



Volume 18, Issue 2 (April 2025)

President's Message—Change is in the Air

By Judge Frankie Moore, Nebraska Court of Appeals

According to the Greek philosopher Heraclitus of Ephesus (535-475 BC), the only thing constant in life is change. While change can sometimes create uncertainty and anxiety, it can also provide new opportunities for learning, growth, and development.

I want to bring you up to date on changes that are happening at the National Center for State Courts (our secretariat) as well as organizational changes impacting our Council. First, as you may already know, NCSC has selected a new president to lead the Center following the retirement of President Mary McQueen. The search committee appointed Elizabeth Clement, currently the Michigan Supreme Court chief justice, to assume the president's role this spring. Mary McQueen, who has led the Center admirably for the past 20 years, thanks CCJSCA for partnering in the Center's mission of driving innovation and progress in courts and justice systems.



Second, the NCSC also undertook an extensive process to reimagine its structure and services by reviewing current practices, challenges, and opportunities, with the assistance of the Center for Applied Research (CFAR), which interviewed the officers of the court associations supported by the Center. To strengthen feedback mechanisms and collaborations between the various associations and establish closer connections between NCSC leadership and the associations, the Association Management team has been assigned to the Executive Office under the direction of Edwin Bell. And our own association manager, Sirena Kestner, has been promoted to be the new director of Association Management. Sirena assumed her new position on February 22. Most of you know how valuable Sirena has been to CCJSCA, and it comes as no surprise that the NCSC leadership has recognized her talent. Please take a moment to congratulate Sirena for this well-deserved promotion!

I am pleased to announce that a new association manager for CCJSCA has been hired. Cassandra (Cassie) Bradshaw assumed this position on March 24. Cassie has been employed by NCSC as a program specialist for two associations, the National Association for Court Management and the Conference of Court Public Information Officers. Sirena and Cassie will work together on the transition over the coming weeks and months. Chief Justice Mark Green and I were able to meet Cassie while at the National Center in late March, and we are confident that she will be a great addition to our Council family. Cassie's email is cbradshaw@ncsc.org.

Another outcome of the planning process noted above was the decision to hold an "Assembly of Associations" at the NCSC headquarters in Williamsburg, Virginia. This assembly was held March 27 and 28 and brought together officers from the various associations served by NCSC and the NCSC Board. For a full list of the associations managed by the Center, [please click here](#). Chief Justice Mark Green and I attended the assembly, and we will share more information at a later time.

The Annual Conference Committee met in January at our 2025 conference location: the Omni Shoreham Hotel in Washington D.C. The hotel is a beautiful historic facility. As luck would have it, we were there at the same time as President Jimmy Carter's lying-in-state and funeral. Due to its proximity to the National Cathedral, the hotel was "funeral central," with many guests and dignitaries present. The day of our meeting found us mixed in with hundreds of funeral attendees who were being routed through security to get on the buses outside our hotel to proceed to the funeral. It is but one example of the many exciting things that happen in our nation's capital!

Your conference committee is hard at work lining up fantastic speakers for our education sessions as well as organizing social activities that will highlight the many gems in D.C. The biggest challenge is narrowing down the available options. An article from our annual conference chair, Presiding Judge

Michele Christiansen Forster, is included below. We will provide you with more details in the months to come, but please set aside the dates of October 12-15 for the conference. You may also wish to extend your stay to further enjoy our nation's capital.

Thank you for all you do, both in your respective courts, and for CCJSCA!



Pictured above: Judge Frankie Moore (President), Chief Justice (Ret.) Mark Green (President-Elect), Sirena Kestner (Director of Association Management) and Cassie Bradshaw (new Association Manager).

Join Us for the 2025 CCJSCA Annual Conference in Washington, D.C.

***By Michele Christiansen Forster, Presiding Judge, Utah Court of Appeals;
Chair, CCJSCA Annual Conference Committee***

The Annual Conference Committee is hard at work planning a truly exceptional 2025 CCJSCA Annual Conference, which will take place October 12-15, 2025, at the historic Omni Shoreham Hotel in Washington, D.C. This year's conference will focus on the theme "Equal Justice Under Law"—a guiding

principle of our courts and a powerful reminder of our role as judicial leaders and our shared commitment to upholding fairness, integrity, and the rule of law.

