

AZ JUDICIAL CONFERENCE

Task Force on Public Communication Update



TASK FORCE ON PUBLIC COMMUNICATION UPDATE

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Task Force on Public Communications

2026 Arizona Judicial Conference
Arizona Supreme Court



Presenters

James P. Beene

Justice
Arizona Supreme Court
Chair, Task Force on Public
Communication



Maria Elena Cruz

Justice
Arizona Supreme
Court



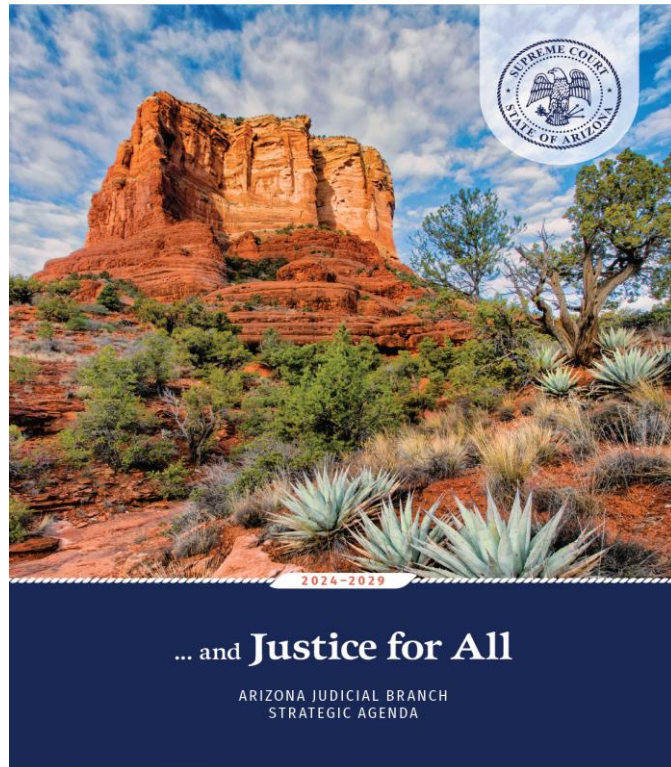
Pat Norris

Retired Judge
Arizona Court
of Appeals



Task Force on Public Communications

Chief Justice's Five-Year Strategic Agenda



Goal Two: Maintaining Public Trust & Confidence

The judicial branch is acutely aware of the knowledge and trust gap that exists nationwide and in Arizona regarding the role of the courts and the wide variety of court programs available.

2.1 (A): Develop a communications plan and create a task force to recommend ways to increase public awareness and improve understanding and perception of the judicial branch using various forums such as social media, public access links, and judicial involvement in public speaking opportunities.

2.2(A): Continue to be proactive in addressing misinformation and disinformation, providing information on the three branches of government and on the limited role of the courts under the separation-of-powers structure.

2.2(D): Offer training for the media on how to access and read judicial information.

Task Force on Public Communications

The **Task Force on Public Communications** was established by Chief Justice Ann A. Scott Timmer on September 12, 2024, by Administrative Order No. 2024-181.

A knowledge and trust gap currently exists nationwide and in Arizona regarding the role of courts, the meaning of court decisions, and the wide variety of court programs available.

The Task Force shall:

- a. Develop a platform for timely reporting on significant rulings and court decisions that affect Arizonans. The platform should include various media, including video, social media, and public access links, and communicate in a manner designed to reach as many people as possible.
- b. Examine and recommend ways to increase public awareness of the Arizona courts' role in our democracy and to improve understanding and perception of the judicial branch. This examination should include exploring the usefulness of video or audio podcasts, any interaction with secondary and adult education, and how to promote judicial involvement in public speaking and listening opportunities.
- d. Recommend the best way to offer training for the media on how to access and read judicial information.
- e. Examine and recommend the need for a permanent committee dedicated to assisting the courts with public communication.

Task Force on Public Communications



The Task Force's Work

- Created working groups to address the topics of the Administrative Order
- “Listening Sessions”
- Arizona Courts and Media Survey

Task Force on Public Communications

The Task Force's Final Report



Recommendation 1: Establish a permanent, standing commission that will establish communication and public outreach goals, policies, priorities, programs, and strategies for Arizona courts.

Recommendation 4: Direct the permanent commission to coordinate with the Foundation on programs designed to improve public awareness of and trust in the Arizona judicial system.

Continued -

Task Force on Public Communications

The Task Force's Final Report - Continued



Recommendation 5: Direct the permanent commission to develop ongoing training programs to educate members of the media regarding the operation and work of state courts at all levels, including general and limited jurisdiction courts.

Recommendation 6: Direct the permanent commission to develop ongoing training programs for court personnel regarding public outreach and best practices in working with members of the media and the public.

The Commission on Public Communications

How to educate the public about the courts?

- Advisory Board
- Forward Looking, Independent, and Evidence-Based Work

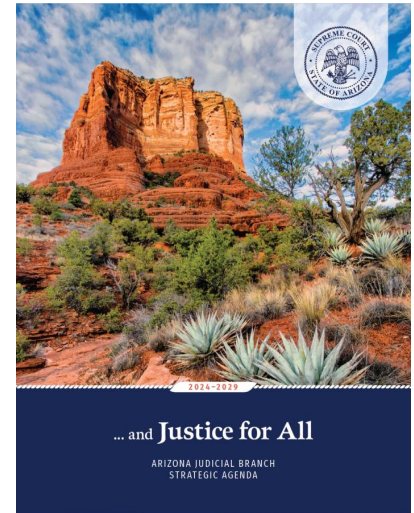
*Strengthens the public's understanding of our work
and builds trust in the judiciary.*

