



2025 ANNUAL REPORT

**Ohio First District
Court of Appeals**



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First District Court of Appeals



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Introduction

Courts exist to serve the public. The work of an appellate court is often conducted quietly—through careful research and written decisions. But its purpose is straightforward: to ensure that everyone, no matter background, income, or status, has access to a just outcome under the law.

The First District Court of Appeals therefore belongs to the community it serves. The cases we decide affect real people, real families, and real institutions across our region. For that reason, we continually evaluate how our processes can better serve those who rely on us.

This Annual Report shares that information with you—the public.

Over the past year, the First District made significant strides in ensuring that we are serving you as fairly and efficiently as possible. For example, we revised our local rules to streamline procedures and make them clearer for litigants and attorneys. We extended the start time for oral arguments to 9:30 a.m. and launched a pilot program allowing incarcerated individuals to present oral argument remotely, expanding meaningful participation in the appellate process. In collaboration with the Hamilton County Court Reporter's Office, we implemented improvements to ensure that transcripts are prepared and delivered more efficiently, reducing delays by five percent. And we continued our partnership with the Hamilton County Help Center, informing over 40 self-represented litigants of the availability of assistance.

Service also extends beyond the courtroom. Our judges remain actively engaged in the community—serving on nonprofit boards, teaching students and young lawyers, and volunteering their time and expertise. These efforts reflect a shared commitment to public service and to strengthening the communities in which we live and work.

This report reflects a year of thoughtful progress and continued dedication to our core mission: administering justice fairly, efficiently, and in service to the public.

Judge Jennifer Kinsley,
Administrative and Presiding Judge



Judges



Jennifer Kinsley
Administrative and
Presiding Judge



Marilyn Zayas
Judge



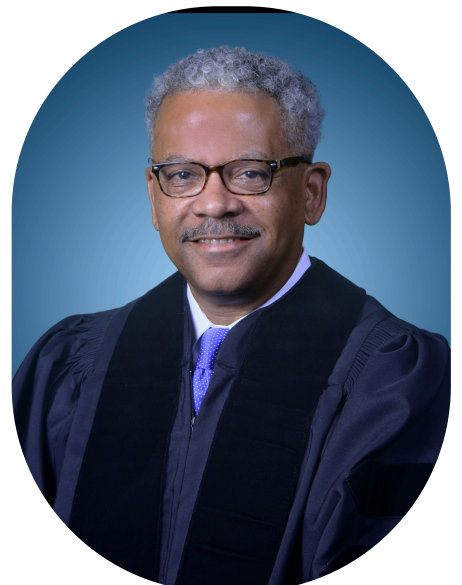
Candace C. Crouse
Judge



Ginger S. Bock
Judge



Terry Nestor
Judge



Richard L. Moore
Judge



Court Administrators



Julie Kahrs Nessler

Magistrate
Court Administrator



Angela Hayden

Magistrate
Assistant Court
Administrator

About the Court

The First District Court of Appeals is one of twelve intermediate appellate courts in the State of Ohio. It exclusively serves the people of Hamilton County by hearing appeals from the County's five trial courts—the General Division and Domestic Relations Division of the Hamilton County Court of Common Pleas, the Hamilton County Probate Court, the Hamilton County Municipal Court, and the Hamilton County Juvenile Court. In addition to resolving appeals, the First District also decides lawsuits that seek specialized orders against the government, which are known as writs. Six judges serve on the First District, which is located on the 12th floor of the William Howard Taft Courthouse and Law Center in downtown Cincinnati.

What is an Appeal?

An appeal challenges a decision made by a trial court. An appeal is filed by the party who disagrees with the trial court's decision or order. This party is referred to as an appellant. The party on the other side of an appeal is referred to as an appellee. An appeal is decided by a panel of three judges. To facilitate their decision, each judge reviews the parties' briefs in the case, which are legal documents containing each side's arguments and positions. With the aid of judicial staff attorneys, the judges also review the trial court record in every appeal and conduct legal research on the issues presented for review.

