

RHODE ISLAND JUDICIARY  
**ANNUAL REPORT**  
**2023**

# Letter of Transmittal

To the Honorable Members of the General Assembly:

The following is the 2023 Annual Report of the Rhode Island Judiciary, submitted pursuant to G.L. 1956 (2012 Reenactment) § 8-15-7. The Judiciary serves the Rhode Island community with more than 80 judicial officers and nearly 700 permanent staff across six courts operating in four counties. We maintain and operate six courthouses as well as the Judicial Records Center in Pawtucket and the Fogarty Judicial Annex in Providence. In 2023, 12 judicial officers joined the bench. The Judiciary is grateful to the Governor for these appointments and to the Senate for its advice and consent of this exceptionally qualified slate of new judicial officers. 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 2023, personnel of color represent 16.93% the Judiciary's work force.

We are mindful that a modern Judiciary must be agile and able to adapt to the shifting needs of individuals who interact with the justice system. In 2023, more than one in three cases involved at least one party who represented themselves (34% of all cases involved a party that represented themselves; this is an 8% increase since 2022). As the rate of self-representation increases, our approach to the administration of justice must be continually evaluated. The Access to Justice Office has been integral in assessing and meeting the needs of our court users. By way of example, the Judiciary has seen an uptick in requests for Spanish-language interpretation in courtrooms and clerks' offices. In response, the Judiciary has added to its roster of full-time interpreters, though more are needed. Through the Access to Justice Office, the Judiciary conducted its first Access and Fairness survey in the spring and summer of 2023. The survey, formulated by the National Center for State Courts, was meant to assess court users' perceptions of access to the courts and fairness within the courts, including what it is like to physically navigate courthouses to comfortability understanding proceedings. The results of the survey will be available in 2024.

We are pleased to report that 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 2023, having resolved most of the backlogs caused by the pandemic.

In addition to providing an overview of 2023 caseload data, this report underscores Judiciary programming that aims to meet our Rhode Island neighbors where they are. From calendars that offer alternatives to traditional incarceration and probation sentencing, to the inauguration of the District Court’s Mental Health Treatment Calendar (RIMHTC), to the Family Court’s Caring Dads pilot program, the Judiciary is examining processes and implementing initiatives that are user-centric, rehabilitative and focused on reducing recidivism.

The transformative work happening at the Judiciary would not be possible without judicial officers who are committed to the highest level of professionalism, dedicated staff who demonstrate personal connection to their work, and our public safety partners: the Capitol Police and Rhode Island Division of Sheriffs. We offer our thanks and gratitude to them and all of our justice partners without whom we would not be able to carry out our mission.

Respectfully submitted,

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



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# Judicial Appointments



Twelve (12) judicial officers joined the Judiciary in 2023. Thank you to Governor Dan McKee, the Senate Judiciary Committee and Senate Judiciary Committee Chairwoman Dawn Euer, and the Judicial Nominating Committee and Chairwoman Krystle Tadesse for the recommendation, appointment, and confirmation of Rhode Island Superior Court Associate Justice Joseph J. McBurney, Rhode Island Superior Court Associate Justice Christopher K. Smith, District Court Associate Judge J. Patrick O'Neill, District Court Associate Judge Nicholas J. Parrillo, District Court Associate Judge Debra A. Saunders, and Workers' Compensation Court Associate Judge Moira E. Reynolds. Six (6) new magistrates were appointed and confirmed in 2023. The Family Court welcomed Magistrate Ronald Cascione, Magistrate Susan Nahabedian, and Magistrate Samantha Polisen. The Rhode Island Traffic Tribunal welcomed Magistrate Allison C. Abilheira, Magistrate Norman Landroche, Jr., and Magistrate Mark Welch.

# Decriminalizing Cannabis



## The Court Expungement Process

The Rhode Island Cannabis Act (Act), passed by the General Assembly in 2022, made possession of certain amounts of marijuana legal. The Act also provided for the automatic expungement of prior marijuana possession charges. Expungement means the removal and destruction of records relating to the case(s) or charge(s) in question. Usually, a person would have to file a motion with the court to have a record expunged. The Act modifies that process and requires the courts to automatically expunge any eligible case(s) and charge(s). The automatic expungement process is free.

In accordance with the requirements of the Act, in January of 2023, Rhode Island Supreme Court Chief Justice Paul A. Suttell signed Executive Order 2023-02, which outlines the process for implementing the Act's expungement provisions. All criminal convictions for marijuana possession committed by individuals eighteen (18) and over and all civil violations committed by individuals twenty-one (21) and over are to be expunged. The Executive Order does not apply to other marijuana convictions including, but not limited to, the selling, delivering, or manufacturing of marijuana.

Executive Order 2023-12 provides for automatic expungement of cases in two (2) phases.

Phase I called for the expungement of cases consisting of a singular possession charge (meaning, the possession charge was the only charge on the case) by the Superior and District Courts and the Rhode Island Traffic Tribunal. With the cooperation of the Attorney General's Office, the State Police, and the law enforcement agency that filed the marijuana possession charge(s), the courts completed phase one before the deadline of April 30, 2023. Judiciary-wide, more than 23,000 cases were expunged: 3,015 individual cases were expunged in the Superior Court, 10,650 in the District Court, and 9,952 cases in the Rhode Island Traffic Tribunal. Phase II is on track to be completed ahead of deadline in the first quarter of 2024.

# Superior Court



## Trial Increases in 2023

In 2023, a total of 275 trials were held in the Superior Court. Of those trials, seventy-eight (78) were jury trials and 197 were bench trials. This is a forty-six percent (46%) increase in total trials from 2022 to 2023.

Jury trials increased by thirty-six percent (36%) since 2022. There were seventy-eight (78) jury trials in 2023 and fifty-seven (57) jury trials in 2022. The Superior Court also saw a significant uptick in bench trials. There was a forty-nine percent (49%) increase in bench trials from 2022 to 2023. There were 197 bench trials in 2023 compared to 132 bench trials in 2022.