The Commission on Public Communications



Social Media Presence

- Judicial Influencer
- Daniel and Victoria, AI Court Reporters
- Bar Exam Tips from Justices
- Go Cats! Audience Engagement

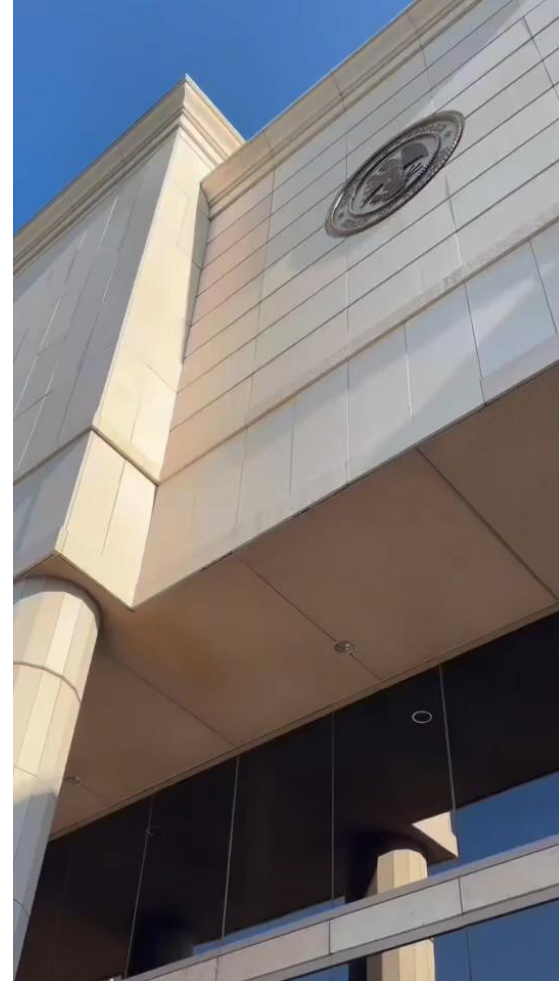


New Communication Idea(s)

- News Releases for Court Opinions

The Judicial Influencer

Concept: The Judicial Influencer
Host: Judge Maria Elena Cruz



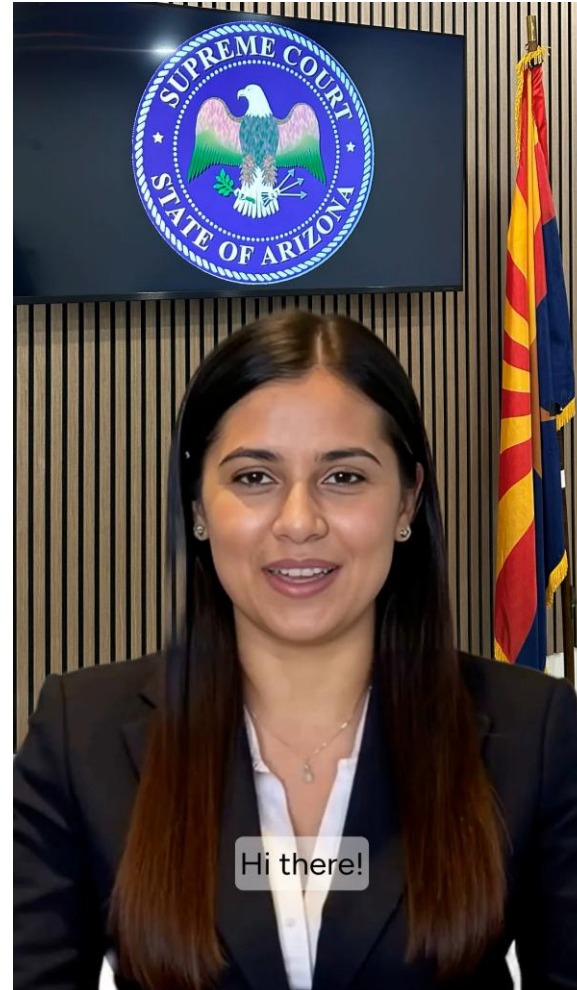
Long Form Podcasting – Bench Talk AZ



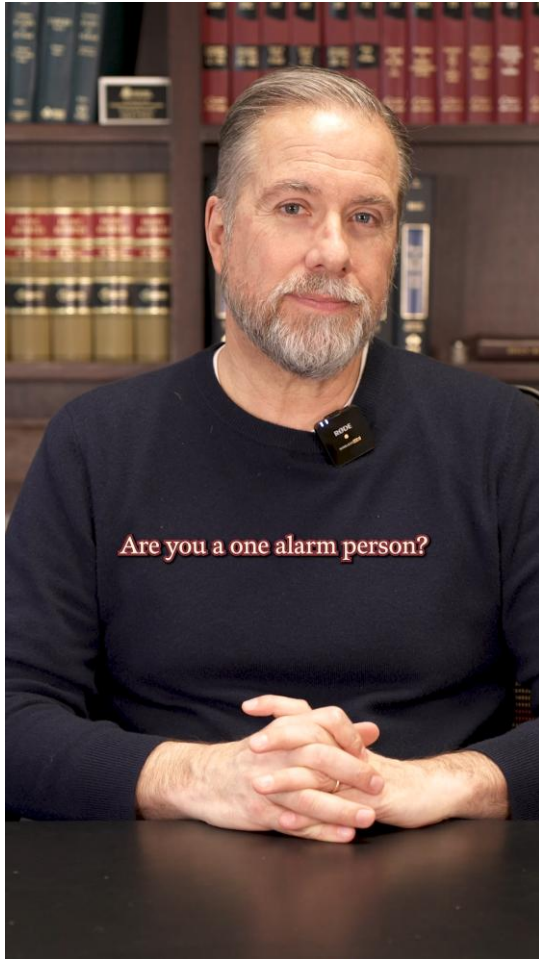
Topic: Rule of Law
Guest: Tom Zlaket, Former Justice