After the record and briefs are filed, the case is scheduled for oral argument or submission on the briefs. If the parties request oral argument, each side has 15 minutes to present its case. Oral arguments are primarily scheduled for Mondays and Tuesdays. These hearings are open to the public and available for viewing on the First District's YouTube channel.

Following oral argument or submission on the briefs, the panel of judges meets to discuss each case. One of the judges is selected at random to write an opinion or judgment entry, which the other judges join. The opinion or judgment entry states the First District's ruling and contains an analysis of the legal issues and the reasons for the decision. If a judge on the panel disagrees with the opinion or judgment entry, the judge may write a dissent. Opinions and judgment entries are typically released on Wednesdays and Fridays and are available on the First District's website.

Judicial Changes



Judge Jennifer Kinsley Elected Administrative and Presiding Judge

Judge Jennifer Kinsley was elected by her colleagues to serve as the First District’s Administrative and Presiding Judge for 2025. In this role, Judge Kinsley is responsible for the First District’s administration, docket, and calendar, as well as identifying key projects for the court. About the role, Judge Kinsley explained, “I am both honored and humbled to step into this new role. I join my colleagues in a renewed commitment to the values of service, justice, dignity, and fairness for all.”

2024 Election

In early February 2025, the First District bid farewell to Judge Pierre Bergeron and Judge Robert Winkler and welcomed newly elected judges, Judge Terry Nestor and Judge Richard Moore. Judge Bergeron was elected to the bench in 2018 and served as Administrative and Presiding Judge in 2021. After serving a six-year term, he transitioned to teaching at Centre College in Kentucky. Judge Winkler, also elected in 2018, concluded his six-year term at the First District, and in November 2024, he was elected to serve on the Hamilton County Court of Common Pleas. In January 2025, First District judges and staff held a reception honoring the work and service of the departing judges.

Judge Terry Nestor

Judge Nestor took his oath of office on February 6, 2025, and his term began on February 9, 2025. Judge Nestor previously served as a judge on the Hamilton County Court of Common Pleas and was the Presiding Judge in 2021. Before becoming a judge, Judge Nestor served as an Assistant City Solicitor for the City of Cincinnati and was in private practice specializing in tort litigation. In 2021, Judge Nestor was named Trial Judge of the Year by the Southwest Ohio Trial Lawyers Association. Judge Nestor serves as an adjunct professor at University of Cincinnati College of Law and is a member of the Ohio Supreme Court’s Case Management Advisory Committee.



Judge Richard Moore

Judge Moore took his oath of office on December 29, 2024, and began his term on February 12, 2025. A first-time candidate, Judge Moore made history, becoming the first African-American attorney to be elected to a seat on the First District. Prior to joining the bench, Judge Moore was an experienced trial attorney in private practice at two of the largest law firms in Cincinnati. During his more than 30 years in private practice, Judge Moore was a frequent lecturer and author on topics related to employment law, and he previously served as an adjunct professor of legal ethics at the University of Cincinnati College of Law. As an attorney, Judge Moore was selected to be included in several prestigious, peer-nominated publications, including Ohio Super Lawyers since 2018, Best Lawyers in America since 2020, and Cincy Magazine’s Leading Lawyers in 2021.



Judge Marilyn Zayas and Judge Candace Crouse

Judge Marilyn Zayas and Judge Candace Crouse were also reelected to six-year terms in the 2024 election. Judge Candace Crouse was sworn in by Hamilton County Clerk of Courts Pavan V. Parikh in February 2025. Judge Zayas was sworn in on February 6, 2025, by Jackie Aguilar, Assistant General Counsel at Procter & Gamble.

Access to The Court



The First District continued its commitment to improving access to justice in 2025. Through updated rules, new programs, collaborative partnerships, and facility improvements, the First District worked to better serve litigants, attorneys, and the community. The sections below highlight the year's major accomplishments.