The overall increase in the number of trials held in 2023 can be attributed to having a full complement of the Superior Court's twenty-eight (28) judicial officers. With respect to bench trials, the considerable increase can be explained in part due to the high number of trespass and ejectment trials that were held. There were 146 trespass and ejectment trials in 2023 compared to ninety-two (92) in 2022.



There were 166,516 total hearings held in the four counties in 2023, which accounts for a seven percent (7%) increase from 2022 when there were 154,910 total hearings held. Remote hearings dropped for the second year in a row from 2,811 in 2022 to 2,398 in 2023.

## Rehabilitative and Diversion Programming

Courts throughout the unified judicial system continue to administer and augment rehabilitative and diversionary programs that offer alternatives to traditional incarceration and probation sentencing.

The Rhode Island Superior Court Diversion Program provides eligible defendants with a framework of supervision and services in lieu of traditional conviction, incarceration, and/or probation. Judicial officers and the Superior Court Diversion Program staff work with nonviolent offenders to access services such as substance use counseling, education, and mental health treatment instead of probation and/or incarceration. Graduates who meet the program requirements qualify to have their cases dismissed.

Since the program's inception in 2020, 1,219 participants have graduated, the majority of whom are first-time offenders. Last year, fifty-five percent (55%) of people referred to the program were accepted. Those 297 individuals signed contracts detailing the conditions and expectations of the court. The program held to its historic average, with an eighty-one percent (81%) graduation rate. Three hundred participants graduated in 2023. Of those, 104 people received substance use treatment, seventy-three (73) mental health treatment, and 119 participants put in a combined 7,572 community service hours as a condition of their program requirements. Restitution collected on behalf of victims totaled \$239,987.

The Superior Court Adult Drug Court Program focuses on connecting people with treatment and resources, while providing an opportunity for the participants to have their records cleared if they successfully complete the program. By the close of 2023, forty-three (43) participants had graduated from the Adult Drug Court Program. At that time, there were eighty-one (81) active participants in the program. Since 2006, a total of 1,259 participants were admitted into the Adult Drug Court Program and 933 successfully completed the program, a seventy-four percent (74%) graduation rate.

The Probation Termination Calendar also provides new pathways. The calendar permits individuals serving probation within the community to request the court to end their probation early, provided certain benchmarks are met. In 2023, the program marked its seventh year and there were 147 hearings with seventy-five (75) motions granted, fifty-two (52) motions denied, and nine (9) motions that were continued.

# District Court



The Rhode Island District Court facilitates two (2) specialty calendars with the goal of addressing the needs of Rhode Island’s most vulnerable individuals while reducing recidivism. 2023 marked the start of the Mental Health Treatment Calendar (RIMHTC). The calendar began accepting referrals on August 5, 2023. The RIMHTC hearings take place weekly in both Providence and Kent Counties for individuals across the state who are charged with misdemeanors and who meet specific mental health diagnoses. There were fifteen (15) active participants by the end of 2023 and nine (9) of the participants ended the calendar year in phase II of the four-phase program. This program is playing an instrumental role in stabilizing individuals, creating alternatives to repeated incarceration, and reducing recidivism.

The Rhode Island Veterans Treatment Calendar (RIVTC) has been operating for fourteen (14) years. The calendar programming provides treatment options and wraparound services for active military personnel and veterans who experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and other “serious” mental health conditions. The District Court’s Pretrial Services Unit received 156 referrals to the RIVTC in 2023.



Of those referrals, eighty-five (85) were accepted and seventy-four (74) veterans successfully graduated from the program. Individuals referred to the program are eligible to receive wrap-around services that may include housing assistance and driving privilege restoration through the Division of Motor Vehicles and the Rhode Island Traffic Tribunal. Additionally, in 2023, two new programs, one that provides a gym membership incentive to promote wellness and sober activities and one which provides a “transition bag” to veterans leaving transitional housing or incarceration were initiated. The goal is to ameliorate the challenges of reentry.

In 2023, the District Court also worked with the Judicial Technology Center (JTC) to implement new software in the Pretrial Services Unit to streamline the record management of clients involved in supervisory programming. The JTC deployed the Tyler- hosted software called Enterprise Supervision, which enables the court to manage supervision clients and interface with the Judiciary’s case management system. This functionality allows the Pretrial Services Unit to access client referrals and client case information in one centralized location. It improves efficiency by enabling staff to send automated and confidential correspondence reminders about court dates and related appointments via text message to program participants.

# Traffic Tribunal



The Rhode Island Traffic Tribunal (RITT) continues to expand programs to deliver equitable services and to address barriers to safe driving. The License Restoration Program, which began in 2018, has been a vital service for a demographic that may not otherwise have an opportunity to restore their driving records to good standing. The program supports motorists who do not have the economic means to pay outstanding fines in full. In 2023, there was a total of 358 active cases. The RITT works with numerous state agencies, community partners, and organizations to educate and to communicate the options available to motorists who are not in compliance. The Refusal Division of the RITT has streamlined the interaction between the Division of Motor Vehicles and the RITT regarding conditional hardship codes and license reinstatement.

The RITT's Ability to Pay Program (APP) has been an important initiative that aims to give more flexibility to individuals who face monetary penalties since the program's inception in 2016. In 2023, the APP kept 2,495 motorists licensed by assessing their ability to pay and either reducing the total amount the individual owed or setting up payment plans that are manageable for the individual.



The RITT has also enhanced adjudications on the remote hearings calendar, disposing of a total of 11,709 cases before hearing dates, again lessening the inconvenience to motorists by reducing or eliminating the need to be in attendance for court hearings.

# Family Court



In an effort to address domestic dispute issues, the Family Court piloted a new program called Caring Dads. The program follows an international model developed by psychologists to specifically address violence against women and children, which the creators view as intertwined.

A training was held for court staff and the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) to certify them as providers of the Caring Dads program. The Family Court, including the Safe and Secure Baby Calendar team, and DCYF staff successfully piloted the program in 2023. At the end of 2023, the program's pilot was renewed as a full program contract through several providers and funding from DCYF. The program will begin its next session in April of 2024.

