# RHODE ISLAND JUDICIARY

EXIT

# Annual Report 2022

# Letter of Transmittal

#### To the Honorable Members of the General Assembly:

The following is the 2022 Annual Report of the Rhode Island Judiciary, submitted pursuant to G.L. 1956 (2012 Reenactment) § 8-15-7. Calendar year 2022 can be characterized as the year the Rhode Island Judiciary emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic. Markers of a most challenging time receded: most of the plexiglass installed in our state courthouses was removed; masks became optional, and most proceedings were once again held in person. While the Judiciary is pleased to get back to mostly "business as usual," some of the innovations the pandemic necessitated have become part of the Judiciary's new way of doing business.We thank the public and the bar for being adaptable and persevering during a period of uncertainty. That "thank you" extends to all of our justice partners, especially to our colleagues in the Rhode Island Capitol Police and the Division of Sheriffs.

The Judiciary serves the Rhode Island community with more than 80 judicial officers and near 700 permanent staff across six courts operating in four counties. In 2022, seven new judicial officers joined the bench: Associate Justice Kevin McHugh, General Magistrate Gina Lopes Thibodeau, and Magistrate William Rampone to the Superior Court; Associate Judge Shilpa Naik and Associate Justice Jeanine Perella McConaghy to the Family Court; Associate Judge William Trezvant to the District Court; and Associate Judge George Lazieh to the Workers' Compensation Court. The Judiciary is grateful to the Governor for these appointments and to the Senate for its advice and consent. With a full and diverse bench, the Judiciary is best prepared to serve the people of the State of Rhode Island. The Judiciary continues its efforts to diversify its work force and can report that in calendar year 2022, personnel of color represent 16.74% the Judiciary's work force.

Most of the courts within Rhode Island's unified judicial system - Supreme Court, Superior Court, Family Court, District Court, Workers' Compensation Court, and the Rhode Island Traffic Tribunal - were current with caseloads in 2022. The Superior Court jury trials continue to see scheduling delays due to sheriff staff shortages. Nonetheless, 10% more jury trials were held in 2022 than in pre-pandemic year 2019. Due to virtual communication options instituted during the pandemic, the Family Court continues to hold in-person as well as remote proceedings and implemented a "virtual" clerk to provide assistance through a web-based platform that can be accessed remotely. The District Court has also continued to utilize pandemic-era adjustments as both the criminal and civil calendars remain on a staggered schedule. The Rhode Island Traffic Tribunal will similarly offer other options convenient to court users in lieu of in-person hearings in perpetuity.

As our communities emerge from the pandemic, the impact of the national and local mental health crisis, especially regarding diseases of despair, has become more acute. According to the National Judicial Task Force to Examine State Courts' Response to Mental Illness' 2022 Report, people in the United States with mental illnesses are ten times more likely to be incarcerated than they are to be hospitalized. The Judiciary is working strategically to follow national models for diversion and behavioral health intervention. These initiatives range from the Superior Court's Diversion Program, to the Veterans Treatment Calendar, to the inauguration of the District Court's Mental Health Treatment Calendar, which was legislatively approved in 2022.

There is innovation happening at every level of the Judiciary and the Administrative Office of the State Courts looks forward to further enhancements in 2023.

#### Respectfully submitted,

Chief Justice Paul A. Suttell and State Court Administrator Julie P. Hamil





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### Supreme Court

In 2022, The Rhode Island Supreme Court, under the leadership of Chief Justice Paul A. Suttell, heard 110 cases. The Supreme Court's Appellate Mediation Program conducted 21 appellate mediations. The following sections provide updates about specific departments within the Administrative Office of State Courts and the courts within Rhode Island's unified judicial system.

#### Access to Justice

The Access to Justice Office is responsible for overseeing three vital court services related to access to justice: language access through the Office of Court Interpreters; compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA); and services for self-represented litigants. The key goal of the office is to ensure the Judiciary's programs, services, and proceedings are accessible to all, irrespective of access to an attorney or representation, language proficiency, and/or disability status. In 2022, the Access to Justice Office entered its second year of service and expanded upon programming to advance the Office's mission and the five other courts within the unified judicial system. The Judiciary is seeing an increase in self-represented litigants. In 2022, 27,679 matters involved at least one party that was self-represented. Due to this increase, the Access to Justice office worked to expand resources for individuals representing themselves.

In 2022, there were approximately 8,100 language services provided in 32 languages. Language services are tracked by 'event.' Events include requests for interpretation during a case, at a court service counter (such as in a clerk's office) and during intakes conducted by various court programs and offices. The most requested languages were Spanish (more than 7,000 events), Portuguese (more than 300 events), and Cape Verdean Creole (more than 300 events). The Judiciary also provided services in languages of lesser diffusion such as Pashto and Telugu, among others.