▶▶▶ Making Courtrooms More Accessible ◀◀◀

A More Convenient Start Time for Oral Arguments

Beginning January 1, 2026, the First District shifted the start time for oral arguments from 9:00 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. After gathering feedback from attorneys and other court constituents in September 2025, the First District learned that a later start would ease morning travel, reduce stress, and provide more preparation time for attorneys and litigants arguing before it. The First District was pleased to implement a change that directly supports the community.



Updated Local Rules – Including Guidance on Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use

In late 2025, the First District circulated revised Local Rules for public comment. The updated rules took effect on February 1, 2026, and include:

- Amendments to Local Rule 33, which relates to original actions. The amendments provide more structure for discovery and case management conferences in original actions and introduce a new docket statement form to be used in these cases.
- New Local Rule 45, which outlines expectations for the responsible use of generative artificial intelligence in court filings.
- Renumbered Local Rules 4.1, 4.2, 7, 8, and 22, which now align with the Ohio Rules of Appellate Procedure.
- Local Rules 9(C) and (D), which provide clarity as to where to find exhibits and how to supplement the record when exhibits are missing.
- Local Rule 15, which clarifies the page limits and formatting requirements for motions.

These changes help ensure fairness, clarity, and consistency in a rapidly evolving legal environment.

Appointed Counsel

The First District is deeply grateful for the dedicated attorneys who serve on its appointed counsel list. These qualified practitioners play a vital role in ensuring that indigent litigants receive high quality legal representation and meaningful access to justice. Their continued commitment strengthens the fairness and integrity of the appellate process.

The First District maintains an appointed counsel list for eligible appeals, including direct criminal appeals, delinquency appeals, dependency actions, and parental termination cases. Attorneys interested in serving as appointed counsel must submit an application and, in criminal appeals, meet the qualifications outlined in Ohio Administrative Code 120-1-10 and comply with Local Rule 3.4. The First District accepts applications for attorneys interested in serving as appointed counsel at any time.

One such attorney on the First District's appointed counsel list is attorney and professor Andrew Polis. Professor Polis runs the Appellate Litigation Clinic at Case Western Reserve University (CWRU) School of Law's Milton and Charlotte Kramer Law Clinic. The clinic provides opportunities for law students who obtain a legal intern certification to argue cases on behalf of indigent parties. This year, CWRU student Iris Rodriguez argued an appeal at the First District under the supervision of Professor Polis.

The First District remains grateful for all appointed counsel who contribute to the administration of justice and uphold its commitment to fairness for every litigant, regardless of income.



Case Western student Iris Rodriguez argued an appeal under the supervision of Professor Polis

The First District would like to thank the attorneys who served on its appointed counsel list in 2025:

Rhett Baker, Michele Berry, Ravert J. Clark, Colin Cochran, Elizabeth Conkin, Jeffrey Cutcher, Cynthia Daugherty, William Gallagher, Angela Glaser, Brian Goldberg, Derrek Gustafson, Jim Hardin, Bethany Hayes, Mark Illingworth, Christopher Kapsal, Raymond Katz, Stephanie Kessler, Jehanzeb Khan, Roger Kirk, Erik Laursen, Mary Lewis, Timothy McKenna, Bryan Perkins, Andrew Polis, Jonathan Sinclair, Brian Smith, Patrick Story, Kimberly Thomas, Michael Trapp, Nathaniel Truitt, Alana VanGundy, and James Whitfield.

Clear Courtroom Decorum Rules

To ensure that visitors experience a consistent and comfortable environment during oral arguments, the First District adopted official Courtroom Decorum Rules, which include silencing phones, removing hats, and avoiding photography or recording. The full list of rules is available on the First District's website and in-person at the marshal's desk.



