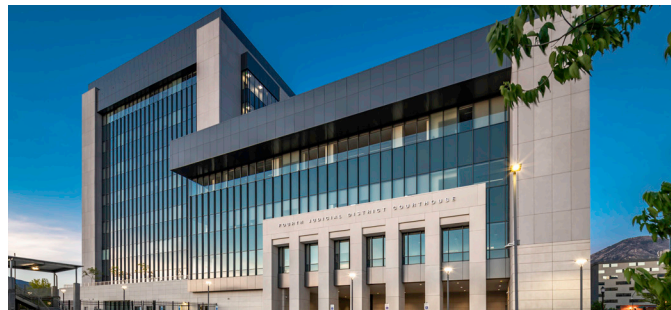
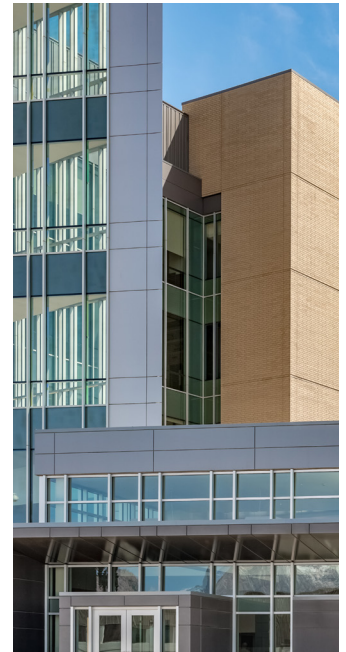


# Utah Judiciary Strategic Plan



2026-2029





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Chief Justice Matthew B. Durrant

## Message from the Chief

Utah is nationally renowned for its legal system. But to continue our reputation for excellence, we must commit to doing more and constantly improve the system we have. When people come within the walls of a courthouse, they are entitled to an environment that is professional, respectful, and impartial. They will find court staff who are knowledgeable, helpful, and committed to assisting with the judicial process in an efficient and culturally competent manner. They will also find judges who listen carefully and respectfully, treating every individual with dignity. Our judges take an oath to decide cases based on the facts presented, reasoned argument, and established law—without regard to personal characteristics such as socioeconomic status, political beliefs, or identity. Every person can expect to be heard and to receive a fair and impartial decision, free from bias or external influence. These values are at the heart of how we serve the public each day—and they also form the foundation of our future direction.

It is my great privilege to introduce the Utah Judiciary's Three-Year Strategic Plan, a comprehensive vision that will guide our courts in ensuring justice for all Utahns and build upon the excellence we have already achieved. The Judiciary plays a critical role in upholding the rule of law, safeguarding constitutional rights, and fostering public trust. Our strategic priorities reflect our commitment to being an open, fair, inclusive, and efficient Judiciary that serves all individuals with integrity and excellence.

### **An Open Judiciary**

Transparency and accessibility are essential to public trust. The Utah Judiciary is committed to ensuring that court procedures, decisions, and operations are open and understandable to all. Through increased access to information, expanded digital resources, and community engagement, we will continue to operate responsibly and ensure that every Utahn has meaningful access to the courts.

### **A Fair Judiciary**

Impartiality is at the heart of justice. Our Judiciary must remain free of bias in its actions, procedures, and decisions. Building on the foundation of past efforts, including the 1996 Utah Task Force on Racial and Ethnic Fairness and the establishment of the Office of Fairness and Accountability in 2021, we reaffirm our dedication to eliminating bias, enhancing procedural fairness, and fostering trust in the legal system for all Utahns.

### **An Inclusive Judiciary**

Justice must be welcoming and accessible to all individuals, regardless of background, language, ability, or identity. Our strategic plan prioritizes inclusivity by expanding culturally responsive programs, improving language access, and ensuring that all court users feel respected and accommodated. We are dedicated to fostering a Judiciary that serves the diverse needs of Utah's communities.

### **An Efficient Judiciary**

Timely and fair resolution of legal matters is fundamental to justice. We are committed to adopting best practices, leveraging technology, and implementing evidence-based methodologies to enhance efficiency while maintaining the highest standards of judicial integrity. Virtual hearings, electronic filing, and modernized case management systems are just a few of the initiatives aimed at ensuring a responsive and effective judicial system.

The Utah Judiciary is steadfast in its mission to administer justice fairly and efficiently. This strategic plan reflects our dedication to continuous improvement, innovation, and service to the people of Utah. I look forward to working alongside our judicial colleagues, legal partners, and the community to bring this vision to life.





# Overview

Beginning in 1996, the Judicial Council’s Utah Task Force on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Legal System conducted a comprehensive review of the Utah criminal justice system to examine issues of racial and ethnic fairness. The Task Force published a final report that included suggestions to address equity issues found within the judicial branch. A quarter-century later, the Judiciary is reflecting on the progress made since those efforts and looking toward the future.