Utilizing AI – Meet Victoria

Victoria
AI Court Reporter



Bar Exam Pep Talk With The Justices



**February Bar Exam Prep
Public Engagement**

Topical Content – U of A Final Four

Go Cats!
Final Four Cheer Squad
UofA Alumni



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Arizona Supreme Court Newsroom

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Supreme Court Says One-Year Limitations Statute Does Not Apply to Claims Brought by Public Entities
AZCourts

The case arose from a dispute between the City of Chandler and the Roosevelt Water Conservation District concerning a 2002 water service agreement.

[News Release](#) | [Full Opinion](#)

April 28, 2026

Court Says Third-Party Statements Can Count as Harassment
AZCourts

[News Release](#) | [Full Opinion](#)

April 28, 2026

Court Rules Arizona Business Qualifies for "Processing Operation" Use Tax Exemption
AZCourts

[News Release](#) | [Full Opinion](#)

March 3, 2026

Chief Justice Ann Scott Timmer's Remarks During Arizona Supreme Court Rule of Law Day 2026
AZCourts

Chief Justice Ann Timmer speaks on the Rule of Law and the nation's semi quinquennial—the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence during the Supreme Court's Arizona Rule of Law Day.

View the entire event [here](#).

>> More videos: [YouTube Court News Playlist](#)

Latest News Releases

| Date | Title |
|-----------|--|
| 5/4/2026 | Applications Being Accepted for Two Vacancies on Superior Court in Maricopa County |
| 5/1/2026 | Judicial Nominees Announced for Opening on Superior Court in Pima County |
| 4/28/2026 | Court Says One-Year Limitations Statute Does Not Apply to Claims Brought by Public Entities |
| 4/27/2026 | Arizona Supreme Court Says Third-Party Statements Can Count as Harassment |
| 4/24/2026 | Arizona Supreme Court Justice and Administrative Director Honored for Service and Leadership |

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Podcasts: Bench Talk AZ

| Date | Title |
|-----------|--|
| 4/16/2026 | ABS Program Highlight: Episode 2 |
| 4/2/2026 | ABS Program Highlight: Episode 1 |
| 3/12/2026 | The Rule of Law: Episode 3 |
| 2/26/2026 | The Rule of Law: Episode 2 |
| 2/12/2026 | The Rule of Law: Episode 1 |
| 5/1/2025 | Law Day 2025 |

AI Podcasts: Supreme Court Programs

| Date | Title |
|-----------|---|
| 9/19/2025 | \$40 Million in Juvenile Debt Wiped Clean in Arizona Courts |
| 6/03/2025 | 2024 Arizona Judicial Data Report |
| 3/20/2025 | 2024 Arizona Youth Violence Summary Report |

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Arizona Supreme Court Newsroom

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News Releases

NEWS RELEASE

Arizona Supreme Court
Administrative Office of the Courts

Contact: Alberto Rodriguez
Phone: 602-452-3656
Email: arodriguez@courts.az.gov



Apr. 27, 2026

Arizona Supreme Court Says Third-Party Statements Can Count as Harassment

PHOENIX – The Arizona Supreme Court today ruled that statements made to third parties can count as harassment of another person under Arizona law when those statements are meant to cause harm to that person.

The case, *Hernandez v. Loarca*, involved Briana Hernandez and Luis Arturo Loarca, who share a daughter and have been involved in family court proceedings for years. Hernandez asked for an order of protection against Loarca, saying he harassed her by making harmful statements about her to her daughter's teacher and school principal, where Hernandez also worked.

According to the record, Loarca told the teacher that Hernandez "despises" her and thought she was not a good teacher. In a separate incident, he sent the principal information about Hernandez helping their daughter with a book report. After that, Hernandez received a written warning at work.

The Supreme Court said Arizona's harassment law does not only apply to statements made directly to a person. The justices explained that statements made to third parties can also be "directed at" a person if they are intended to cause an adverse result for that person, such as trouble at work.

Chief Justice Ann Timmer, writing for the Court, said that the law focuses on who the conduct targets, not just who hears the words.

The Court concluded that the trial court did not abuse its discretion by finding that Loarca's statements were aimed at Hernandez and were intended to cause problems for her at her job.

The Court vacated the court of appeals' opinion and sent the case back to that court to decide issues it had not yet addressed.

All the justices joined in the opinion.

###

This summary is intended solely to notify the public about an Arizona Supreme Court Opinion. It is not to be considered an official commentary by the Court or any member of the Court, nor may it be cited as legal authority for any reason or purpose. The full Opinion is available [here](#) for those seeking details about the Court's reasoning.

To learn more about Arizona's judicial branch, visit azcourts.gov. Follow @AZCourts on Instagram and YouTube and @ArizonaSupremeCourt on Facebook.



The Committee on Public Communications



What Can You Do?

