



Hon. Matthew J. Fader, Chair
Chief Justice, Supreme Court of Maryland

Hon. Donine Carrington Martin
Circuit Court for Charles County

Hon. Audrey J. S. Carrión
Chair, Conference of Circuit Judges

Hon. Karen Christy Holt Chesser
District Court in St. Mary's County

Hon. Heather S. DeWees
Vice-Chair, Conference of Circuit Court Clerks

Nancy Faulkner
Secretary, Deputy State Court Administrator

Hon. Jeffrey S. Getty
Circuit Court for Allegany County

Hon. Fred S. Hecker
Vice-Chair, Conference of Circuit Judges

Kathy Hefner
*Administrative Clerk
District Court in Montgomery County*

Hon. Geoffrey G. Hengerer
District Court in Baltimore City

Hon. James A. Kenney, III
Chair, Senior Judges Committee

Rebecca Kimball
*Administrative Clerk
District Court in Cecil County*

Hon. Stacy A. Mayer
Circuit Court for Baltimore County

Stephanie Medina
Chair, Conference of Circuit Court Administrators

Hon. John P. Morrissey
Chief Judge, District Court of Maryland

Amanda Purnell
Vice-Chair, Conference of Circuit Court Administrators

Judy Rupp
State Court Administrator

Hon. Shaèm C. P. Spencer
District Court in Anne Arundel County

Hon. Kevin Tucker
Chair, Conference of Circuit Court Clerks

Roberta Warnken
Chief Clerk, District Court of Maryland

Hon. E. Greg Wells
Chief Judge, Appellate Court of Maryland

Hon. Alan M. Wilner
Chair, Standing Committee on Rules of Practice and Procedure

MARYLAND JUDICIAL COUNCIL

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Meeting Minutes
January 24, 2024

Judicial Council Members Present:

Hon. Matthew J. Fader, Chair	Rebecca Kimball
Hon. Donine Carrington Martin	Hon. Stacy A. Mayer
Hon. Audrey J.S. Carrión	Stephanie Medina
Hon. Karen Christy Holt Chesser	Hon. John P. Morrissey
Hon. Heather S. DeWees	Amanda Purnell
Nancy Faulkner	Judy Rupp
Hon. Jeffrey S. Getty	Hon. Shaèm C. P. Spencer
Hon. Fred S. Hecker	Hon. Kevin Tucker
Kathy Hefner	Roberta L. Warnken
Hon. Geoffrey G. Hengerer	Hon. E. Greg Wells
Hon. James A. Kenney, III	Hon. Alan M. Wilner

Others Present:

Robert Bruchalski	Jeff Huddleston
Melissa Canada	Amanda Miller
Shamika Dent-Williams	Sharon Reed
Hon. Kathleen Duvall	Chris Sharpes
Lou Gieszl	Lara Stone
Kristin Grossnickle	

A meeting of the Judicial Council was held on Wednesday, January 24, 2024, at the Maryland Judicial Center, beginning at 9:30 a.m. Chief Justice Matthew J. Fader welcomed attendees and announced that the meeting was being livestreamed on mdcourts.gov.

Justice Fader acknowledged the hard work of outgoing members and presented a gavel plaque of appreciation to Judge Bonnie G. Schneider (not present), Clerk Kathleen Duvall, Court Administrator Kristin Grossnickle, and Administrative Clerk Lara Stone. Judge John P. Morrissey added that Ms. Duvall and Ms. Grossnickle were also valuable assets to the Major Projects Committee in their previous roles. Judge Stacy A. Mayer, Clerk Heather S. DeWees (not present), Amanda Purnell, and Rebecca Kimball were welcomed as the newest members of the Council.

Justice Fader then asked for approval of the minutes from the previous meeting. Judge Donine Carrington Martin made a motion with a second from Judge James A. Kenney, III. After hearing no objections, the minutes were approved.

1. Committee/Strategic Initiative Updates

a. Court Technology Committee

Judge Fred S. Hecker presented on behalf of the Court Technology Committee (CTC). He explained that much of the work achieved is largely credited to the staff at Judicial Information Systems (JIS). In addition, committee members are composed of a diverse range of employees throughout the Judiciary and bring an array knowledge and experience. The mission of the committee is to facilitate and pursue technology-based solutions to maximize judicial efficiency and access to the courts.