The program was developed by Katreena Scott (Ph.D. Clinical Psychology), Claire Crooks (Ph.D. Clinical Psychology), Tim Kelly (Executive Director of Changing Ways), and Karen Francis (Ph.D. Clinical Psychology), in collaboration with child protective services, batterer intervention programs, children's mental health agencies, women's advocates, centers for children and families involved in the justice system, family resource agencies, and probation and parole services.



Family Court Chief Judge Michael B. Forte greets the Morse family and their adopted daughter Aaliyah.



Family Court Magistrate Andrea Iannazzi celebrates after a formal adoption ceremony.

A week before Thanksgiving, families were united as Rhode Island Family Court finalized ten (10) adoptions with nine (9) different families at a celebration of the 20th annual National Adoption Day.

Throughout the event, speakers and attendees emphasized the need to recognize adoptions and raise awareness about the need for more foster parents and forever homes. A crowd of more than 125 people gathered to celebrate this special occasion, which was held at Noel Judicial Complex on Saturday, November 18, 2023. Family Court Chief Judge Michael B. Forte served as the emcee of the speaking program that preceded the adoptions and welcomed all in attendance. He thanked the Family Court staff that worked to ensure that Adoption Day was a memorable day for all. During the 2023 calendar year, the Family Court granted 247 adoptions.



# Dispute Resolution



## Alternatives In Action

Courts throughout the unified judicial system continued to utilize arbitration and mediation as alternative dispute resolution tools in 2023.

The Superior Court offers both court-annexed arbitration and a mediation program. The Superior Court has run a Court-Annexed Arbitration Program for thirty-four (34) years. Eighty-nine arbitrators participated in the program in 2023. Forty three percent (43%) of cases designated for arbitration were settled within the year. The program captured nine percent (9%) of all civil cases and forty-five percent (45%) of all personal injury cases filed in the court in 2023. These percentages were well above the program's twenty-year (20) average.

The Superior Court's Arbitration Unit also hosted the 31st Settlement Week in December 2023. Certain types of civil actions are eligible for participation during the week, which remains an expeditious and cost-effective way to resolve select matters. Ninety-one (91) of the 139 cases heard during Settlement Week were settled. Since the program began, there has been a sixty-six percent (66%) overall settlement rate.

The Family Court has a designated Mediation Unit comprised of five (5) full-time attorneys and one (1) part-time attorney who are all certified family and divorce mediators. The Mediation Unit offers a free, court-based mediation program to assist parties in settlements cases through a process that aims to be fair, cooperative, and respectful to all parties. When a case involves children, the expectation is that mediation will result in a parenting plan that meets both the parents' concerns as well as the children's needs. The mediation process often serves to enhance mutual understanding and communication for future interactions. In 2023, the Mediation Unit assisted families involved with DCYF to reach agreements for permanency for 150 children. Additionally, the Mediation Unit handled more than 900 domestic cases with eighty-five (85%) concluding in a resolution.

The District Court partners with the Center for Mediation Rhode Island (CMCRI) to mediate cases, including eviction disputes. Small claims cases with a self-represented litigant are referred to mediation outside of the District Court through CMCRI. In 2023, 154 mediation referrals were made and twenty-eight (28) were deemed successful. Small claims cases where the plaintiff and the defendant are both self-represented are referred to mediation. The parties receive the referral in the form of a letter to each party offering the opportunity to reach out to the Center for Mediation. If the parties do not contact the Mediation Center within the specified number of days, the referral is declared unsuccessful. Landlord/Tenant disputes involving self-represented litigants can be referred to on-site mediators that are present every Wednesday. On average, two (2) to three (3) cases are referred to mediation each week.



## Alternatives In Action Continued

The Workers' Compensation Court's mediation program experienced a fifty percent (50%) increase in referred cases since 2020. A total of 265 cases were referred in 2023; of those cases, 209 were successfully mediated, nineteen (19) cases saw no resolution and returned to trial, and thirty-seven (37) were still pending. Ninety-one percent (91%) of the cases that completed the mediation program were successfully settled.

# Court Services



## Facilities, Operations, and Security

The Facilities, Operations, and Security Department of the Supreme Court oversees the preservation and maintenance of key capital State of Rhode Island assets. Restoration and repurposing of key spaces carried over from 2022. Courtrooms 3D, 3E, and 5G in the Garrahy Judicial Complex were renovated. The Family Court's largest courtroom, 5C, was converted into two (2) courtrooms to increase virtual hearing capacity. The Noel Judicial Complex Law Library was reconfigured and the Access to Justice Offices were expanded to meet the staff's growing needs. At the Murray Judicial Complex, public areas were restored to historic period-specific specifications.

Security protocol, software, and physical updates continued to be a central focus of the office.



## State Law Library

2023 marked a successful year of growth for the State Law Library. Most notably, the renovation of the Noel Judiciary Complex library was completed. The focus of the renovation was to create a workable space with increased digital access for court users. Leadership worked to bolster the library's collection as interlibrary loaning and borrowing increased. Library staff are an essential resource to attorneys, law students, colleagues, and visitors.



## 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 records. The JRC stores more than 5.5 million case files. In 2023, the center held 106,964 boxes of case files and 5,127 manuscript books.

In 2023, with the support of the Judicial Technology Center, the JRC updated its Records Management System (RMS) and implemented a new Content Manager Records system. The JRC was also essential in the marijuana expungement process; retrieving and sealing more than 14,000 cases for the Superior and District Courts combined. As part of the Rhode Island Cannabis Act, the courts were mandated to expunge and seal marijuana criminal cases that fell under the criteria of the new law. The JRC was tasked with storing and flagging the expungements from the District and Superior Courts as confidential. Flagging the cannabis-related cases as confidential limits court staff, attorneys, and members of the public from viewing the now confidential cases. The project is ongoing. The JRC is projected to complete the project ahead of schedule in 2024.

The JRC applied for and was awarded a Rhode Island Supreme Court Historical Society grant for the restoration of two (2) Providence County Supreme Court indices.