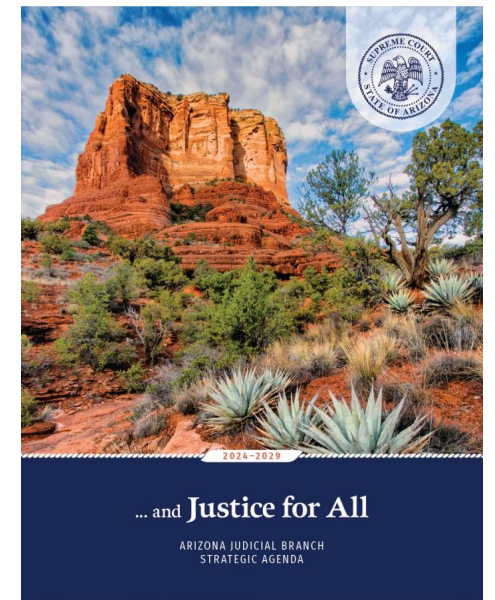
- Create Social Media Presence
- Add SM Accounts to Website
- Use the Successful Public Communications Campaign Guide
- Reference the Guardrails
- Identify SM Content Creator



Brainstorming Together

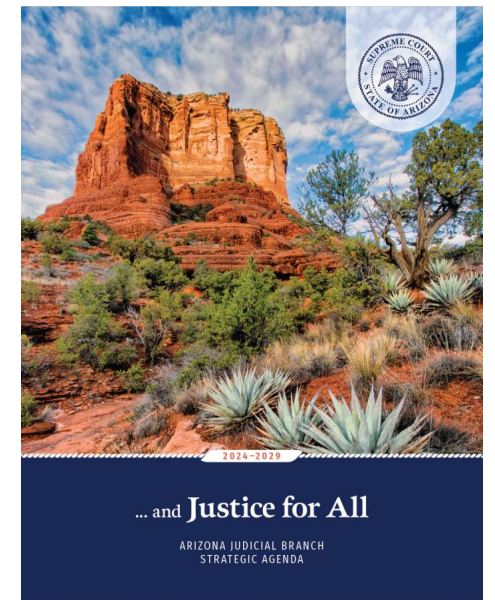
Thinking Locally

What programs can **you** implement on a local basis, now, that would address the “knowledge and trust gaps” in Arizona regarding the work of the courts?



Brainstorming Together

We have been discussing programs you and your courts can implement that would explain to the public what you and your courts do. What could the Arizona Supreme Court's new Advisory Committee on Public Communications do to help you strategize about these programs?



Questions?

Follow us on ...



and how to promote judicial involvement in public speaking and listening opportunities.

- c. Recommend the best way to structure and offer a civics academy to educate the public about the role and operations of the judicial branch.
 - d. Recommend the best way to offer training for the media on how to access and read judicial information.
 - e. Examine and recommend the need for a permanent committee dedicated to assisting the courts with public communications.
 - f. Examine and recommend the utility of assembling a Junior Council comprised of middle-school and/or high school students to advise the Task Force and any permanent committee as needed on the best way to communicate with children and young adults about courts.
 - g. In the Chair's discretion, consider and recommend other changes promoting effective communication with and education of the public.
3. The Task Force may present recommendations to the Chief Justice as they are finalized. Nevertheless, the Task Force shall present an interim report and recommendations to the Chief Justice by May 1, 2025. The Task Force shall present a final report and recommendations to the Chief Justice by December 1, 2025.
 4. The individuals listed in Appendix A are appointed as members of the Task Force effective immediately and ending December 31, 2025. The Chief Justice may appoint additional members as necessary.
 5. Task Force meetings shall be scheduled at the discretion of the Chair. All meetings shall comply with the Arizona Code of Judicial Administration § 1-202: Public Meetings.
 6. The Administrative Office of the Courts shall provide staff for the Task Force and shall assist the Task Force in developing recommendations and preparing the reports.

Dated this 12th day of September, 2024.

ANN A. SCOTT TIMMER
Chief Justice



Arizona Supreme Court Task Force on Public Communications Membership List

Chair

Hon. James Beene

Arizona Supreme Court
Justice

Members

Crystal Alvarez

Arizona State University Cronkite School
Instructor, Digital Marketing
& Multimedia Production

Barrett Beall

High Ground Public Affairs
Sr. Account Executive,
Social Media & Public Relations

David Bodney

Ballard Spahr
Senior Partner

Hon. Maria Elena Cruz

Arizona Court of Appeals, Div. One
Judge

Scott Davis

Phoenix Justice Courts
Public Information Officer

Jessica Fotinos

Office of the Maricopa County Court Clerk
PIO/Legal Counsel

Gabriel Gamiño

Alhambra School District
Community Outreach & Communications
Director

Murphy Hebert

Arizona Secretary of State
Deputy Assistant SOS

Chris Kline

Arizona Media Association
President & CEO

Hon. Laine McDonald

Town of Marana
Magistrate

Hon. Patricia Norris

Retired Judge

Ossman Padilla

Telemundo Arizona
Community Relations Director

Chris Parkinson

C. Parkinson Media/Coash Court
Reporting
Video Producer

Alberto Rodriguez

Arizona Supreme Court
Communications Director

Lara Slifko

Arizona Bar Foundation
Chief Operating Officer

Mark Weaver

Communications Counsel
Lawyer and Communications
Professional

Task Force on Public Communication

Final Report – December 1, 2025

Executive Summary

I. Creation and Charge of the Task Force

On September 12, 2024, Chief Justice Ann A. Scott Timmer issued Administrative Order No. 2024-181, which established the Task Force on Public Communications. The administrative order rested on the premise that a “knowledge and trust gap currently exists nationwide and in Arizona regarding the role of courts, the meaning of court decisions, and the wide variety of court programs available.” The administrative order acknowledged Arizona’s judicial branch had “traditionally been reluctant” to discuss its work and decisions with the public and had “not kept up with current ways many people get their information and news”—which, the administrative order noted, had allowed others outside the judicial branch to provide incomplete, misleading, or simply inaccurate information about the work and role of the judicial branch. To address the knowledge and trust gap, the administrative order concluded it was time for the judicial branch to “act proactively to increase the public’s awareness of the constitutional role of the judicial branch and to ensure that information provided about courts, court decisions, and court programs is easily accessible, timely, relevant, and accurate.”