This year's conference will feature an outstanding lineup of speakers and engaging discussions on constitutional law, legal writing, access to justice, wellness, collegiality, and leadership. These sessions will provide valuable insights and practical tools to support chief judges in their critical roles. Highlights of the conference speakers include former Acting U.S. Solicitor General Neal Katyal; Georgetown Law Professor Jonathan Turley; Joe Starita, author of *I Am a Man: Chief Standing Bear's Journey for Justice*; and historians from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum who will speak on "Law, Justice, and the Holocaust."

Of course, the things that make a conference memorable are the social activities and the free time that allow the attendees and their partners to interact with other chiefs and enjoy the historical and cultural landmarks of Washington, D.C., including its famed museums and monuments. Our closing dinner on Wednesday, October 15 will be held in the Great Hall of the Supreme Court of the United States, the longstanding symbol of "the national ideal of justice in the highest sphere of activity."

As you can see, the Annual Conference Committee has made every effort to make this another great conference for CCJSCA. Mark your calendars and make plans to join us in Washington, D.C. in October.

A Note from the Scholarship Committee

By Judge Christopher Murray, First District Court of Appeals, Michigan; Chair, CCJSCA Scholarship Committee



This year's Annual Conference is in our nation's capital, Washington D.C. Visiting the capital is always enjoyable, but even more so when doing it in conjunction with the conference's wonderful programming and events. But these days even a trip to Washington is expensive that end, the Executive Committee has once again provided a healthy budget for the Scholarship Committee to award scholarships to assist those members who need to defray the costs of attending the conference. The more chiefs and former chiefs that attend a conference translates into more golden opportunities to share experiences and ideas, so don't be shy in seeking a scholarship.

An email announcement providing a link for scholarship applications will be sent on **May 5**, and the deadline for submitting completed applications is **June 2**. Please be on the lookout for the May 5 email.

CCJSCA Spotlight: Judge Nancy Vaidik, Court of Appeals of Indiana

How and why did you become a court of appeal judge?

Before I was a member of the Indiana Court of Appeals, I was a trial court judge in northwest Indiana, in the suburbs of Chicago. I absolutely loved the trial court, mainly because I could see the results of

my rulings, if not in the courtroom, afterwards, from litigants or their loved ones telling me the difference I made in their lives. On the trial court, I was also very active downstate as an officer of the Indiana Judges Association and the chairperson of the supreme court's judicial education committee.

Through my involvement downstate, I had an inkling of how appellate judges were appointed. But I didn't think I wanted to leave the trial court, nor was I sure I could do the job. And being chosen as one of the top three candidates to be sent to the governor was daunting. I didn't know the members of the commission or the governor.

Then, a position on the court opened, and people started asking me if I would apply. Initially I said, "Nah, not for me." But after several people encouraged me to apply, I finally convinced myself that I could do the job and worked like heck to be appointed.

Twenty-five years later, I seek out attorneys and judges who I think would be great appellate judges and urge them to apply. Women particularly need a nudge. One of the most recently appointed judges told me that she would never have seen herself as an appellate judge without me seeing it in her first.

How did you become chief judge?

The chief judge is elected by the 15 members of the court for a three-year term. During my term, I stressed collegiality among the judges and the staff. My motto—tear down the silos within and talk to our constituents without. I was the first chief judge in the last 25 years to be elected two times.

What have you found most valuable about your affiliation with CCJSCA?

By far, the friendships I have made. There is nothing like having peers in the same situation as you are. Not only can you commiserate with them, but you learn from their successes and failures. Second, the annual conference is the best conference I go to each year. Sprinkled though the conference are useful administrative and self-care tips, but also a good bit of inspiration.

What are you most looking forward to crossing off your bucket list?

Lately, I have been furiously crossing off bucket list items. My husband Jim and I just bought a house on Lake Michigan. I am hoping to spend this summer working remotely as I look out my living room window to the beach, lake, and the Chicago skyline. My bucket list also contains a trip throughout India on the Maharajah Express during Diwali. Unfortunately, Diwali is always at or near the time of our conference.