## Mandatory Continuing Legal Education

Judicial education programming in 2023 included a variety of topics to enhance the judicial excellence among veteran and newly appointed jurists and attorneys alike. The Mandatory Continuing Legal Education (MCLE) and Judicial Education Office assists Rhode Island attorneys in achieving compliance with Art. IV, Rule 3 of the Supreme Court Rules. The office executed the Fall and Spring Judicial Conferences, the Supreme Court Retreat, Law Clerk Orientation, and the Judicial Breakfast in partnership with the Rhode Island Bar Association at the Rhode Island Bar Association's Annual Meeting. Topic areas offered for credit included sessions on the use and influence of Chat GPT; a lecture on cryptocurrencies, Bitcoin, and Non-Fungible Tokens (NFT) policy; and an update on cannabis legalization and its impact on court proceedings.

Judicial officers also served as instructors locally and nationally at events including the National Judicial College, the American Bar Association, the Office of the Rhode Island Attorney General, and the Pawtucket Bar Association.

Hundreds of industry professionals were also able to earn MCLE credits through the annual Rhode Island Workers' Compensation Educational Conference held on April 27th and 28th at the Graduate Hotel in Providence. Program features included a discussion on remote work, teleworking spaces, and the new modality's impact on the workers' compensation system. The highly-anticipated conference also offered a lecture from a renowned orthopedic surgeon on the topics of hand, wrist and elbow surgeries. The conference was attended by over 200 individuals, which included attorneys, employers, insurance adjusters, safety and human resource managers, health care and rehabilitation providers.

## Law Clerk Department

The Law Clerk Department provides the Superior Court, Family Court, District Court, and Rhode Island Traffic Tribunal with ongoing support in complex legal research, analysis, and writing. In 2023, the department hired and oversaw seventeen (17) law clerks, most of whom serve one-year terms following their graduation from law school. The law clerks served more than seventy (70) judicial officers in courthouses around the state. Law clerks assisted with just over 1,000 matters during their collective assigned term; assignments increase year-over-year.

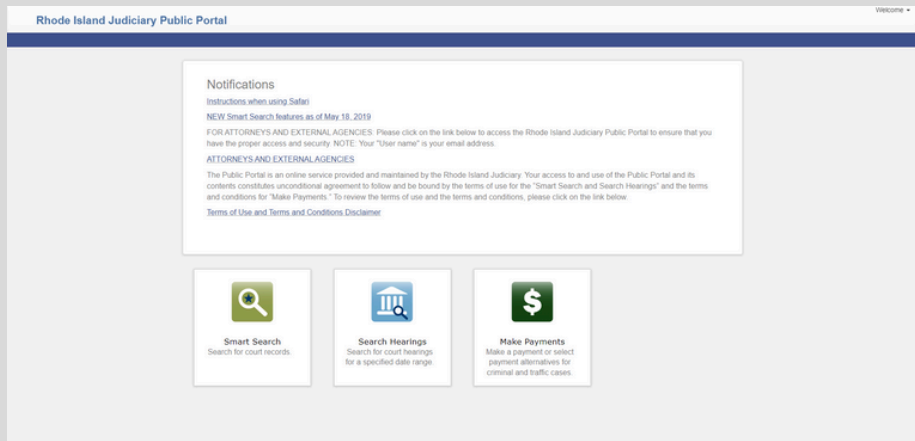
# Domestic Violence Training and Monitoring

In 2022, the Domestic Violence Training and Monitoring Unit (DVTMU) distributed approximately 10,200 Victim Information and Safety Planning Pamphlets. The Domestic Violence Safety Plan pamphlets and the Domestic Violence Victim Information pamphlets are currently available in five (5) languages (English, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, and Mandarin Chinese). Both pamphlets are offered to victims by law enforcement at the time of filing an incident report, in hospitals and emergency rooms, and by victim advocates throughout the State of Rhode Island. The pamphlets provide information regarding key resources and services a victim may need at the time of the incident or in the future. Distribution has increased since implementation began in 2019.

The DVTMU Director remains an active member of the Domestic Violence (DV)/Sexual Assault (SA) Law Enforcement Training Curriculum Committee and served as an in-person trainer at the April Providence Police Academy and the October Rhode Island Municipal Police Academy.

In accordance with the state mandated DV/SA form processing procedures, the DVTMU carried out a three-phase process. They reviewed 10,337 forms to compare them to the accompanying police report narratives. Police departments were contacted to verify and obtain missing information. They manually input data from 9,411 written DV/SA forms into the database. Finally, they scanned 6,257 forms to capture remaining data fields and to assign each form a Domestic Violence Identification (DVID) form number to generate statistics.





# Technology and Data Enhancements

The Judiciary increased internal functionality and transparency through Judicial Technology Center (JTC) upgrades and the Judicial Planning Unit’s procedural caseload management updates. The JTC completed an upgrade of the case management system in June of 2023.

In alignment with facilities upgrades and an emphasis on increasing access and services, the JTC completed a wireless Internet upgrade in all buildings; this enhanced the free WiFi availability and quality for all court users. In July of 2023, the JTC launched a new intranet, an internal platform that enables broad dissemination of information to the Judiciary’s 700-plus employees.

JTC staff continue to be available to support judicial officer and staff technology needs on a daily basis. The JTC works with individual courts to meet specific project-based needs such as the implementation of the District Court Pretrial Services Unit Enterprise Supervision software.



## Data Awards

The Judicial Planning Office received a National Center for State Courts (NCSC) “Court Statistics Project Award” for the Judiciary’s 2022 data submission. The Office was recognized for reporting publishable incoming data for eighty-eight percent (88%) of case types for 2022 and for making significant efforts to improve their data quality by resubmitting adjusted trial court data dating back to 2019. Also, Rhode Island now reports publishable general jurisdiction disposition data for sixty-seven percent (67%) of case types for jury trials and sixty-five (65%) of case types for bench/non-jury trials and non-trial dispositions, a thirty-five percent (35%) increase from 2018 due to improved data extraction and reporting capabilities. This was the third time in six (6) years that the Judiciary received the Reporting Excellence Award.