In 2022, the Judiciary provided more than 100 reasonable accommodations to court users pursuant to the Americans with Disabilities Act. Requests for American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters, Certified Deaf Interpreters (CDI), closed captioning, and Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) services made up the most common services requested.

The Access to Justice office organized and planned several initiatives in 2022 with the goal of making the Judiciary as accessible and user-friendly as possible. In December of 2022, the Access to Justice office, on behalf of the Judiciary, was selected by the National Center for State Courts as one of eight states to participate in a three month 'form bootcamp.' The bootcamp was an intensive training and technical assistance program focused on assisting courts in revising its forms. The bootcamp is designed to teach best practices that ensure court forms are easy for court users to understand and to use. The feedback process and new form implementation will continue into 2023 and beyond.

#### Judicial Technology Center Upgrades

The Judicial Technology Center (JTC) is at the epicenter of many of the Judiciary's technological innovation initiatives.

The JTC is located in the John E. Fogarty Judicial Annex at 24 Weybosset Street in Providence and has technicians available to support staff at the Judiciary's buildings around the state in-person and virtually. The JTC is responsible for all the Judiciary's technology needs and operations.

In 2022, the JTC deployed a juror management system that enabled the Superior Court to electronically generate and send juror summonses. This system also streamlined juror service tracking and payments to jurors.

In addition to supporting the daily court functions, the JTC established a new online wellness screening system for Family Court. Adults who are justice involved with the Family Court may require wellness check-ins. This new system enabled remote check-ins, which relieves court users from having to come into a courthouse to fulfill this requirement.

Finally, the Wi-Fi infrastructure in all Judiciary buildings was upgraded to enhance visitors' internet usage experience.

#### Facilities, Operations, and Security

The Facilities, Operations, and Security Department of the Supreme Court oversees the care and preservation of key capital State of Rhode Island assets. In 2022, the Department delivered on the vital mission to provide economical, efficient, and well-organized maintenance services and security to the Judiciary.

Courtroom restoration remained a priority in 2022. Restoration of the final courtroom in need of repairs was completed at the Licht Judicial Complex in Providence. All courtrooms at Licht were returned to the original colors. Several courtrooms were renovated at the Garrahy Judicial Complex in Providence. This year the high-volume-use Family Court courtrooms at Garrahy were upgraded. At the Murray Judicial Complex in Newport, the District Court courtroom was refinished and restored to its period-specific design.

The Department also made significant progress in its efforts to make the Judiciary's buildings more energy efficient and cost-effective to heat and cool.

Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) improvements are part of a multi-phase project plan intended to cut costs and increase efficiency. While supply chain issues remained a challenge, substantial upgrades have been implemented at the Licht Judicial Complex, the Noel Judicial Complex in Warwick, and at the John E. Fogarty Judicial Annex in Providence.

The Judiciary continues to prioritize security within all facilities to ensure a safe environment for judicial officers, attorneys, litigants, staff, and visiting members of the general public. Additional surveillance cameras were added in cell blocks and in public areas to provide more holistic security coverage. Finally, additional identification card readers were added to the rear hallways at the Garrahy Judicial Complex to prevent unauthorized access from this entry point.



#### **Community Outreach and Public Relations**

The Office of Community Outreach and Public Relations serves as the Judiciary's first point of contact for many external partners and individual Rhode Islanders. Community Outreach and Public Relations staff collaborated across the Judiciary to provide internal and external communications and deliverables and offer educational opportunities and community outreach programming. The Office provided proactive communications regarding judicial policies and updates. Staff fielded media inquiries on behalf of the Judiciary. And, in collaboration with the Office of General Counsel, responded to all Access to Public Record Act (APRA) requests.

The Office of Community Outreach and Public Relations promotes access to justice and understanding of the court structure through a variety of programs. The Office continues an ongoing relationship with local schools, the Department of Education's Career Coordinators, and senior center organizations to provide civics education. Through these efforts, hundreds of Rhode Island students have become familiar with the judicial branch. Tours of the Supreme Court were held virtually as the state emerged from the extended restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic. The virtual tour program remained convenient for classroom instruction, reaching upwards of 530 students in 2022. Towards the end of 2022, small in-person tours resumed, and staff welcomed just over 100 Rhode Islanders to the Supreme Court in Providence for formal tours.

Community Outreach and Public Relations staff also collaborated with the Rhode Island Bar Association for Law Day and the Annual Bar Association meeting.