If you didn't have this job, what would you most LIKE to be doing instead?

Teaching. In fact, my second career is teaching trial and appellate advocacy and evidence for the National Institute for Trial Advocacy, the ABA, Indiana University Maurer School of Law, and any law school that asks.

If not teaching, I would be a tour guide. I love to plan our travel. Lately, Jim and I have taken each of our grandchildren to anywhere in the world they would like to go. Five down, two to go.



William Bright Appointed to Connecticut Supreme Court

By Judge Frankie Moore, President, CCJSCA

William H. Bright, Jr., the former chief judge of the Connecticut Appellate Court, was sworn in as an associate justice of the Connecticut Supreme Court on Wednesday, March 5.

Bright was appointed to the appellate court in 2017 and has served as chief judge since 2020. Before joining the appellate court, he served as a judge of the superior court, beginning in 2008.

Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont nominated Bright for the position on the supreme court vacated by Justice Raheem Mullins, who was recently nominated to become chief justice. Governor Lamont said,

“Judge Bright has been an excellent leader of our Appellate Court over these last four and a half years, and he has had an impressive career handling all types of cases both on the trial and appellate levels.”

Judge Melanie L. Cradle has been appointed to fill Bright’s position as chief judge of the appellate court. Cradle has been on the appellate court since 2020 and served as a superior court judge, beginning in 2013.

Chief Judge Bright has been active in CCJSCA during his tenure, most recently serving on the Finance and Scholarship committees. Bright asked that we let everyone know how much he enjoyed being part of the Council. “I learned a lot and everyone was so nice and welcoming. I will, of course, miss the annual meeting, as well as the Chief Chats, and the committee meetings,” said Bright.

Justice Bright, we are proud of you, and we will miss you. We look forward to welcoming Chief Judge Cradle to our organization.



Our Chief Chats

***By Elizabeth A. Garry, Presiding Justice, Appellate Division, Third Department, New York;
Chair, CCJSCA Communications Committee***

On March 5, 2025, this year’s first Chief Chat kicked off with an impressive presentation by Chief Judge Nancy Vaidik of the Indiana Court of Appeals. She was joined by her director of communications, Anne Fuchs. Accompanied by a series of photos, the two of them shared the approach—and rousing success—of the Court’s “Appeals on Wheels” program, in which a panel of judges, accompanied by key staff, travels to venues across their state to hear arguments and conduct educational presentations.

It is fair to say that many or even most of our courts similarly conduct some traveling program in an effort for outreach and to enhance civics education in the communities we serve, but it is less likely that many of us have made such a strong effort to formalize our programs. In Indiana, under Judge Vaidik's capable leadership, this program has reached great heights. The court began traveling to various venues in the 1980s. In 2001, the program was formalized and named; in 2019 they reached the goal of conducting arguments in each of the 92 counties within the state, at venues ranging from colleges to high schools to Rotary Club and State Bar venues—and even nursing homes! The success of this initiative was recognized by the National Center of State Courts in 2023, when the Appeals on Wheels program was awarded the prestigious Sandra Day O'Connor Award for the Advancement of Civics Education.

The Chief Chat was well attended, and Judge Vaidik and Ms. Fuchs shared the details of their progress and success. The goals of “Appeals on Wheels” are to “teach, inspire and network,” and it was clear that these objectives are being well met in Indiana, in ways that we can replicate. Anyone seeking to follow up may reach out to Ms. Fuchs at Anne.Fuchs@courts.in.gov.

What's coming next? A Chief Chat on the new and improved CCJSCA website will be conducted by Judge Gary Lynch, chair of the CCJSCA Website Committee, on **June 12, 2025, at 3:00 p.m. ET**. Judge Lynch will demonstrate how the CCJSCA website may be used to build and support our community of chief judges. Beginning with a brief general overview of website functionality and features, he will focus primarily on website discussion groups. Using a live website demonstration along with interactive questions and answers, he will explain the intended function of each group, how to access a particular group, how to post a new discussion and a comment in a group, how to link a document or other media to a post, how to receive notifications of new posts made by others, and how to search for and find ongoing or historical discussions by subject.