Accordingly, as abbreviated, the administrative order directed the task force to:

- a. Develop a platform for timely reporting on significant rulings and court decisions that affect Arizonans.
- b. Examine and recommend ways to increase public awareness of the Arizona courts’ role in our democracy and improve understanding and perception of the judicial branch, which would include exploring the usefulness of video or audio podcasts,

- interaction with secondary and adult education, and ways to promote judicial involvement in public speaking and listening opportunities.
- c. Recommend the best way to structure and offer a civics academy to educate the public about the role and operations of the judicial branch.
 - d. Recommend the best way to offer training for the media on how to access and read judicial information.
 - e. Examine and recommend the utility of assembling a junior council comprised of middle school and/or high school students to advise the task force and any permanent committee as needed on the best way to communicate with children and young adults about courts.
 - f. Consider and recommend, at the Chair’s discretion, other changes that would promote effective communication and education of the public about the work and role of the courts.
 - g. Submit a report and recommendation to the Chief Justice by December 1, 2025.

II. Summary of Recommendations

Beginning in October 2024, and throughout 2025, the task force met on a regular basis to explore, investigate, and discuss the issues and topics identified by the administrative order. As discussed below, the task force reviewed materials and information prepared by or obtained from third parties, met with representatives of organizations involved in educating the public about the work of the courts and the availability of legal services, met with judicial officers, surveyed court personnel and members of the media regarding their interactions concerning court activities and proceedings, and held several “listening sessions” with members of the public regarding their perception of Arizona courts and their work.

In summary, based on its work over the past year, the task force submits the following recommendations to the Chief Justice, which for brevity, are abbreviated:

1. Establish a permanent, standing commission that will implement, supervise, and develop the public outreach and programs identified, discussed, and recommended in this report.
2. Direct the Administrative Office of the Courts to hire one full-time employee (“the FTE”) who will be assigned, on a full-time basis (unless otherwise assigned by the Chief Justice) to the permanent commission and who will be responsible, subject to guidance from the commission, for implementing the task force’s recommendations and commission’s programs on a day-to-day basis.
3. Direct the permanent commission to structure, establish, and work with a youth council comprised of Arizona high school and college students.
4. Direct the permanent commission to be responsible for coordinating with the Arizona Foundation for Legal Services & Education (“the Foundation”) to improve public awareness of and trust in the Arizona judicial system.
5. Direct the permanent commission to develop ongoing training programs to educate and confer with members of the media regarding the operation and work of state courts at all levels.
6. Direct the permanent commission to develop ongoing training programs for court personnel regarding public outreach and best practices in working with members of the media.
7. Amend Code of Judicial Conduct Rule 1.2 to include in the text of Rule 1.2 the text of comment 6 to that rule which encourages judges to initiate and participate in

activities for the purpose of promoting public understanding of and confidence in the administration of justice.

Report and Recommendations

I. The Task Force and its Work

Beginning in October 2024, the task force met on a regular basis to explore, investigate, and discuss the issues and topics identified by the administrative order. In doing so, members of the task force reviewed and discussed an August 2024 report prepared by the Conference of Chief Justices and the Conference of State Court Administrators, with significant assistance from the National Center for State Courts, *Beyond Civics Education* (“the Report”).¹ Based on polling data and discussions at in-person and online focus groups involving participants from across the United States in 2023, the authors of the Report concluded there is a disconnect between the judiciary and members of the public. Those associated with the judicial branch view their services as fair and impartial, while those outside the branch question whether the justice system is truly fair and impartial. The Report found the publicized political battles, controversies, and ethical concerns involving the federal judiciary taint the public’s perception of state courts. The Report further stated that public trust in courts and their work has continued to decline as Americans increasingly see courts as political and partisan. The Report also explained the public frequently found the judicial branch bureaucratic, difficult to navigate and understand, uninformative, not user friendly, and out of touch with the people and local communities it serves.

¹ Jesse Rutledge, Vice President of Public Affairs for the National Center for State Court, also met with the task force and discussed in more detail the Report’s findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

Of significance to the work of the task force, the Report recommended that state courts implement four initiatives to address the foregoing realities: First, educate the public that state courts—comprised of state and local residents—are distinct from the federal courts; second, explain that, unlike Article III federal judges, state court judges are not appointed for life, are usually accountable to state citizens, hold proceedings generally open to the public, and are subject to ethical standards that are, in fact, enforced; third, take proactive steps to publicize the work of state courts, particularly efforts addressing problems faced by large segments of the public; and fourth, improve communication with the public. The Report stressed the importance of ensuring that the judiciary communicates with the public using modern information platforms and technologies.

In addition to the Report, the task force considered the 2024 Arizona Media Study, which was a study prepared for the Arizona Media Association that surveyed the current landscape of media in Arizona and interviewed thousands of Arizonans to assess how Arizona consumers use media.² The Arizona Media Study found Arizonans consume media and information from multiple platforms, commonly relying on local TV, radio, and print media in addition to digital sources. Arizonans also subscribe to national streaming subscription services but may be pulling back from these services due to increasing costs. Most importantly, nearly 50% of Arizonans have “high trust” in local news and 86% have a neutral or higher opinion of local news. Across age groups and disparate political affiliations, Arizonans perceive local TV, AM/FM radio, and newspapers as the most truthful and factual media.

In Spring 2025, several members of the task force held “listening sessions” with individuals primarily uninvolved in the state judicial system (friends, colleagues, students,

² Task force member Chris Klein distributed the Arizona Media Study to the task force.

members of the media/news professionals, etc.) to find out how they perceive the Arizona judicial system and the work of the courts. Observations from these participants reflected the factual premise of the administrative order and the Report’s findings and conclusions.

