

Developing this strategic agenda provides an opportunity to look to the future. It requires us to consider where and how our courts need to improve, to set goals for improvement, and to chart the course for accomplishing those goals. In other words, it compels us to plan for the continued excellence of Arizona's courts.

Arizona is a strong and vibrant state with a storied history and a bright future. Similarly, Arizona's judicial branch has a proud history of service to the public. Arizona's courts serve more than seven million Arizonans from Fredonia in the northwest to Douglas in the southeast. More than five hundred judicial officers and thousands of court employees resolve almost two million cases each year. Extraordinarily talented men and women have led our courts and due to their remarkable leadership, Arizona's courts have been successfully delivering justice to our citizens and are well-positioned for continued success. Our courts have established a nationally recognized reputation for excellence in innovation, judicial administration, and education, which we intend to continue into the future.

Arizona's courts also have a history of demonstrated commitment to justice under the rule of law. As the late Chief Justice Charles Jones wrote: "The rule of law is the bulwark of a free society, the leavening that affords essential balance among all of society's interests, both public and private." Faithfulness to our laws and to the United States and Arizona Constitutions, fairness, and access to justice are the basis for everything we do. At our foundation, we are committed to an impartial judiciary that provides due process and equal justice to all.

The judges, staff, volunteers, and our community partners work hard every day to maintain Arizona's reputation for excellence. Our commitment to the timely and fair resolution of cases continues to result in innovation and improvement. But our courts still face challenges. Many of Arizona's citizens cannot afford needed legal representation and the justice system is often too complex for people to navigate alone. Today's litigants often choose means other than the courts to resolve their disputes, perceiving the courts as too slow, complex or expensive. Comparatively few cases are now decided by jury trial and, as a result, fewer citizens now receive the important civic education that jury service traditionally provides. We are committed to addressing these and other challenges to improve the provision of justice in our courts.

This strategic agenda, *Justice for the Future: Planning for Excellence*, is a result of input from across Arizona. It affirms the important goals and applauds the success of prior strategic plans and it includes new initiatives proposed by a variety of court stakeholders. This agenda continues our commitment to promoting access to justice, protecting our children, families and communities, strengthening our courts, promoting public confidence in our judiciary, and enhancing professionalism in the legal community.

During the next five years we will continue to focus on court excellence. Most of the judicial branch's work is done in the trial courts throughout the state, and we must provide the necessary resources for them to operate effectively and efficiently. This work begins with a critical examination of the business operations of courts at every level, directed both at identifying and replicating the best practices and improving or eliminating what is not working. Our goal is to achieve administrative and jurisprudential excellence in every court and court process by focusing on the fundamentals: caseload management, productivity, prompt resolution of cases, and court administration. We intend to validate the quality of the court's data and use that data to help all courts make better management decisions and to measure our results. In the next five years, through planning, data analysis and technology, Arizona will continue its stellar record of providing excellent judicial service and improving on the delivery of justice for the future.

Thank you for your contributions to this agenda and your commitment to carrying it out. I look forward to working together in planning for and achieving excellence that ensures justice in the future.

— **ROBERT BRUTINEL**

*Chief Justice*