Expanding Services for Self-Represented Litigants

Oral Argument Pilot Program for Incarcerated Litigants

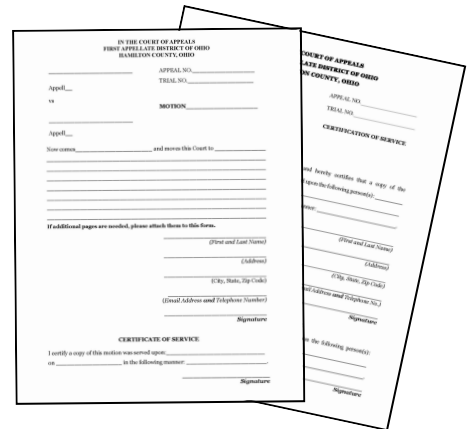
In 2025, Administrative Judge Jennifer Kinsley initiated an innovative pilot program to expand access to oral argument for individuals who are both self-represented and incarcerated. Under this program, a person meeting these criteria may request remote oral argument. If granted, the First District schedules a remote Zoom argument as facilitated by the litigant’s correctional institution. This initiative reflects the First District’s commitment to equitable participation in the appellate process.

About the program, Judge Kinsley said, “The mere fact that a person is incarcerated should not deprive them of their day in court. I’m grateful to be able to use technology to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to be heard at the First District, regardless of income, background, or status.”

New Forms to Assist Litigants

After collaborating with administrative staff to review the clarity and usefulness of court forms, the First District introduced two new resources in 2025:

- A general motion form, offering structure while allowing flexibility for litigants to explain what they are asking the First District for.
- A Certificate of Service form, making it easier for litigants to comply with applicable rules regarding service of documents filed with the First District.



The new forms are available on the First District’s website.

First Full Year of Help Center Services for Appeals

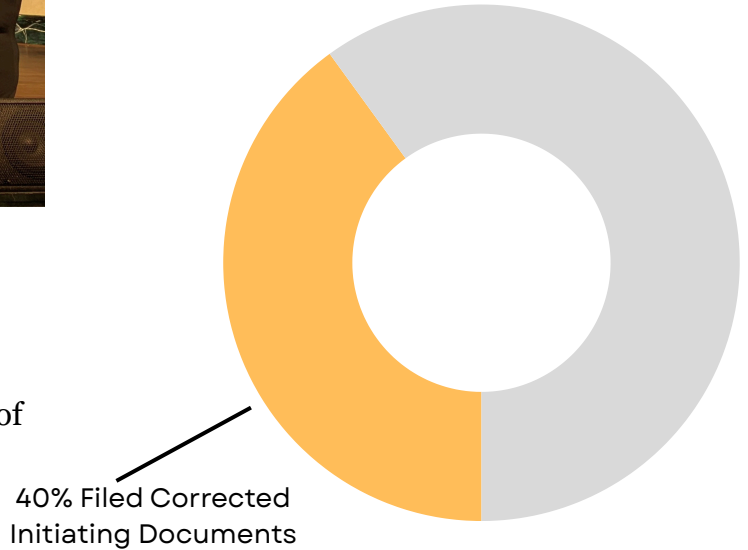
The First District continued its collaboration with the Hamilton County Help Center, first reported in the 2024 Annual Report. The Help Center, a partnership between the Hamilton County Clerk of Courts and the University of Cincinnati College of Law, provides people with education, information, and limited legal advice, by appointment, to access Hamilton County courts. In 2024, Judge Ginger Bock, Judge Candace Crouse, and Judge Jennifer Kinsley engaged with Hamilton County Clerk of Courts Pavan V. Parikh and the Hamilton County Help Center to provide external resources to self-represented litigants. Together they developed a program in which eligible self-represented civil litigants are advised of the Hamilton County Help Center’s services. These include in-person appointments and limited legal advice for completing the paperwork necessary to initiate an appeal. The goal of the Hamilton County Help Center program is to avoid deficiencies in initiating documents, which can result in the early dismissal of appeals filed by those who represent themselves. The First District remains grateful to the Hamilton County Clerk of Courts, the University of Cincinnati College of Law, and the Hamilton County Help Center for their ongoing support and partnership.