The last of this year's Chief Chats will be held on **September 18, 2025, at 3:00 p.m. ET**. This Chief Chat will be co-facilitated by Judge Darlene Byrne and Judge Mark Green on the timely and ever-changing topic of artificial intelligence. Both Judge Byrne and Judge Green have helped to oversee the use of artificial intelligence at the state court level. The presentation will be an opportunity to learn how members of CCJSCA can use artificial intelligence in the day-to-day life of an intermediate appellate judge. The discussion will focus on both the positive and negative impact of an everchanging technology.

An Important Message from Membership

***By Chief Justice Scott E. Stevens, Texas Sixth District Court of Appeals;
Co-Chair, CCJSCA Membership Committee***

On behalf of the Membership Committee, we would like to welcome our new members:

Hon. Amy Blake— MA

Hon. Robert Patton—OH

Hon. Jennifer Frisch—MN

Hon. Justin Kock—TX

Hon. Edwin Scales—FL

Hon. Sarah Warner—KS

Hon. Jaime Tijerina—TX

Each of these new members have been sent welcome letters and have been assigned mentors. We look forward to hopefully meeting them in person at our annual conference in Washington, D.C.

The Membership Committee, with the help of Sirena Kester and others, have recently updated the membership brochure. The updated brochure looks great, and we are excited to get it out soon. The membership committee is also working on an update of the current membership roster. We encourage all members to please let the membership committee know if you have a change in the chief judge position on your court. Also, if you are aware of any chief judges who are not members of CCJSCA, please let us know so we can reach out to them.

Finally, the membership committee will soon be preparing for the new chief judges' pre-conference orientation program. We look forward to working with the other committee chairs in preparation for that.

We are excited to see you all in Washington, D.C. in October!

A New Specialty Court of Appeals for Texas

By Chief Justice Tracy Christopher, Fourteenth Texas Court of Appeals

Some of you may have met Chief Justice Scott Brister at our last CCJSCA conference in Monterey. He started his tenure as chief justice of the Fifteenth Court of Appeals on September 1, 2024, when the new Fifteenth Court of Appeals was created in Texas. The Fifteenth Court of Appeals is a specialty court of appeals, similar to the United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit. It has jurisdiction over civil appeals from the state's new business courts and for certain appeals involving state agencies. Just like the Federal Circuit, its jurisdiction is based on subject matter and not geographic location. The rest of the Texas intermediate appellate courts are location based and handle both civil and criminal appeals—just like the other 12 United States Courts of Appeals.

According to a National Center for State Courts white paper of November 2012, there are other states that specialize (see J. P. Doerner and C. A. Markham, "[The Role of State Intermediate Appellate Courts: Principles for Adapting to Change](#)"). Alabama, New York and Tennessee have different intermediate appellate courts for civil and criminal matters. Indiana has a specialty court of appeals for

tax matters. Pennsylvania has a superior court and a commonwealth court. The commonwealth court has jurisdiction over administrative and civil public law, with the superior court handling all the rest. If there are other states out there that have specialty intermediate courts, please let me know!

When the Texas legislature created the Fifteenth Court of Appeals, the bill's sponsor and supporters gave several reasons. First, the government appeals would all be handled by one intermediate court (rather than 14), which would allow the justices to specialize in that area of the law. The Fifteenth Court is also elected statewide rather than in smaller districts. This would allow all Texans to have a say in important government cases. Second, the new appellate court would handle all appeals from the new Texas Business Courts, created in the same legislation. The Texas Business courts are also specialty trial courts handling only certain high-dollar business disputes. Again, the justices could specialize and be elected statewide. Third, having a smaller docket would perhaps allow quicker resolution of cases.

Those opposed to the new court felt that specialization was unnecessary. They argued that having different lower courts of appeals weighing in on the issues created a better view of the law and that our supreme court is elected statewide and would resolve any conflicts between the lower courts. Finally, politics was cited as the reason for the new courts. Statewide elected officials in Texas are generally Republicans, while some of the courts of appeal from the urban areas have more Democrats on the bench.