In 2021, the Judicial Council established the Office of Fairness and Accountability, charging it — through the Committee on Fairness and Accountability — with developing a strategic plan to address bias and inequity in the judicial system. Under the applicable Rules of Judicial Administration, this strategic plan must include “the Judiciary’s goals and policy directives for meeting the court’s mission for the open, fair, and efficient administration of justice under the law while also being responsive to the state’s cultural, ethnic, socioeconomic, linguistic, physical, gender, and age diversities. Branch efforts in this regard will strive to eliminate bias and the appearance of bias, meet the needs of increasing numbers of self-represented litigants, remain receptive to the needs of all branch constituents, ensure that court procedures are fair and understandable, and provide culturally responsive programs and services.”

To develop this plan, the Committee on Fairness and Accountability convened a Strategic Plan Drafting Committee composed of employees and judges from every court level and district around the State. This committee has created the goals, strategies, and action items necessary to help the Judiciary meet its mission. By formalizing a strategic plan, the Judiciary can assess areas for improvement, set clear objectives, and advance its mission while upholding our commitment to excellence.

## MISSION

*To provide an open, fair, efficient, and independent system for the advancement of justice under the law.*

## JUDICIARY VALUES

### Uphold the Rule of Law

The Judiciary applies the law equally to institutions, entities, and individuals.

### Independent

The Judiciary is an independent, self-governing branch of government, which acts in accordance with the law at every level to make impartial decisions that are free from improper influence or pressure.

### Open

The Judiciary operates transparently and responsibly and is accessible to all.

### Fair

The Judiciary is impartial and free of bias in its actions, procedures, and decisions.

### Inclusive

The Judiciary provides a respectful, welcoming, and accommodating environment for all.

### Efficient

The Judiciary ensures the fair and timely resolution of all matters by adopting and utilizing best practices, technology, and evidence-based methodologies to serve all court uses.



## Promoting Public Trust and Confidence

The Utah Judiciary is dedicated to upholding its constitutional duty to provide open courts that resolve disputes, interpret and apply the law, and safeguard the constitutional rights of all Utahns. The effectiveness of this role relies on maintaining public trust and confidence, as well as fostering strong relationships with the other branches of government. To uphold that trust, the Judiciary is committed to transparent communication, active community engagement, and exemplary service to the people of Utah.



### GOAL 1

*Discern public opinion regarding the Judiciary and its processes and implement changes where necessary*

**Strategy 1:** Gather and assess current public opinion

**Strategy 2:** Create opportunities for ongoing feedback

### GOAL 2

*Communicate more effectively with the public and increase public outreach and education*

**Strategy 1:** Increase utility of the public website

**Strategy 2:** Increase opportunities for public outreach by courts in each district

**Strategy 3:** Increase engagement with schools

**Strategy 4:** Increase engagement with the media

### GOAL 3

*Improve and expand training for all court staff and judicial officers to enhance consistency and efficiency throughout the State to improve service to the public*

**Strategy 1:** Enhance and expand current training and practices to ensure exemplary service

### GOAL 4

*Increase opportunities for strategic engagement with other branches of government*

**Strategy 1:** Continue engagement and identify new ways to engage with other branches of government

**Strategy 2:** Increase opportunities for engagement with Tribal Nations



## COMMITMENT TWO

### Increasing Access to Justice

Many obstacles hinder the promise of equal justice under the law. These challenges include the complexity of legal and judicial systems, difficulties faced by self-represented litigants, language barriers, and perceptions of bias and unfairness in governmental institutions. The Utah Judiciary is committed to reviewing and improving court processes and rules to expand access to justice. By actively seeking and addressing feedback from court patrons and community members, the Judiciary will hold itself accountable for removing barriers and ensuring equal access to justice for all.



#### GOAL 1

##### *Address immediate barriers to accessing the judicial system*

**Strategy 1:** Employ strategies to increase the understanding of court rules and procedures by non-law trained individuals

**Strategy 2:** Enhance our service culture

#### GOAL 2

##### *Create accountability mechanisms for expanding court access and increase our capacity to improve while balancing sustainability of operations*

**Strategy 1:** Invite community members to provide input to help us find ways to increase access to justice and continually solicit feedback from community members about court processes and their impact on the community and access to justice





## COMMITMENT THREE

### Ensuring Constitutional Openness

Utah's judicial system is designed to be fair and accessible to everyone. Utah's Constitutional Declaration of Rights declares that courts shall be open and that every person shall have remedy under the law without denial or delay. To uphold this principle, the Judiciary must identify and systematically eliminate practices that result in disparate treatment. These practices may exist in various areas including courthouse facilities, juror selection, access to legal resources, hiring procedures, and employee retention strategies. By gathering data in these areas, the Judiciary remains responsive to Utah's evolving community needs and ensures equal treatment for all who interact with the judicial system.