The CaseSearch and Data Request Subcommittee is chaired by Judge Margaret M. Schweitzer and the Non-Case Record Automation Subcommittee is chaired by Clerk Scott Poyer. Workgroups under the CTC include the Remote Hearings Workgroup, E-Warrant Workgroup, the Electronic Payment Workgroup, Digital Evidence Workgroup, and the Audio Livestreaming Workgroup, which sunset in December 2023. The Legislative Workgroup of the CTC is tasked with reviewing bills that may impact technology in the Judiciary and meets weekly during session. Six bills have been reviewed this year, most related to expungements.

In conjunction with JIS, the CTC focused on four major objectives in 2023 to advance the integration of technology while securing and protecting the data contained. In general, members concentrated on information security, infrastructure and technology, case-based applications, and non-case-based applications.

As a result of SB812 in 2022, JIS is required to complete a biennial information security assessment. In addition, the CTC reviewed and approved changes recommended by David DelGuadio, an Information Security Officer at JIS, to the Judiciary's Information Security Policy. Committee members are in the process of reviewing changes to the Court Security Policy.

Judge Hecker reported 100% compliance with the Information Security Awareness Training through the first three quarters of 2023. Kent County District Court won last year's Evergam Cup for having the highest completion rate. Internal phishing campaigns were also launched to measure how well users were able to recognize attempts to compromise information. Robert Bruchalski, Chief Information Officer, added that he met with colleagues around the country and is proud to say Maryland's completion rates far exceed those in other states.

In May 2023, JIS successfully moved the primary Data Center without any reported downtime in the system. The Office of Legislative Audits reviewed the data center's disaster recovery plan and praised JIS for the seamless transition from one location to another. In October, the project to implement new public wireless networks throughout the state was

completed. As the Judiciary approaches go-live in Baltimore City, the Non-Case Record Automation Subcommittee is working diligently to identify alternate locations for the data once Mainframe is decommissioned.

Members of the CTC joined with JIS to create the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Workgroup to examine the risks and benefits of AI technology within and outside the Judiciary. As part of this initiative, Justice Fader is also working with the National Center for State Courts to gather feedback and recommendations from courts across the world for the workgroup to consider. A set of guidelines for acceptable use of AI by Judiciary personnel will be shared once they are finalized. Judge Alan M. Wilner emphasized the importance of involving the Standing Committee on Rules of Practice and Procedure (Rules Committee) in the process.

Similarly, the Redaction/AI Workgroup was formed under the Major Projects Committee (MPC) to explore additional uses for generative AI software purchased by the Judiciary in the redaction of court records. Following an expungement order, the software has the ability to automatically redact specified key words and patterns in both structured and unstructured documents and images. The software will be integrated with Odyssey and File and Serve and is being piloted in Dorchester County, primarily for expungements related to cannabis cases.

The Digital Evidence Workgroup is exploring a more efficient way to manage and store digital evidence, such as body-worn camera videos, photos, emails, etc. A large amount of memory is required to handle the increased use of electronic communication. A Request for Proposal (RFP) is underway to solicit vendors with a cloud-based storage option. Judge E. Greg Wells suggested partnering the workgroup with local law enforcement and state's attorneys in order to pursue a uniform approach. Judge Morrissey noted that each department purchases their own body camera equipment and therefore the formats may be different. However, he acknowledged the importance of collaborating with justice partners, including the Maryland State Bar Association.

In the continuing effort to improve user experiences, the Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) project will provide a platform that increases access to justice and expands alternative dispute resolution options. Initially, the system will be used for three case types; traffic hearings for guilty with an explanation, small claims hearings, and child support cases. Factors for success include integration with MDEC, the ability to support asynchronous communication, and the ability to return to traditional court process if issues cannot be resolved in ODR.

Another pilot project underway is the use of kiosks in courthouses to assist the public. The kiosk is an automated clerical assistant that helps users find forms or locate an office within the building. The goal is not to eliminate clerk functions but to relieve them of basic tasks in order to focus on other needs. Currently, the kiosks are being piloted in the Circuit Court for Baltimore and the Circuit Court for Howard County.

In conjunction with the MPC, the CTC reviewed and approved the final report of the Alternative Work Arrangements Feasibility Workgroup. As a result, a new telework policy was implemented in summer 2023. The workgroup is now in the next phase, and at the request of the workgroup, CTC, voted to approve that the workgroup report only to the MPC.

A few additional updates to note include the ability for parties to e-file Failure to Pay (FTP) rent cases in all jurisdictions except Baltimore City, which will launch with MDEC go-live in May 2024. A new non-case revenue system was implemented and details are being finalized to enhance online payment options for case and non-case related transactions. The Problem Solving Courts' information system, SMART, will be replaced to improve communication with parties. Finally, the new CaseSearch 2.0 will be rolled out on February 5, 2024, which will significantly improve the user's online experience.