From my own perspective, I welcome another court of appeals to lighten the load, but I am sorry that the complex high-dollar business cases will not come before our court. Those cases will be interesting and well briefed and argued with some of the best appellate lawyers in our state. I would like to have had those cases as part of my docket. As far as the government cases—the Fifteenth Court is welcome to them!

Finance Committee Report

***By Dori Contreras, Chief Justice (Ret.), Thirteenth District Court of Appeals;
Co-Chair, CCJSCA Finance Committee***

Your Finance Committee has met regularly to review all financial matters including status of investments and conference expenses. Rest assured that CCJSCA is financially sound and healthy due to smart decisions made by previous leaders and conference committee members. We are looking forward to planning for the 2025 conference in D.C. and are prepared to review all financial decisions.

Letter From the Editor

By Gregory Orme, Judge, Utah Court of Appeals; Chair, CCJSCA Newsletter Committee

This is our annual pitch for our members to help keep us up to date on changes—and potential changes—in our membership. You are our best, and most reliable, source of such information.

We like to stay up to date on changes, and impending changes, in the position of chief judge, presiding judge, president judge, etc., as well as in the positions on the leadership track for those positions, such as associate presiding judge. We also like to recognize our members when a change of status has happened or is around the corner. Retirements are the best example, but we also like learning of appointments to other courts, as has happened recently with two of our members who accepted appointments to their state supreme courts.

The best way to get this information to us is by emailing our new association manager, [Cassie Bradshaw](#).

Preserving Judicial—and Your Own Family's—History Before It's Too Late; A Call to Action for My Colleagues

By Judge Cory J. Ciklin, Fourth District Court of Appeal, Florida

In the quiet corners of our homes, offices, tucked away in attics, storage boxes, and forgotten filing cabinets, lie invaluable pieces of our personal and professional histories—videotapes that captured moments we assumed would always be there for us to revisit. Judicial investitures, family gatherings, milestone events, and even candid glimpses of colleagues and loved ones are all stored on magnetic VHS tapes. Yet what many of us do not realize is that these tapes—some now 30 to 40 years old—are silently disintegrating, and with them, irreplaceable memories are vanishing.

I recently had a stark realization of this truth when I went through my own collection of VHS tapes, prompted by a Christmas gift of digitization services. As I reviewed the footage, I noticed something troubling: small glitches, color distortions, and brief moments where the video seemed to “jump” or degrade. These were tapes I had hardly touched in decades, yet time alone had begun to erase them. The more I researched, the clearer it became—VHS tapes, most likely unbeknownst to the people that invented the technology, were not built to last. Without human intervention, we will rapidly lose an entire era of recorded history, both personal and professional.

The Science of VHS Degradation

VHS tapes, like all magnetic media, have a finite lifespan. The estimated shelf life of a VHS tape stored under ideal conditions is 15 to 30 years. However, “ideal conditions” mean low humidity, stable temperatures, and minimal exposure to dust and magnetic fields—conditions that almost none of us have maintained perfectly.

Here's what happens over time:

- **Magnetic Signal Loss**—VHS tapes store video and audio data using a thin layer of magnetic particles. Over the years, this magnetic signal weakens, resulting in fading images and muffled sound.
- **Physical Deterioration**—The plastic reels and tape itself become brittle, leading to warping, tangling, or even snapping during playback.
- **Mold and Humidity Damage**—In humid environments, tapes attract mold, which eats away at the magnetic layer, permanently corrupting the footage.
- **Playback Equipment Obsolescence**—Even if a VHS tape survives, functioning VCRs are becoming rare. Manufacturers stopped producing them in 2016, and existing machines are

breaking down with little chance of repair.

In short, every year that passes puts our VHS tapes at greater risk of becoming completely unwatchable.

Why This Matters to Us as Judges

For most of us in the judiciary, our careers have spanned decades, bridging the era of analog and digital recording. Judicial investitures in the 1980s and 1990s were often filmed on VHS tapes, sometimes handed over to the judge or their family as a keepsake, never to be formally archived. That means there are judicial milestone events—featuring judges, lawyers, and community leaders—that exist **only on those tapes**.

