiciary is committed to improving public access to the courts. Access to reliable, Arkansas-specific information will assist our citizens and strengthen the public's confidence and faith in the legal system.

We will demonstrate the need and build support for obtaining the resources necessary to achieve the accessibility goals set forth herein.

To achieve this goal, we offer the following action plan:

ENSURE ACCESS TO FACILITIES

We will ensure that the judicial-branch facilities are accessible to all court users and that the public has meaningful and equal access to the justice system despite economic and geographic barriers.

We will develop accommodations to ensure that persons with disabilities and limited English proficiency can participate in all court proceedings whether as litigants, witnesses, jurors, lawyers, or otherwise.

ENSURE ACCESS TO COURT INFORMATION AND SERVICES

We will expand public access to court information and services.²

We will improve consistency of access and equip judges, court staff, clerks, and librarians with a statewide policy, resources, services, and information that they may need to provide the public services and information in a manner that does not constitute the practice of law.

We will consider the feasibility of establishing a statewide network of public libraries, law libraries, self-help centers, and public access terminals that provide information to the public about common legal issues and available resources.

ENSURE ADEQUATE LEGAL REPRESENTATION

We will work with our justice partners to educate the legal community about the continued need for pro bono services, and we will encourage members of the Bar to fulfill that need by providing representation and assistance to individuals in need.³

We will advocate for sufficient resources necessary to provide legal representation to individuals who cannot afford to hire an attorney in right-to-counsel cases or where an individual's life, health, or safety is at risk.

*Supreme Court Library
Little Rock, Arkansas*

To delay justice is injustice.

William Penn
Founder, Pennsylvania

*Union County Courthouse
El Dorado, Arkansas*



The Constitution doesn't belong to a bunch of judges and lawyers. It belongs to you.

Associate Justice Anthony Kennedy
U.S. Supreme Court

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Communicate Effectively with the Public

The Arkansas Judiciary is committed to communicating effectively with the public and educating the public about the court system. Public confidence in the judicial system is fostered by understanding the work of the courts. Through education and outreach, the courts can broaden the public's knowledge about the purposes, roles, and responsibilities of the judicial branch.

To achieve this goal, we offer the following action plan:

STRENGTHEN PUBLIC AWARENESS OF THE JUDICIARY AND OUR PROJECTS

We will support the Arkansas Courts and Community Initiative (ACCI), a program for courts across the state to promote knowledge and understanding of the Judiciary. We will encourage members of the Judiciary to assume an active role in outreach efforts through ACCI.

We will continue to partner with schools by expanding Law Day programs, offering group tours of courtrooms, and looking for other partnership opportunities.

We will continue to attend civic clubs, local organizations, and other community meetings to enhance understanding of the courts' role and to foster civic awareness.

We will develop and provide an orientation or other basic educational program to explain court processes, rules, and procedures to litigants, witnesses, jurors, and other court participants.

Improve Educational Opportunities Available to the Judiciary

The Arkansas Judiciary is committed to improving the educational and training programs provided to the Judiciary.

To achieve this goal, we offer the following action plan:



STRIVE FOR JUDICIAL EXCELLENCE

We will ensure that professional excellence is the standard and expectation for all judicial officers and court personnel in the Arkansas Judiciary.

We will continue to provide ongoing subject-matter-focused education and training to our judges, which will include information on maintaining and enhancing professional development.

We will enhance education and training for the courts and judicial employees on ethical conduct, integrity, accountability, bias, and procedural fairness.

We will train courts on the use of social media and the internet. We will also disseminate information on how the use of such tools impact the courts and encourage judges who are utilizing social media to remain mindful of limitations imposed by the Arkansas Code of Judicial Conduct and the Arkansas Rules of Professional Conduct.

PARTNER WITH ARKANSAS BAR ASSOCIATIONS

We will increase collaborative continuing-legal-education opportunities for the courts and members of the Bar, which will enhance relationships and promote discussions on issues affecting the judicial system statewide.

*Jefferson County Courthouse
Pine Bluff, Arkansas*



*A judge can't have any preferred outcome in any particular case. The judge's only obligation - and it's a solemn obligation - is to the **rule of law**.*

Associate Justice Samuel Alito
U.S. Supreme Court



Administration of justice is the firmest pillar of good Government.

President George Washington

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Embrace Technology

The Arkansas Judiciary is committed to embracing technology and promoting its use to optimize the experiences of all who are involved with the court system.

Technology can aid in improving accessibility to, as well as efficiency and productivity of, the judicial system. Courts must embrace technology and actively use and manage it. Courts must also respond to the changing technological environment by providing court users remote access to information, records, and services. While recognizing the importance that technology can play in the judicial system, courts must always ensure that all court systems and data are securely maintained and that the requisite level of privacy is afforded all information.