## Diversity Office

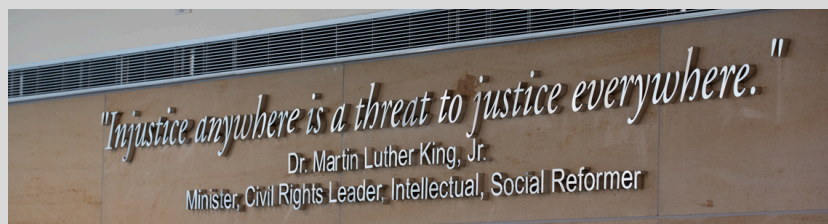
The goal of the Diversity Office, now in its seventh year, is to both create career pathways that result in a workforce that is representative of the Rhode Island population as well as to monitor and to promote diversity and inclusion.

Since the establishment of the Diversity Office in 2016, the Office has measured an increase from 11.77% of employees who identify as part of a “minority” group to 16.93% as of December 31, 2023.

The Diversity Office works closely with the Office of Employee Relations and the Community Outreach and Public Relations Office. In 2022, the Diversity Office revamped a High School Internship program, offered several Judicial Employment Education Programs (JEEP), and had multiple students participate in quarterly job shadow opportunities.



Diversity Coordinator Sara Gilkenson talks to students from Tolman High School during a JEEP panel.



## Access to Justice Office

The Access to Justice Office is responsible for overseeing three (3) vital court services: services for self-represented litigants; language access services through the Office of Court Interpreters; and the Judiciary’s compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The Judiciary continues to see an increase in self-represented litigants. In 2023, more than 35,400 matters involved at least one party that was self-represented. This accounts for a twenty-eight percent (28%) increase from 2022 to 2023.

In 2023, the Access to Justice Office launched the Judiciary’s first Access and Fairness Survey, joining states across the country in meaningful court-user data collection. The Office also continued efforts to ensure court users can navigate the judicial process by participating in the National Center for State Courts’ (NCSC) “form bootcamp.” Rhode Island was one of seven (7) states selected to participate in the intensive training and technical assistance program focused on aiding courts in revising their forms using best practices.

The Access to Justice Office also saw a 7.8% increase in language services provided from 2022 to 2023. More than 8,730 language service events in thirty-seven (37) languages were provided. The most requested languages were Spanish (more than 7,400 events), Cape Verdean Creole (more than 475 events), and Portuguese (more than 350 events). The Office also provided more than 150 reasonable accommodations to court users pursuant to the ADA.

## Community Outreach and Public Relations

The Community Outreach and Public Relations Office is responsible for internal and external Judiciary-wide communications. The Office fields all media inquiries and Access to Public Records Act (APRA) requests, in collaboration with the Office of General Counsel, and facilitates community outreach efforts. The office facilitates employee learning opportunities and offers courthouse tours and civics education programming to the community. In 2023, the office expanded its digital reach by establishing the Judiciary’s LinkedIn page, which can be found at “The Rhode Island Judiciary.”

Virtual and in-person tours were carried out in all Rhode Island counties.


Virtual tours reached 351 people, including those at nineteen (19) high schools, two (2) middle schools, and one (1) elementary school. In-person tours reached 173 people including those at six (6) high schools, one (1) middle school, and four (4) colleges. The Community Outreach and Public Relations Office collaborated with the Rhode Island Bar Association to assign fifty-six (56) judicial officers to forty-one (41) schools throughout Rhode Island for annual Law Day events. The Office also worked with the Committee on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts and the Rhode Island Bar Association to pilot Constitution Day programming in five (5) middle schools and high schools.

Additional educational offerings the office facilitates, in partnership with various departments, include the Judicial Employment Education Program (JEEP), internships, clerkships, and shadowing opportunities. The Judiciary is in its third year partnering with Windwalker Pet Assisted Therapy to provide comfort and stress relief to court users while they await court hearings. Trained handlers and their certified canine attend court in two (2) counties for three (3) days per county.

In 2023, the Community Outreach and Public Relations Office responded to more than 600 media inquiries.

# Workers' Compensation Court Outreach

The Workers' Compensation Court, in particular, continued its unique efforts to educate young adults through the Young Employee Safety-Rhode Island (YES-RI) program, reaching hundreds of students in 2023. YES-RI aims to inform high school students about workers' rights and injury prevention. The Workers' Compensation Court organized seventeen (17) presentations, which featured Workers' Compensation Court judges and employees, along with lawyers and safety engineers.



## Congratulations!

You will soon begin your first job. This is a major milestone full of excitement, opportunities and positive expectations. Work for teenagers provides experience, skills, confidence, a sense of responsibility, and let's not forget, the money. Together, employers, school officials, and, most importantly, you play an important role in assuring a safe and positive work experience.


The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health reports that nearly 200,000 young workers suffer work-related injuries each year. One hundred thousand teens between the ages of 16 and 17 visit emergency rooms every year for work-related injuries. Annually 70 young people die.

Unfortunately, Rhode Island's young employees are also injured too often. In the past several years, between 700 and 800 of our youth were injured seriously enough to file workers' compensation claims. Countless others do not know they have workers' compensation rights and do not file claims.

Rhode Island has various laws and agencies to help promote and prevent young worker injuries. Rhode Island's Child Labor Laws protect our youth from abuses in the workplace as well as their rights to a meaningful education. The law limits the hours and jobs where young employees can be employed.

Take Charge

Take an active role



Search  
RI CHILD  
LABOR LAWS

Prohibited Occupations

There are both federal and state restrictions on jobs a person under 18 can do.

**In Rhode Island, NO worker under 18 may:**

- ▶ Drive a motor vehicle on public streets as a main part of the job
- ▶ Drive a forklift
- ▶ Use power equipment like a circular saw, box crusher, meat slicer, or bakery machines
- ▶ Work in wrecking, demolition, excavation, or roofing
- ▶ Prepare, serve, or sell alcoholic beverages
- ▶ Work where there is exposure to radiation

**Also NO ONE 14 or 15 years of age may:**

- ▶ Do any baking activities
- ▶ Cook (except with electric or gas grills that do not involve cooking over an open flame and with deep fat fryers that automatically lower and raise the baskets).
- ▶ Work in dry cleaning or a commercial laundry
- ▶ Do building, construction, or manufacturing work
- ▶ Load or unload a truck, railcar, or conveyor
- ▶ Work on a ladder or scaffold