The Office is working interdepartmentally with the Administrative Office of State Courts to upgrade the Judiciary's website, the Judiciary's internal employee portal, and is expanding the Judiciary's digital footprint. The Rhode Island Judiciary can be found on Twitter at @RIJudiciary and LinkedIn at linkedin.com/company/rhode-island-supreme-court.



#### **State Law Library**

The central State Law Library is located the on the 8th floor of the Licht Judicial Complex. There are two additional Judiciary state law libraries located at the Garrahy Judicial Complex in Providence and at the Noel Judicial Complex in Warwick. This year, the library's collection was bolstered with the addition of BNA Bloomberg to the electronic vendor offerings and in doing so became the first library in the United States to sign on to Bloomberg's EnterpriseWide License. This license provides access for all court personnel working on legal research projects to comprehensive databases.

The library also added Wolter Kluwer's VitalLaw as an electronic option, which enabled the library to increase electronic titles and reduce the cost of in-house print purchases.

Finally, the library upgraded the microfiche reader-printer scanner through the purchase of an e-Image Data Scanner. The new equipment ensures the preservation of the library's microfilm collection, which includes early federal congressional records, state statutes, federal regulations, congressional hearings, and more for years to come.



#### **Judicial Records Center**

The Judicial Record Center (JRC), located at 5 Hill Street in Pawtucket, serves as the central repository for the Judiciary's semi-active, inactive, and archival court records. Current records that are still necessary for the daily operations of the courts remain stored at the Clerk's Offices of the respective courts. The JRC offers reference services to the courts, the bar, and to members of the public who wish to research these public records.

As of 2022, the Judicial Records Center has more than five million cases stored, and completed several special projects. The Center reviewed and sampled 46,242 worker's compensation cases from 1913-1970, received and inventoried 12,075 3rd Division criminal cases, and identified and organized more than 1,000 boxes of traffic-related documents from 1976-2006. Additionally, JRC staff created a digitized index for Providence Superior Court divorce cases for the years 1840 to 1895 as a special archival project.

#### **Domestic Violence and Training Monitoring Unit**

The Supreme Court Domestic Violence Training and Monitoring Unit (DVTMU) was formed with the passage of the Domestic Violence Prevention Act in 1988. The DVTMU's principal responsibilities are the development, printing, dissemination, and collection of the legislatively-mandated Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault (DV/SA) reporting form. The information collected from these firms is utilized to establish accurate data related to domestic violence, sexual assaults, and child molestation incidents, including arrests and non-arrests in Rhode Island.

The DVTMU works closely with the Rhode Island State Police and each municipal police department, the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Day One, the Office of the Attorney General, the Rhode Island Department of Health, and the Public Safety Grants Administration Office on all policy and training issues relating to or associated with domestic violence, sexual assault, and child molestation.

In 2022, the DVTMU distributed approximately 9,000 victim information and safety planning pamphlets to Rhode Island's law enforcement agencies. Law enforcement agencies are required to distribute the pamphlets when completing DV/SA reporting forms. The pamphlets are available in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, and Mandarin Chinese. Data was extracted and input from more than 8,000 DV/SA reporting forms.

#### **Diversity Office**

In 2022, judicial staff attended the National Center for State Courts' inaugural Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) conference. While many states explore DEI initiatives, Rhode Island's office is well-established, having been created seven years ago, and is carrying out programming and generating reports recommended as national best practices.

In 2022, the office saw a notable increase in minority representation in new hires. Minorities accounted for 29.82% of all new hires. This achievement can be credited to the dedicated efforts of the Court Administrators and the Diversity Office, working in collaboration with Employee Relations to enhance recruitment practices and promote inclusivity. Furthermore, this unwavering commitment to fostering a workplace centered upon DEI has enabled the Judiciary to make significant strides in increasing minority representation in its workforce. Since the office's establishment in 2016, the overall percentage of minority representation within the Judiciary has increased from 11.77% to 16.74%.

The Diversity Office successfully organized a series of Judiciary Employment Education Programs (JEEP) and facilitated the participation of students at various educational levels in the Judiciary Shadow Program. Both learning initiatives aim to provide Rhode Island youth with the chance to explore a range of employment opportunities available at the Judiciary. These programs cater to individuals from diverse educational backgrounds and expose them to information about the rewarding careers in the fields of law, finance, community outreach, diversity, and technology available at the Judiciary.

The Diversity Coordinator is also an active member of the Committee on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts and collaborates with the committee to provide training and community engagement events.



Please note that this data comprises all Judiciary personnel, excluding Medical Board Advisory Members.