JIS continues to assist in developing a centralized calendar to schedule the use of senior judges. The system enables each judge to indicate their availability and a designated employee in each court can find a judge according to their needs. A user-friendly prototype has been developed and will be piloted for 4 – 6 months. A suggestion was made to also explore the feasibility of automating the process to summons jurors.

On behalf of the committee, Judge Hecker requested to remove the term "Automation" from the Non-Case Record Automation Subcommittee name. Judge Kenney moved for approval of the name change followed by a second from Judge Alan M. Wilner. After hearing no objections, the name change was approved.

b. District Court Chief Judge's Committee

Judge Morrissey explained that the District Court Chief Judge's Committee operates similar to the Judicial Council. There are 12 administrative judges, one from each district, plus an additional five associate judges elected by their peers. The Chief Clerk, Roberta Warnken, and an administrative clerk (rotating every two years) are also members. A few districts have the opportunity to share an update at each meeting. The ultimate goal of the committee is to assist each other in achieving fair and efficient justice.

The committee met four times in 2023. At the first meeting, Judge Morrissey provided legislative updates and reviewed proposed bills that would potentially affect the Judiciary's business process, such as landlord tenant's proof of licensing, probation before judgement (PBJ) agreements, and small claims enforcement of oral exams. The committee also discussed the use of Narcan in court and nominations for the Ethics and Rules Committees. Alternative dispute resolution (ADR) statistics were presented, and judges were encouraged to take advantage of the services available, both in person and remote. Judge Morrissey also shared statistics of the self-help centers and stated the goal is to provide access across the state to self-help centers, either in person or virtual..

In February, the Judiciary partnered with the University of Maryland, Francis King Carey School of Law (UMD) to initiate the veterans pod program in the Baltimore City Detention Center. Research has shown that housing prisoners who have served in the military together increases morale and decreases the number of infractions. Maryland's Secretary of Veterans Affairs and Secretary of Public Safety and Correctional Services also attended the presentation put on by UMD students and both were excited to see the program come to fruition.

The renovation of the Shillman Building in Baltimore City experienced a few setbacks but is still scheduled to open in early 2025.

In July, the committee shared updates on the new cannabis law, the Redaction/AI Workgroup, PBJ agreement forms, MDEC 2.0, and the progress of the ODR program. The new telework policy was discussed, and Buddy Weber, JIS Project Manager, introduced the new courthouse kiosks. The meeting coincided with District Court's ADR Appreciation Day and judges also had the opportunity to meet with over 300 volunteer mediators.

The committee joined the Conference of Circuit Judges in September, a practice that began in 2018. Justice Fader and Justice Eaves also presented at the meeting on behalf of the Standing Committee on Pro Bono and asked judges to encourage local attorneys to develop a goal for pro bono work. There are many opportunities to provide assistance in District Court. Dr. David Soulé of the Maryland State Commission on Criminal Sentencing Policy presented a training opportunity for law clerks with respect to sentencing guidelines. Kevin Cox from the Attorney General's Office finished the meeting with an update on the Soderberg case.

Following the joint meeting, the District Court Chief Judge's Committee held a meeting of their own. The Assistant Director of the Legislative Division of the Maryland Alcohol, Tobacco, and Cannabis Commission, Jeff Hann, presented on the upcoming cannabis regulations. The committee discussed bailiff staffing issues, employee surveys, and celebrated the launch of e-filing in FTP rent cases in all jurisdictions except Baltimore City.

The final meeting was held in December 2023. Judge Marina L. Sabett was announced as the new District Court coordinator on mental health issues. The Judiciary is working hard to improve the issues surrounding incompetency hearings and understanding the resources that are available to those who need assistance.

The committee watched a presentation on best practices for Teams/Zoom hearings and remote interpretation in the courtroom. The access to remote resources provides a cost-effective and private experience for users. The Rules Committee is also reviewing whether changes need to be made with respect to remote services.

The meeting also included a presentation by Lisa Ritter and Michael Brady from District Court's Engineering and Central Services. The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) and District Court are working to develop a central database to document all threats that occur across the state. A new courthouse for Harford County District Court is also in the design phase. The MPC also established a workgroup to identify terms that reference shielding or expunging a record with the Rules. Judge Morrissey closed the meeting with an update on restitution orders, bond forfeiture documents, new PBJ bench cards, and time standard changes approved by the Judicial Council.

2. For the Good of the Order

Justice Fader informed attendees that a group photo will be taken after the next meeting, scheduled for March 27, 2024, at 9:30 a.m. There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 10:50 a.m.