Overall, the participants demonstrated limited knowledge regarding the work of Arizona courts and the differences between the various state courts (municipal, justice, superior, and appellate courts). They viewed state courts as having “low touch engagement” with the public, which in turn creates an “invisible barrier” that makes the judicial system seem inaccessible and out of touch. They found it difficult to obtain information about what the courts do, furthering the perceived disconnect between the courts and the communities they serve. The participants characterized court communications as “lacking clarity,” riddled with legal jargon, and unintelligible to the average person. The participants also indicated that their perception of the federal judiciary, including the decisions and controversies involving the United States Supreme Court, shaped their perception of the state courts. Further, even those participants who believed Arizona courts were generally fair and nonpartisan nevertheless believed the Arizona judicial system was complicated, bureaucratic, and difficult to understand.

The participants agreed – almost unanimously – that the judicial branch should implement several initiatives that would help rebuild public trust in the courts. Participants emphasized the importance of using plain, accessible language in court communications, providing simplified and centralized access to legal information, and opening avenues for the public to directly ask questions about navigating the legal system through different platforms like social media or chat functions. Participants suggested holding community workshops to educate the public about the role and work of the courts and the differences between local, state, and federal courts, sponsoring court-run citizen academies where the public could directly interact

with judicial personnel in informal environments, developing interactive civics courses, and expanding public outreach efforts to popular platforms. Participants also suggested restructuring and modernizing court websites to be more intuitive and user-friendly. Streamlining these channels of communication would make it easier for groups already engaged in court-related “discourse” (like legal professionals and members of the media) to accurately report on the activities, initiatives, and opinions of the courts. Finally, one of the most notable suggestions was to humanize the work of the courts and judicial officers, who are often considered “invisible” to the public, through community outreach programs and through stories in court communications that focus on real life, everyday experiences (think, “A Day in the Life of a Municipal Court Judge”).

The task force discussed the observations and suggestions made by the participants at the listening sessions and unanimously agreed that judicial officers and court personnel should be encouraged to participate in activities and programs to educate members of their communities on the work of the courts and that these efforts would go a long way in improving public trust in the courts. The task force discussed and evaluated a variety of activities and programs that could achieve these objectives such as providing simplified and centralized access to legal information; holding community workshops to educate the public about the role and work of the courts; restructuring and modernizing court websites to be more informative, more intuitive, and user-friendly; using modern communication platforms, media, and other delivery technologies to address the knowledge and trust gaps; working with established organizations, most notably the Foundation³ which is already engaging young people in civic education programs and activities;

³ The Foundation is a public nonprofit Arizona corporation founded in 1978. Its mission is to promote "access to justice for all Arizonans" by providing technical and financial assistance to

establishing a youth council comprised of high school and college students which could participate in community outreach programs regarding the work of the courts and provide information to the permanent commission and members of the judiciary regarding community concerns and issues regarding the operation of the courts.

The task force also discussed establishing a civics academy to educate the public about the role and operations of the judicial branch. See Administrative Order ¶ 2(c). Such a program could include small group meetings with judicial officers, programs allowing members of the public to shadow a judicial officer, or opportunities to attend public court proceedings accompanied by informal informational sessions conducted by judicial officers who were not involved in the proceedings. The task force did not, however, decide to formally recommend the establishment of a civics academy because it concluded that, at this juncture, the permanent commission recommended above should be directed to establish such an academy and to develop curriculum and programs for the Academy that could be implemented by courts throughout the state.

To address the administrative order's directive to the task force that it identify "the best way to offer training for the media on how to access and read judicial information," Administrative Order ¶ 2, the task force surveyed members of the media regarding what

legal service providers and education entities and through partnerships and work with judges, attorneys, educators and all those committed to equal access to justice. The Foundation is exempt from federal income taxes under 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. The Foundation receives funding through federal and state grants, donor contributions, and from the IOTA program. The IOTA program was created by a rule adopted by the Arizona Supreme Court in 1984 that requires all lawyers who receive client funds in Arizona to maintain those monies in interest-bearing trust accounts, with the interest earned on the trust account funds remitted to the Foundation. The Foundation funds programs which provide legal services to the poor, supports law-related education programs designed to teach young people, educators, and other adults about the law, the legal process, and the legal system, and funds studies or programs designed to improve the administration of justice.

information the media needed and what the media’s biggest challenges were in accessing this information. Unfortunately, very few members of the media responded to the survey.

Nevertheless, the task force learned most media outlets do not have reporters that are specifically assigned to cover court proceedings and, instead, coverage is typically assigned to reporters on an ad hoc basis and who are not assigned to any specific substantive area. Knowledge of court processes and activities is, thus, uneven.

The task force also surveyed judicial officers and court personnel regarding their work with the media, and the training and resources they believed would help them more efficiently and effectively communicate with the media. The survey revealed court administrators and judges generally have a good comfort level in working with the media although many expressed an interest in training on media relations and handling difficult situations. A significant number of the respondents indicated they would attend media training sessions with topics of interest including access to court records, media trends, and best practices in working with the public, including individuals or groups skeptical about the impartiality and fairness of the courts.