#### **Mandatory Continuing Legal Education**

The Supreme Court Mandatory Continuing Legal Education (MCLE) Commission assisted Rhode Island's more than 5,000 active attorneys by monitoring compliance and offering MCLE opportunities throughout the year.

The Commission coordinated several of the Judiciary's annual events, including the fall judicial conference, the spring judicial conference, the judicial breakfast held during the Rhode Island Bar Association's Annual Meeting, the Supreme Court annual judicial retreat, law clerk orientation, and the "Concepts of Justice in Literature" book discussions. The fall and spring judicial conferences are designed to provide training to all judicial officers. This year's topics included social media and the law, best practices regarding how to address transgender and nonbinary individuals, and population health and judicial decision-making.

Several judicial officers participated as presenters in trainings on a national, regional, and local level throughout the year. Judicial officers taught at the Roger Williams University School of Law, the Rhode Island Bar Association, and the Rhode Island Municipal Police Training Academy. Judicial officers and staff attended trainings with the following partners as well as many others: the American Bar Association, the New England Association of Recovery Court Professionals, the National Center for State Courts, and the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania.

The MCLE Office is in the process of converting the office's paper files into electronic documents to be maintained in the Judiciary's case management system. In 2022, the MCLE Office converted more than 100,000 paper records to electronic records dating back to 1994.



## **Superior Court**

With plexiglass removed from courtrooms, the Superior Court operated in 2022 much as the court did prior to the pandemic. Remote hearings decreased by 31% and 98% of the more than 154,000 proceedings were held in person.

Key to the Superior Court function, there were 57 jury trials in 2022, compared to 12 in 2021. For a post-pandemic perspective, there were 10% more jury trials held in 2022 than in pre-pandemic 2019. These increases were possible, but challenging, as the court continued to face a sheriff staffing shortage.

The Superior Court also saw an uptick in bench trials. A total of 132 criminal and civil bench trials were held, a 140% increase from pre-pandemic 2019. This was largely due to an increase in trespass and ejectment proceedings after the federal eviction moratorium expired in August 2021.

In 2022, there were 6,214 total criminal case filings, a 10% increase from 2021. Felony filings dropped by 4%. Civil case filings also decreased (9,074 filed), falling 8% from 2021. The reduction in civil filings was due, in part, to the declining number of hernia mesh lawsuits.

There were 502 new case filings on the Court's Gun Calendar in 2022, a 27% increase from 396 filings in 2021. The Gun Court Calendar was designed to efficiently move gun-related cases to reduce the time from filing to disposition.

The number of cases processed under Rhode Island's "red flag" extreme risk protection order law increased from 33 in 2021 to 50 in 2022. The court attributes this to an increase in awareness of the protection order law. The law enables members of state or local police to file a petition to order the temporary surrender of firearms upon receiving credible information of significant and imminent risk by the individual in possession of the firearms. By county, 43 extreme risk protection orders were filed in Providence, 4 in Kent, 3 in Washington and 0 were filed in Newport.

There were 649 Temporary Restraining Order (TRO) filings in the Superior Court in 2022 compared to 741 in 2021. This represents a 12% decrease after a significant spike the previous year with a 25% increase.

The Court's other specialized calendars and programs assisted thousands of Rhode Islanders throughout the year. Since 2020, the Superior Court Diversion Program has offered an alternative to traditional conviction, sentencing, incarceration, and/or probation. In total, the program has graduated 919 nonviolent offenders who were eligible and enrolled in substance use counseling, educational programming, and mental health treatment. In 2022, the program yielded 351 program graduates and an 80% graduation rate.

The Adult Drug Court Program is in its 20th year of service. More than 200 people participated in 2022, with 49 new participants and 35 graduates. There remained 147 active participants at the close of 2022. The program aims to connect individuals with treatment and wraparound services while providing an opportunity to have their records cleared upon program completion. The program boasts an overall 72% graduation rate since inception.

Court-annexed arbitration captured 11.4% of all civil cases filed in Superior Court in 2022 and 40% of personal injury cases filed. Ninety-two different arbitrators participated in the program, and 42% of the cases designated to arbitration settled within the year, a percentage identical to 2021.

During the third week of December 2022, the Arbitration Unit hosted 115 cases for mediation during Settlement Week. This program remains a successful initiative for the Court, providing an expeditious means to resolve certain civil actions. The program held to its historical average, producing a 67% settlement rate in 2022 with 79 cases resolved and 13 withdrawn. Since the program's inception 29 years ago, 7,614 cases have been mediated and 5,015 resolved for a 66% settlement rate.