And our reality is that these videos are not just personal mementos. Indeed, they are historical records, capturing the evolution of the bench, the changing demographics of the judiciary, and the legacy of those who paved the way for today's legal system. Judges who sat for decades before us, some of whom have now passed, are preserved only in these fragile recordings.

If we do nothing, these *moving images and voice*, some of the only moving footage of our predecessors—will be lost forever.

Beyond the Bench: The Personal Side of This Issue

The urgency to digitize VHS tapes extends beyond judicial history. Many of us have **family videos** from the 1980s and 1990s—weddings, birthdays, graduations, first steps, holidays—captured on camcorders and VHS recorders.

We often assume these tapes will always be around for us to relive cherished moments or pass them down to the next generation. Yet, without proactive effort, the recordings of our parents, our children, and even our own younger selves are at risk of disappearing.

Consider this: If you have VHS tapes of your children or grandchildren as toddlers in the late 1980s or early 1990s, those tapes are already at the outer edge of their expected lifespan. Without digitization, those moments could be lost before you ever get a chance to watch them again.

What Can You Do Right Now?

The good news is that there is still time to act—**but not much**. Here's what I urge my colleagues to do:

- **Locate Your VHS Tapes**—Search through storage bins, bookshelves, and old cabinets. Set aside any tapes labeled with significant events, names, or dates. Even unmarked tapes may contain important footage, so don't discard them without checking.
- **Assess Their Condition**—If the tapes show signs of mold, warping, or sticking, they need professional cleaning before digitization. Avoid playing them in old VCRs, as damaged tapes can be further destroyed during playback.
- **Digitize Immediately**—There are several options for converting VHS tapes to digital formats.
- **Professional Services** – Many companies specialize in transferring VHS to digital files or DVDs. These services ensure the best possible restoration and preservation.
- **DIY Solutions** – If you prefer, VHS-to-digital converters are available online. These devices allow you to transfer video directly to a computer. However, they may require some technical setup and quality control.
- **Create Multiple Backups**—Once digitized, store the files on at least **two or three platforms**—a cloud service, an external hard drive, and a computer. This ensures long-term accessibility and

protection against data loss.

- **Share and Preserve**—If you have videos of judicial investitures or significant legal events, consider sharing copies with historical societies, local bar associations, or legal archives that may be interested in preserving them.

A Final Plea: Don't Wait

I have seen firsthand how these tapes are deteriorating, and I am not alone. Many of you may assume that the footage you or your family recorded decades ago is safe, sitting on a shelf. But by the time you finally take a look, it may be too late.

As judges, we value history—not just legal history, but the personal and professional narratives that shape our institutions. We have a unique opportunity, right now, to rescue and preserve these pieces of the past before they are gone forever.

Whether it's a judicial investiture, a holiday dinner, or a speech given at a retirement ceremony, these moments matter. Let's ensure that future generations will be able to see, hear, and learn from them.

Time is running out—but if we act now, we can save these memories before they disappear forever.

CCJSCA Executive Committee

Frankie J. Moore, President, *Nebraska Court of Appeals, District 6*

Mark V. Green (ret.), President-elect, *Massachusetts Appeals Court*

Dori Contreras (ret.), Vice President, *Thirteenth Court of Appeals, Texas*

H. Bruce Williams, Secretary/Treasurer, *South Carolina Court of Appeals*

Mark D. Pfeiffer, Past President, *Missouri Court of Appeals, Western District*

Karen Arnold-Burger, *Kansas Court of Appeals*

Darlene Byrne, *Texas Court of Appeals, Third District*

Michele Christiansen Forster, *Utah Court of Appeals*

Nelly Khouzam, *Second District Court of Appeal, Florida*

Gregory Orme, *Utah Court of Appeals*

Gilbert Roman, *Colorado Court of Appeals*

CCJSCA Newsletter Committee

Gregory Orme, Chair, *Utah Court of Appeals*

Jessica Lorello, Vice Chair, *Idaho Court of Appeals*

Tracy Christopher, Vice Chair, *Fourteenth Court of Appeals, Texas*

Jay Cohen (ret.), *Fifth District Court of Appeal, Florida*

Randall Howe, *Arizona Court of Appeals, Division One*

The Newsletter Committee encourages our judges to share our newsletter with members of their bench.