II. The Task Force’s Division of Labor

Given the number of topics the administrative order directed the task force to address, the task force divided into three work groups: The “Newsroom” work group, chaired by Justice Maria Elena Cruz, which focused on administrative order ¶ 2(a); the Public Information and Education (“PIE”) work group, chaired by Judge Patricia K. Norris (Ret.), which focused on administrative order ¶¶ 2(b), (c), and (f); and the “Media” work group, chaired by Jessica Fotinos, which focused on administrative order ¶ 2(d). The work groups met separately throughout 2024 and 2025 to investigate, discuss, and consider initiatives regarding their assigned topics. The work groups reported to the task force on their work, and the task force

discussed in detail all recommendations from the work groups. The task force formally approved several of the work groups' recommendations, as detailed below.

III. Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Establish a permanent, standing commission that will establish communication and public outreach goals, policies, priorities, programs, and strategies for Arizona courts.

In the course of its work, the task force discussed prior efforts spearheaded by members of the Arizona Supreme Court to educate the public regarding the work and operation of Arizona courts. These prior efforts were, at best, sporadic and not institutionalized as a priority. If members of the state justice system are going to meaningfully address the “disconnect” between the courts and the public, outreach and education efforts must be institutionalized, ongoing, prioritized, and organized. Accordingly, the task force recommends the creation of a permanent, standing commission comprised of judicial officers, lawyers, members of the media, community members, and others as appointed by the Chief Justice, which will be responsible for establishing communication and public outreach goals, policies, priorities, programs, and strategies to build and maintain public trust for Arizona courts. The permanent commission should be directed to proactively provide planning, staffing, and other resources to courts throughout the state, including but not limited to all general and limited jurisdiction courts, which will allow these courts to implement outreach and education activities in their communities. The permanent commission should meet, at a minimum, every other month and be directed to provide an annual, written report to the Chief Justice or her designee regarding its activities, programs, progress, and work with general and limited jurisdiction courts.

Recommendation 2: Hire a full-time employee whose sole responsibility and assignment on a day-to-day basis, unless otherwise directed by the Chief Justice, will be to implement, under the direction of the commission, the commission’s goals, policies, priorities, programs, and strategies to build and maintain public trust in all Arizona courts.

Arizona courts work hard, help solve problems in their communities and are efficient. Judicial officers are accountable to the citizens of the state, and all judicial officers and court personnel are subject to ethical guidelines and requirements. Yet, as the administrative order recognized and as the task force confirmed, public trust is eroding. Arizona courts need to do a much better job of informing the public about their work and programs. But because of staffing constraints, this is generally not happening. The AOC communications team is stretched thin and the task force believes it will not be able to take on the additional responsibilities of working with the permanent commission to implement the task force’s recommendations. Although the task force appreciates and applauds the work of and initiatives undertaken by the AOC communications team,⁴ the reality is that, because of time and resource constraints, the communication team’s work is frequently centered only on the activities of the Arizona Supreme Court. Despite the communication team’s best efforts, it has only limited time to proactively work with other general and limited jurisdiction courts and court personnel throughout the state to provide programming and organizational assistance to these courts and their personnel.

Accordingly, the task force recommends AOC hire a one full-time employee (“the FTE”) who will be exclusively assigned, on a full-time basis, unless otherwise assigned by the Chief Justice, to implement, under the permanent commission’s direction, the permanent commission’s

⁴ See, for example, the Arizona Supreme Court Newsroom, and the written and video summaries (using AI “reporters”) of Arizona Supreme Court decisions.

goals, policies, priorities, programs, and strategies to build and maintain public trust in all Arizona courts.

Recommendation 3: Direct the permanent commission to structure, establish, and work with a youth council comprised of Arizona high school and college students which will participate in public outreach activities regarding the work of Arizona courts and provide input to the commission and other members of the judicial branch regarding activities and programs that will help improve public trust in the judicial branch.

Now more than ever, it is critically important to educate younger Arizonans regarding the work of the courts. And, now more than ever, it is critically important for the judicial branch to listen to what younger Arizonans have to say about the courts, and to engage with them directly. Accordingly, the task force recommends the permanent commission be directed to structure and establish a youth council comprised of Arizona high school and college students which will participate in public outreach activities regarding the work of Arizona courts and provide input to the commission and other members of the judicial branch regarding activities and programs that will help improve public trust in the judicial branch.

The task force recommends the permanent commission model the structure and operation of the youth council on the Governor's Youth Commission. Established in 1989, the Governor's Youth Commission solicits the participation of 10th-12th grade high school students from all 15 counties across the state, representing Arizona's demographic and geographic diversity. Commissioners work to promote healthier communities through youth volunteerism and service learning, increasing awareness of the most significant issues affecting their community, and encouraging civic participation.

Exhibit 1 describes the staffing, funding, and operation of the Governor's Youth Commission. Based on this information, the task force further recommends:

The FTE assigned to the permanent commission initially staff the youth council. The permanent commission shall annually evaluate the FTE's workload and assigned responsibilities to ensure the youth council is adequately supported and staffed, and shall report to the Chief Justice on an annual basis whether additional staff support from the Administrative Office of the Courts is needed.

The permanent commission develop, with assistance from the Administrative Office of the Courts, a budget for the operation of the youth council, which the permanent commission shall review annually with the Chief Justice.

The permanent commission develop a robust recruitment and application process for high school and college students.

The permanent commission develop projects and programs for the youth council which the permanent commission shall review and revise annually, as appropriate, based on input from members of the youth council, the judicial branch, and the public.

Recommendation 4: Direct the permanent commission to coordinate with the Foundation on programs designed to improve public awareness of and trust in the Arizona judicial system.

The Foundation has established several programs that educate young people, educators, and other adults about the law, the legal process and the legal system. The AOC has established a workgroup that is exploring partnership opportunities with the Foundation. The task force recommends that the permanent commission assume the responsibility of this work group and be the coordinating entity to work with the Foundation.

Recommendation 5: Direct the permanent commission to develop ongoing training programs to educate members of the media regarding the operation and work of state courts at all levels, including general and limited jurisdiction courts.