To achieve this goal, we offer the following action plan:

ADOPT TECHNOLOGY PLANS

We will encourage each county to adopt a technology plan that incorporates minimum technology standards that would include specifications for hardware, software, equipment, and internet capacity for all courts.

We will safeguard the security, integrity, and confidentiality of court data and technology systems.

We will improve and expand data-exchange and integration processes between the courts and other justice partners.

PROVIDE READILY ACCESSIBLE RESOURCES

We will expand self-service options for court users, including webpages for local courts and interactive smartphone and tablet applications for use by courts, attorneys, parties, and jurors.

UTILIZE CASE-MANAGEMENT TOOLS

We will utilize technology that allows both automated document technology and court case-management system information to provide judges and their staff with the ability to easily and efficiently generate standard orders and other documents for routine matters.

BALANCE

We will assist courts in training and technology to strive for balance in individual discretion of the use of courtroom technology and control of courtroom policy, procedures, conduct, and security.

Enhance Security

The Arkansas Judiciary is committed to providing a safe and secure venue for resolution of legal disputes.

Court facilities must be designed and utilized to ensure the safety and well-being of judges, court staff, attorneys, litigants, witnesses, jurors, victims, the public, and all other individuals involved in the judicial system. Courts must also be prepared for emergencies, disasters, and accidents that could affect court operations and have a plan in place to ensure the continuity of Judiciary functions despite the unforeseen events.

The Judiciary recognizes that courthouses are public forums in which many local governmental activities occur. The Judiciary values its relationships with local law enforcement and county officials and fully understands that any security and emergency preparedness plan must include participation from an agreement with these partners.

To achieve this goal, we offer the following action plan:

IMPLEMENT COURT SECURITY POLICIES

We will encourage each county to develop and maintain a cohesive and comprehensive set of security policies and procedures for the court and the courthouse to assure a thorough and consistent application of security measures.

We will acknowledge that enhancing court security requires tapping into budgetary resources, which may be scarce, and we encourage local courts to prioritize implementation of security policies based upon best practices developed by the National Center for State Courts, which requires: proper staffing, utilization of equipment, adoption of policies and procedures, and continuous training.

We will encourage the utilization and enhancement of current court-security-systems technology and courthouse physical security features to the greatest extent fiscally possible, refining access-control policies and practices, improving critical incident-response and threat-management capabilities, and increasing collaboration and communication among stakeholders to identify and better manage court-security threats. When considering enhancement of court security systems' technology, we will emphasize that a local court should consider use of metal detectors, keyless entry systems, and panic buttons.

Continued Next Spread...



[T]he Constitution will endure as a vital charter of human liberty as long as there are those with the courage to defend it, the vision to interpret it, and the fidelity to live by it.

Associate Justice William J. Brennan
U.S. Supreme Court



*Saline County Courthouse
Benton, Arkansas*



Additionally, when refining access control policies, consideration should be given to utilization of minimal entrances and to placement of uniformed personnel at main entrances.

We will encourage development of a methodology to determine court-security staffing needs for each court, which will ensure that court-security officers are available to monitor each facility, operate security equipment, and respond to emergency or security needs. We will acknowledge that for this type of staffing to be successful, the local stakeholders must engage in ongoing communication and collaboration.

We will work toward a statewide uniform minimum-security protocol for equipment, staffing, procedures, and technology to provide a safe and secure environment for staff, litigants, the public, and other courthouse attendees.

We will provide security and emergency-preparedness training and materials to all judges and courthouse staff.

We will consider the feasibility of creating a singular funding mechanism for all court-security officers.

DEVELOP PLANS TO ENSURE CONTINUITY OF OPERATIONS

We will encourage each county to develop and maintain local emergency preparedness and continuity-of-operations plans for the court and the courthouse, which should address how essential functions will continue, how records and facilities will be protected, and who will be responsible for decision-making.

We will encourage local courts to engage in “drills” to determine appropriateness of the continuity-of-operations plan and to familiarize the participants with their roles under the plan.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Examples of programs, publications, and other media may include legislative and executive bench books, topical lunch meetings, courtroom tours, and other online resources.

² See technology section for specific strategies involving public access through technology.

³ We consider the Access to Justice Commission, the Arkansas Bar Association, legal aid providers, and all local bar associations important justice partners.

Photographs courtesy of Ed Barham, Nick Shumate, and The Diamond Agency (El Dorado, Arkansas).



*State Capitol Building
Little Rock, Arkansas*