**in your employment:**

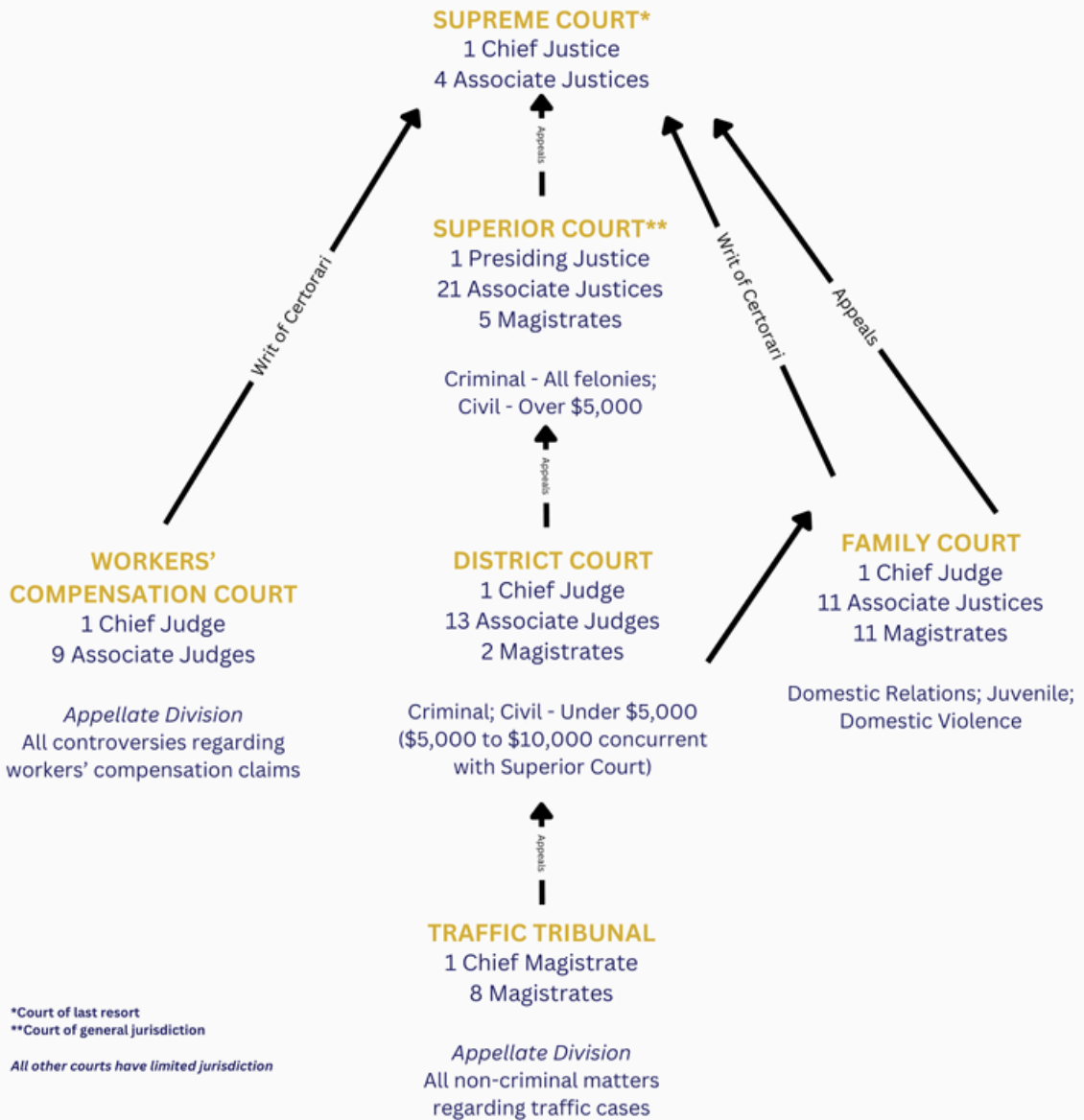
- Follow safety and health rules and safe work practices
- Know what to do if an emergency happens at work
- Use personal protective equipment provided by your employer
- Use the right tool for the job
- Report broken equipment or machinery
- Get help lifting heavy material
- If a job feels unsafe, stop and seek advice
- Ask about training and supervision provided by the employer

**Know your rights:**

- Entitled to payment of all medical expenses associated with your work injury
- Entitled to go to a physician of your choice
- Entitled to Scarring and Loss of Use
- Attorney fees are paid by the employer's insurance company
- Entitled to benefits even if no lost time from work
- Entitled to weekly compensation due to lost wages
- Entitled to vocational rehabilitation
- Undocumented workers are entitled to workers' compensation

# Court Structure

## Rhode Island Unified Judicial System



### ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF STATE COURTS (AOSC)

The AOSC oversees the functions and services of the following departments that support all courts within the Unified Judicial System.

Access to Justice Office · Community Outreach and Public Relations · Data Management and Statistics Office · Diversity Office  
Domestic Violence Training and Monitoring Unit · Employee Relations · Facilities, Operations, and Security · Finance and Budget  
General Counsel · Judicial Records Center · Judicial Technology Center · Law Clerk Department · State Law Library



Revised February 2024

# Judicial Officers by Court



## Supreme Court

Seated, from left: Associate Justice Maureen McKenna Goldberg, Chief Justice Paul A. Suttell, and Associate Justice William P. Robinson III.

Standing, from left: Associate Justice Erin Lynch Prata and Associate Justice Melissa A. Long.





## Superior Court

Seated, from left: Associate Justice Jeffrey A. Lanphear, Associate Justice Stephen P. Nugent, Associate Justice Robert D. Krause, Presiding Justice Alice Bridget Gibney, Associate Justice Melanie Wilk Thunberg, Associate Justice Daniel A. Procaccini, Associate Justice William E. Carnes, Jr.

Middle row, from left: Associate Justice Maureen Keough, Associate Justice Joseph Montalbano, Associate Justice Sarah Taft-Carter, Associate Justice Brian P. Stern, Associate Justice Kristin E. Rodgers, Associate Justice Brian Van Couyghen, Associate Justice Luis Matos, Associate Justice Richard Licht, Associate Justice Melissa Darigan.