# Family Court

The Family Court, one of the Judiciary's largest courts, embraced technological solutions adapted during the pandemic in 2022. The court institutionalized the Virtual Clerk who can assist self-represented litigants and attorneys alike with forms, procedures, and general questions in real-time virtually.

It was a court priority to enhance efforts to be more user-friendly and to provide a larger offering of services to Rhode Island's youth and families. The court partnered with the Mediation Program and the Family Services Office to create an internship program with Roger Williams University Law Students. The Juvenile Services Department, comprised of social workers, case managers, and psychologists, widened the scope of direct work with juveniles. Family Court magistrates were also able to resume in-person truancy sessions in schools, instead of courtrooms. The magistrates, school support staff, and mental health care professionals recognize this as an important shift as rates of anxiety and difficulty navigating interpersonal relationships have increased since the pandemic began.

A highlight of the Family Court's year resumed in person in 2022 as the court held the 19th annual National Adoption Day ceremonies. Nine adoptions were completed, and the courtrooms and hallways were filled with joy.



# **District** Court

As the District Court emerged from COVID-19 pandemic protocols, several legislative and administrative changes were permanently implemented. Criminal and civil hearing calendars remain on a staggered schedule. Further, its Mental Health Civil Certification Calendar resumed in-person hearings in hospitals, but also continued to utilize a hybrid model to allow for remote hearings when required.

In 2022, the District Court continued the Eviction HelpDesk partnership with Rhode Island Legal Services, Rhode Island Center for Justice, and the Roger Williams University Law Clinic in Providence and Kent counties. The clinic provides key free services to unrepresented litigants. There are plans to expand to two additional counties in 2023.

The District Court's Pretrial Services Unit remained an integral part of the court's functions. The Unit monitors all conditions of bail that are placed on a defendant by a District Court judicial officer.

Most of the individuals referred to pretrial services were ordered to mental health and/or substance use treatment programs as a condition of bail. One of the hallmarks of the Pretrial Services Unit is the Rhode Island Veterans Calendar, which as of 2022, has been active for a decade. The program served 106 new veterans in 2022 and 67 graduated from the program.

During the 2022 legislative session, a bill was passed that will establish a Mental Health Treatment Calendar (MHTC) in the District Court. The MHTC will serve individuals who have serious and persistent mental illnesses who have been charged with misdemeanor crimes. The staff of the MHTC will work to identify the psychiatric needs of individuals coming before the court and will work to offer wraparound services. The goal of the new calendar is to offer mental health treatment services to prevent repeat incarcerations.





# Workers' Compensation Court

All Workers' Compensation Court functions were able to fully resume in 2022. The court's mediation program entered its fifth year of service. Since its inception, the program has resolved more than 1,000 cases with an average settlement rate of 90%.

The court offers training and educational programming, which was able to return in-person in 2022. This included the two-day Rhode Island Workers' Compensation Educational Conference. More than 200 workers' compensation industry professionals, including attorneys; safety and human resource managers; and insurance, healthcare, and rehabilitation professionals, attended.

The Workers' Compensation Court offered an Impartial Medical Examiner (IME) training in 2022. Sixty medical providers participated in the program. When a dispute occurs over medical evidence in a workers' compensation case, a judicial officer may refer the injured worker to an IME, who plays a critical role in such cases. IMEs are trained, admitted, and overseen by the court's Medical Advisory Board.



# At a Glance

### **Judicial Officers**

62 Judges (2 Vacancies) 28 Female 5 Minorites

22 Magistrates (1 Vacancy)6 Female1 Minority

### **Facilities**

6 Courthouses (2 Administrative Buildings)

78 Courtrooms (4 Grand Jury Rooms, 2 Mental Health Courtrooms)

## **Employees** Full Time Employee Count

739.3 Authorized683.2 Average Filled





# Supreme Court

### **2022 Appellate Filings**

Total filed	359
Miscellaneous	207
Civil	124
Criminal	28

# **2022** Appellate Manner of Disposition

Total disposed	376
Decided on the Merits	244
Disposed Prior to Decision	83
Permission Denied	49

### **2022** Appellate Caseloads









### **2022 Superior Court Caseload**



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# Family Court

### 2022 Family Court Caseload



JUVENILE

### 2022 District Court Caseload



Workers' Compensation Court

#### 2022 Workers' Compensation Court Caseload



### 2022 Rhode Island Traffic Tribunal Caseload

### Traffic Tribunal Summonses Issued63,582



**Total Traffic Tribunal Summonses Disposed** 65,884

\*NOTE: Figures are estimates generated from the case management system.





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