As explained above, based on its survey, the task force learned that today's Arizona media does not have reporters who are specifically assigned to cover court proceedings, and court coverage is often assigned on an ad hoc basis and handled by journalists who are not assigned to any specific substantive area. Accordingly, the task force recommends the permanent commission be directed to establish an ongoing media training and workshop program which will help members of the media better understand the operation of the courts at all levels, including general and limited jurisdiction courts, their work, processes and procedures, and the legal and ethical limitations placed on courts, judicial officers, and court personnel in responding to requests for information from both the media and members of the public.

Recommendation 6: Direct the permanent commission to develop ongoing training programs for court personnel regarding public outreach and best practices in working with members of the media and the public.

The task force's survey of court administrators and judges revealed that these individuals generally have a good comfort level in working with the media although many expressed an interest in training on media relations and handling difficult situations. A significant number of the respondents indicated they would attend media training sessions with topics of interest including access to court records, media trends, and best practices in working with members of the public who are skeptical regarding the impartiality and fairness of the courts. Accordingly, the task force recommends the permanent commission be directed to establish ongoing media training programs for judicial officers and court personnel which would address these and other relevant topics.

Recommendation 7: Amend Code of Judicial Conduct Rule 1.2 to include in the text of Rule 1.2 the text of comment 6 to that rule.

Implementing many of the task force’s recommendations will require engagement, commitment, and consistent buy-in and participation from judicial officers and court personnel at all levels. The knowledge and trust gaps cannot be meaningfully addressed if the “invisible barrier” that makes the judicial system seem inaccessible and out of touch continues. Not only should the Supreme Court use its “power of persuasion” to encourage court judicial officers and personnel at all levels to meet with members of the public to discuss their work, and the operation of the justice system, but the Court should amend Code of Judicial Conduct Rule 1.2 to include in the text of Rule 1.2 the text of comment 6 to that rule. As amended Rule 1.2 would read as follows:

A judge shall act at all times in a manner that promotes public confidence in the independence, integrity, and impartiality of the judiciary, and shall avoid impropriety and the appearance of impropriety. A judge should initiate and participate in activities for the purpose of promoting public understanding of and confidence in the administration of justice. In conducting such activities, the judge must act in a manner consistent with this code.

(amended language underscored)

IV. Conclusion

The task force chair and task force members would be glad to answer any questions about task force’s work and its recommendations.

1. Clear Purpose and Audience

Start with a well-defined goal:

- Educating the public about court processes
- Announcing policy or procedural changes
- Building trust and transparency
- Improving compliance (e.g., jury duty, filings)

Identify target audiences:

- General public
- Litigants (self-represented vs. attorneys)
- Media
- Community organizations

A campaign fails quickly if it tries to speak to everyone the same way.

2. Plain Language & Accessibility

Courts often default to legal jargon—this is a major barrier.

- Use **plain, everyday language**
- Translate materials into key languages in your jurisdiction
- Ensure ADA accessibility (screen-reader friendly, captions, etc.)
- Provide multiple formats (video, infographics, FAQs)

Think: “Would a first-time court user understand this in 30 seconds?”

3. Consistency and Credibility

Courts rely heavily on public trust.

- Maintain a **neutral, non-advocacy tone**
- Ensure messaging aligns across:
 - Website

- Social media
- Press releases
- Clerk counters / printed materials
- Use official branding and verified channels

Even small inconsistencies can reduce confidence.

4. Transparency and Proactive Communication

Don't just respond—anticipate.

- Explain *why* changes are happening, not just *what*
- Address common concerns upfront
- Share timelines, expectations, and limitations
- Acknowledge uncertainty when it exists

Transparency builds legitimacy, especially during changes or crises.

5. Strategic Channel Use

Meet people where they already are:

- Website (central source of truth)
- Social media (quick updates, awareness)
- Email/SMS alerts (case or service updates)
- Local media partnerships
- Community outreach (libraries, schools, legal aid orgs)

Different audiences require different channels.

6. Media Relations

Courts don't control narratives—but they can influence them.

- Build relationships with local journalists

- Provide clear, timely, factual information
- Designate trained spokespersons
- Prepare media kits for major announcements

Good media handling prevents misinformation.

7. Visual Communication

Many court processes are confusing—visuals help.

- Flowcharts (e.g., “What happens after you file a case”)
- Step-by-step guides
- Short explainer videos
- Infographics for deadlines, rights, procedures

Visuals dramatically improve comprehension and retention.

8. Community Engagement

Trust is built locally.

- Partner with:
 - Legal aid groups
 - Community-based organizations
 - Schools and civic groups
- Host workshops or informational sessions
- Gather feedback from court users

This also helps reach underserved populations.

9. Crisis Communication Readiness

Courts must be especially careful in high-profile situations.

- Have pre-approved protocols

- Respond quickly but carefully
- Stick to verified facts
- Avoid speculation or commentary on pending cases

Consistency and restraint are critical here.

10. Measurement and Feedback

A campaign isn't complete without evaluation.

- Track metrics:
 - Website traffic
 - Engagement rates
 - Call center volume
 - Compliance rates (e.g., jury response)
 - Collect user feedback
 - Adjust messaging based on what's working
-

11. Internal Alignment

Public communication depends on internal clarity.

- Train court staff so messaging is consistent
- Ensure clerks, judges, and administrators understand the campaign
- Provide internal FAQs and talking points

If internal messaging is fragmented, external messaging will be too.

Bottom Line

A successful court communications campaign is:

Clear, consistent, accessible, transparent, and trustworthy—delivered through the right channels and reinforced by community engagement.