#### GOAL 1

##### *Advance a fair and inclusive judiciary*

**Strategy 1:** Identify practices and conditions that may create or contribute to disparate treatment and outcomes

**Strategy 2:** Identify existing data on demographics and create processes to enhance collection of demographic data

**Strategy 3:** Eliminate practices that create or contribute to disparate outcomes and implement practices that are just and equitable for all

#### GOAL 2

##### *Provide equal opportunities for all employees*

**Strategy 1:** Promote fair hiring practices in recruitment efforts

**Strategy 2:** Expand employee retention efforts

**Strategy 3:** Support efforts to increase and broaden the applicant pool for judicial positions

#### GOAL 3

##### *Provide resources to understand and mitigate bias*

**Strategy 1:** Expand training and educational opportunities in areas that contribute to fair treatment and outcomes



Judicial Council  
Members

Chief Justice Matthew B. Durrant  
*Chair, Utah Supreme Court*

Judge David N. Mortensen  
*Vice Chair, Utah Court of Appeals*

Judge Suchada Bazzelle  
*Fourth District Juvenile Court*

Judge Brian Brower  
*Clearfield, Sunset, and Morgan County Justice Courts*

Judge Jon Carpenter  
*Carbon County, Wellington City, and East Carbon Justice Courts*

Judge Samuel Chiara  
*Eighth District Court*

Judge Rita Cornish  
*Business and Chancery Court*

Judge Michael DiReda  
*Second District Court*

Judge Susan Eisenman  
*Third District Juvenile Court*

Judge Angela Foncesbeck  
*First District Court*

Judge James Gardner  
*Third District Court*

Judge Michael Leavitt  
*Fifth District Juvenile Court*

Judge Thomas Low  
*Fourth District Court*

Judge Brendan McCullagh  
*West Valley City Justice Court*

Judge Amber Mettler  
*Third District Court*

Justice Paige Petersen  
*Utah Supreme Court*

Katie Woods  
*Utah State Bar*

Ron Gordon  
*Staff, State Court Administrator, Administrative Office of the Courts*

Strategic Plan Drafting  
Committee

Judge Michele Christiansen Forster  
*Chair, Court of Appeals*

Judge Monica Diaz  
*Chair, Third District Juvenile Court*

Neira Siaperas  
*Chair, Deputy State Court Administrator*

Holly Albrecht  
*Facilities Coordinator*

Lauren Andersen  
*Director of Utah Judicial Institute*

Shane Bahr  
*District Court Administrator*

Tricia Bradshaw  
*Clerk of Court*

Sherrone Braegger  
*Probation Officer*

Miranda Buchanan  
*Probation Supervisor*

Spencer Cottle  
*Chief Probation Officer*

Judge Dianna Gibson  
*Third District Court*

Alicia Espinoza  
*Language Access Program Coordinator*

Marketa Heslop  
*Judicial Case Manager*

Judge Eric Jewell  
*Payson, Santaquin, Genola, and Goshen Justice Courts*

Bryson King  
*Associate General Counsel*

Janine Liebert  
*Director of Self-Help Center & Law Library*

Kristy Martinez  
*Clerk of Court*

Tania Mashburn  
*Director of Communications*

Brielle McCourt  
*Judicial Assistant*

Judge Richard Mrazik  
*Third District Court*

Zerina Ocanovic  
*Juvenile Court Management Analyst*

Bart Olsen  
*Director of Human Resources*

Jim Peters  
*Justice Court Administrator*

Nathanael Player  
*Former Self-Help Center & Law Library Director*

Tiffany Power  
*Trial Court Executive*

Jonathan Puente  
*Director of Office of Fairness and Accountability*

Kapiolani Smith  
*Judicial Team Manager*

Nick Stiles  
*Appellate Court Administrator*

Cade Stubbs  
*Trial Court Executive*

Karl Sweeney  
*Director of Finance*

Sonia Sweeney  
*Juvenile Court Administrator*

Erin York  
*Judicial Team Manager*

Office of Fairness  
and Accountability

Jonathan Puente  
*Director of Office of Fairness and Accountability*

Jessica Leavitt  
*Language Access Program Manager*

Abram Sherrod  
*Public Outreach and Education Coordinator*

Abby Padovich  
*Language Access Program Coordinator*

Alicia Espinoza Rodriguez  
*Language Access Program Coordinator*

Committee on Fairness  
and Accountability

Justice Jill Pohlman  
*Chair, Utah Supreme Court*

Judge Monica Diaz  
*Third District Juvenile Court*

Lauren Andersen  
*Director of Utah Judicial Institute*

Judge Renee Jimenez  
*Senior Judge*

Bryson King  
*Associate General Counsel*

Tania Mashburn  
*Director of Communication*

Shawn Newell  
*Public Member*

Jonathan Puente  
*Director of Office of Fairness and Accountability*

Judge Steven Roth  
*Retired Judge*

Tucker Samuelsen  
*Director of Data and Research*

Judge Todd Shaughnessy  
*Third District Court*

Abram Sherrod  
*Public Outreach and Education Coordinator*

Judge Bill Thorne  
*Retired Judge*

Judge Danalee Welch-O'Donnal  
*Moab Justice Court*

Justice Michael Zimmerman  
*Retired*







Administrative Office of the Courts  
Scott M. Matheson Courthouse  
450 South State Street  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84111  
801-578-3800 | [www.utcourts.gov](http://www.utcourts.gov)