Back row, from left: Magistrate John F. McBurney III, Associate Justice Joseph McBurney, Associate Justice Kevin McHugh, Associate Justice Linda Rekas Sloan, Associate Justice Richard Raspallo, Associate Justice R. David Cruise, Associate Justice Christopher Smith, Special Magistrate Patrick T. Burke, Magistrate Amanda Leigh Valentino.

*Not Pictured: General Magistrate Gina Lopes*



## Family Court

Seated, from left: Associate Justice Patricia K. Asquith, Associate Justice Karen Lynch Bernard, Associate Justice Lauren D'Ambra, Chief Judge Michael B. Forte, Associate Justice Debra E. DiSegna, Associate Justice Sandra Lanni, Associate Justice Lia N. Stuhlsatz.

Middle row, from left: Magistrate Jeanne L. Shepard, General Magistrate Daniel V. Ballirano, Associate Justice Richard A. Merola, Associate Justice Elizabeth Ortiz Whited, Associate Justice Feidlim Gill, Associate Justice Shilpa Naik, Associate Justice Jeanine P. McConaghy, Magistrate Angela M. Paulhus.

Back row, from left: Magistrate Samantha Polisena, Magistrate Denise C. Finkelman, Magistrate Andrea M. Iannazzi, Magistrate Paul T. Jones Jr., Magistrate Edward H. Newman, Magistrate Alberto Aponte Cardona, Magistrate Ronald Cascione, Magistrate Susan Nahabedian.



## District Court

Seated, from left: Associate Judge Anthony A. Capraro, Administrative Judge Pamela Woodcock-Pfeiffer, Chief Judge Jeanne E. LaFazia, Associate Judge Mary E. McCaffrey, Associate Judge J. Terrence Houlihan.

Back row, from left: Associate Judge Debra A. Saunders, Associate Judge William J. Trezvant, Associate Judge J. Patrick O'Neill, Associate Judge James J. Caruolo, Associate Judge Colleen M. Hastings, Associate Judge Stephen M. Isherwood, Associate Judge Brian A. Goldman, Associate Judge Melissa DuBose, Associate Judge Nicholas J. Parrillo, Magistrate Joseph P. Ippolito, Jr.



## Workers' Compensation Court

From left: Associate Judge Alfredo T. Conte, Associate Judge George J. Lazieh, Associate Judge Robert E. Hardman, Associate Judge Susan Pepin Fay, Associate Judge Keith Cardoza Jr., Chief Judge Robert M. Ferrieri, Associate Judge Michael Feeney, Associate Judge Moira Reynolds, Associate Judge Steven A. Minicucci, Associate Judge Kevin B. Reall.



## Traffic Tribunal

Seated, from left: Magistrate Erika Kruse Weller, Chief Magistrate Domenic A. DiSandro III, Administrative Magistrate Joseph Abbate, Magistrate Allison Abilheira.

Standing, from left: Magistrate Mark Welch, Magistrate Norman Landroche, Jr., Magistrate Michael DiChiro, Jr., Magistrate William T. Noonan, Magistrate Alan R. Goulart.

# Court Administrators



Left to right: State Court Administrator Julie P. Hamil, District Court Administrator Jamie Hainsworth, Rhode Island Traffic Tribunal Administrator Dennis Gerstmeyer, Workers' Compensation Court Administrator John McBurney IV, Superior Court Administrator Marisa Brown.

*Not pictured: Family Court Administrator Ron Pagliarini*

# In Memoriam



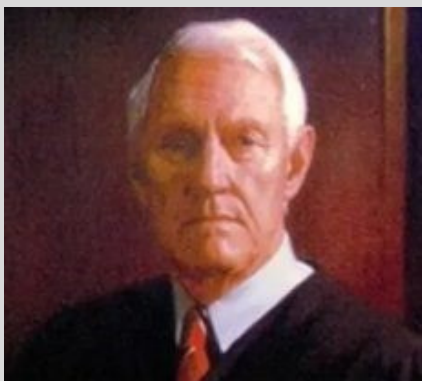
Superior Court  
Magistrate  
William Rampone



Administrative  
Assistant to the Chief  
Justice  
Ronald A. Tutalo



Mazelle Wood  
Superior Court Jury  
Commissioner's Office



Superior Court  
Associate Justice  
Ronald R. Lagueux



District Court  
Associate Judge (Ret.)  
Michael Higgins 35

# The Judiciary at a Glance

## Judicial Officers

62 Judges (1 Vacancies)

27 Female

8 Minorities

25 Magistrates (2 Vacancies)

12 Female

1 Minority

## Facilities

6 Courthouses

(2 Administrative Buildings)

78 Courtrooms

(4 Grand Jury Rooms, 2 Mental Health Courtrooms)

# Caseload Data



**160,906**

Total filings in 2023



**157,033**

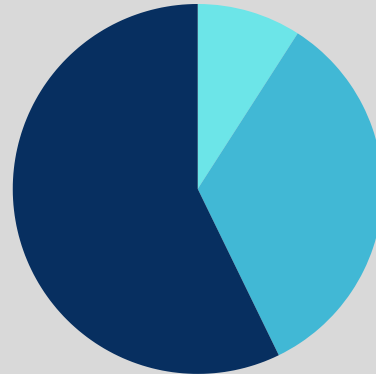
Total dispositions in 2023



# Supreme Court

## 2023 Appellate Filings

Criminal	34
Civil	126
Miscellaneous	214

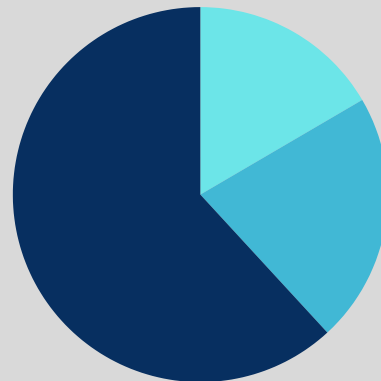


■ Criminal ■ Civil ■ Miscellaneous

**Total filed 374**

## 2023 Appellate Manner of Disposition

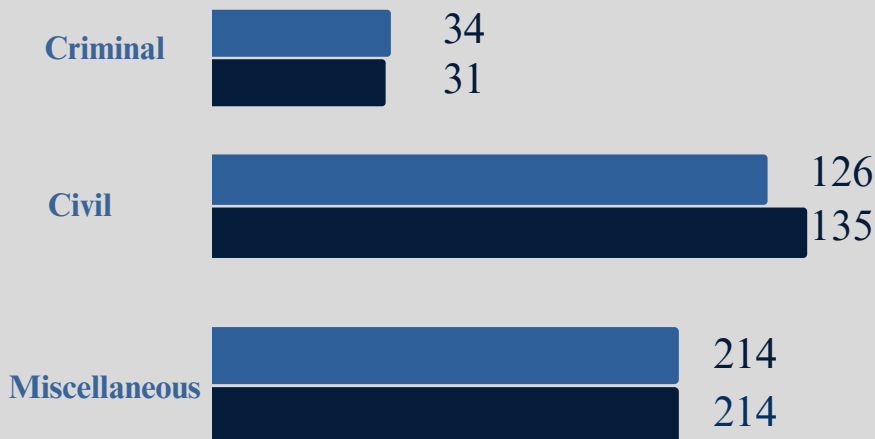
Permission Denied	63
Disposed Prior to Decision	82
Decided on the Merits	235



■ Permission denied  
 ■ Disposed prior to decision  
 ■ Decided on the merits

**Total disposed 380**

## 2023 Appellate Caseloads



*Key*

■ Total filed  
374

■ Total disposed  
380

# Superior Court

## 2023 Superior Court Caseload

CRIMINAL

### Felonies



### Misdemeanors



### Ordinances and Violations



### Total Criminal



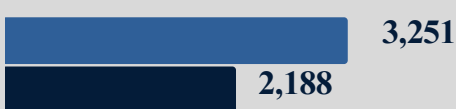
### Civil Appeals



### Contract



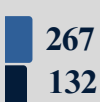
### Miscellaneous Civil



### Probate/Estate



### Real Property



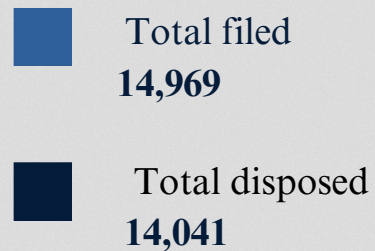
### Tort



### Total Civil



### Key



CIVIL

# Family Court

## 2023 Family Court Caseload

JUVENILE

### Wayward/Delinquent



### Violations



### Dependency/Neglect/Abuse



### Termination of Parental Rights



### Adoption/Guardianship



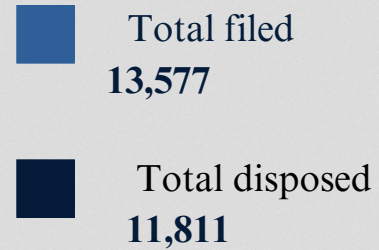
### Civil Violations



### Other



### Key



DOMESTIC / OTHER

### Divorce



### Miscellaneous



### Abuse



### Adult Criminal



### Child Support



# District Court

## 2023 District Court Caseload

### Misdemeanors



### Felonies



### Civil Violations



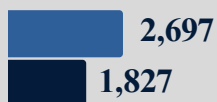
### Violations



### Ordinances



### Small Claims



### Civil



### Abuse



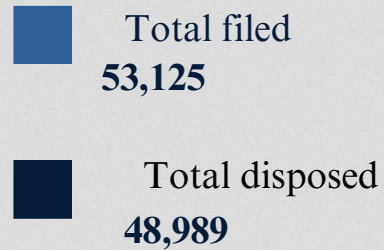
### Administrative Appeals



### Mental Health Hearings



### Key



# Workers' Compensation Court

## 2023 Workers' Compensation Court Caseload

### Employee Petitions to Review



### Employer Petitions to Review



### Lump Sum Settlement



### Miscellaneous Petitions



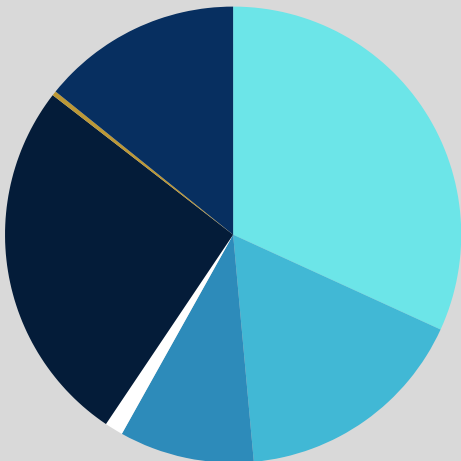
### Original Petitions



### Petitions for Medical



### Petitions to Enforce



### Key



# Rhode Island Traffic Tribunal

## 2023 Rhode Island Traffic Tribunal Caseload

Traffic Tribunal Summonses Issued **73,258**

Traffic Tribunal Summonses Disposed **73,860**

### Traffic Tribunal Total Violations

#### Insurance



#### Marijuana



#### Breathalyzer Refusals



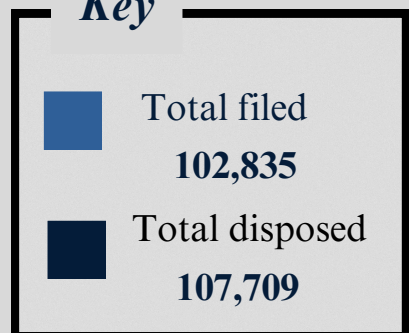
#### Speeding



#### Other



#### Key



# Acknowledgments

The Rhode Island Judiciary would like to thank:

## **Mike Cohea**

for the exterior and interior images of courthouses seen throughout the 2023 Annual Report.

## **Kevin Trimmer**

for the images seen in the Court Governance and Administration section.

## **Amos Shepard**

for the Family Court group image.

## **Signature Printing of East Providence, RI**

for printing copies of the 2023 Annual Report.

## **Court Chiefs and Administrators**

for providing narratives and analytics.

## **The Judicial Planning Unit**

for data and informatics review.

## **The Office of Community Outreach and Public Relations**

for compiling the 2023 Annual Report.



# The Rhode Island Judiciary



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