The Hamilton County Help Center staff in 2025

In 2025, the first full year of the program:

- Self-represented litigants in 44 cases received notice of the Hamilton County Help Center’s services.
- In approximately 40 percent of those cases, self-represented litigants filed corrected initiating documents, allowing their appeals to move forward.



▶▶▶ Collaborative Initiatives to Improve Efficiency ◀◀◀

First District Partners with the Court Reporter’s Office

One important step in an appeal is the preparation and transfer of the trial court record. The record consists of the documents and evidence filed at the trial court level, as well as transcripts of hearings. The Supreme Court of Ohio sets guidelines for the preparation and transmission of the trial court’s record to an appellate court. Under these guidelines, the record is to be filed within 40 days of the filing of the notice of appeal in most cases.

At the start of 2025, under the direction of Administrative Judge Jennifer Kinsley, the First District partnered with the Hamilton County Court Reporter’s Office to reduce the amount of time it takes to prepare transcripts for appeals. These collaborative efforts paid off. By the year’s end, the percentage of cases exceeding the 40-day guideline dropped by 5 percent. This improvement directly supports timely access to justice. The First District acknowledges and thanks the Hamilton County Court Reporter’s Office for its dedication in this area.



By the year’s end, the percentage of cases exceeding the 40-day guideline dropped by 5%.



Continuing Facility and Technology Enhancements

Building on Renovations Started in 2024

This year, the First District continued important renovation projects to modernize its facilities. These new updates enhance public access and increase efficiency for staff members.

In 2025, under the direction of the Hamilton County Facilities Department, the First District installed a modernized and secured receptionist area in its public 12th floor offices. Now equipped with security enhancements, the reception area facilitates effective and transparent interactions between First District staff and the public. In addition, the First District updated its public lobby with designated areas for sharing court resources and materials with constituents. In late 2025, the First District also began creating a space for self-represented parties to review record documents and complete paperwork for their cases. The First District expects to complete this space in early 2026.



Designated space for self-represented parties



New monitor in the lobby displays the docket and resources for court users

Technology Upgrades for Court Users and Staff

Additional improvements this year helped modernize the First District’s technology and enhance the experience for both visitors and staff. The First District introduced a new monitor to its lobby. This monitor displays the First District’s docket and creates a central location for important announcements and resources for court users. Inside the courtroom, a new electronic timer now allows the presiding judge to control time directly from the bench, giving attorneys a clearer and more accurate visual guide of the time remaining during each 15-minute oral argument.

Behind the scenes, with support from the Hamilton County Commissioners, the First District replaced aging laptops to support more efficient daily operations. The First District also upgraded its office phones with the help of Hamilton County Technical Services. Finally, the First District implemented an advanced AI-assisted legal research tool in partnership with other Hamilton County courts. This modern research platform increases efficiency and brings the First District in line with legal research innovations commonly used in the private sector.

Judges at the Supreme Court of Ohio



When a Supreme Court Justice recuses from hearing a case, the Ohio Constitution gives the Chief Justice the authority to assign a judge from one of the appellate district courts. In 2024, Chief Justice Sharon L. Kennedy assigned two judges from the First District to hear oral arguments at the Supreme Court of Ohio. Court News Ohio, a service of the Office of Public Information of the Supreme Court of Ohio, spoke with each judge about the experience.

In March and April, Judge Marilyn Zayas sat by designation in the Supreme Court of Ohio on three occasions within a 40-day period—an unprecedented honor. She heard oral arguments on March 13 in *In the Matter of the Application of Kingwood Solar I, LLC*; on April 2 in *In the Matter of the Application of the Dayton Power and Light Company*; and again on April 22 in *In the Matter of the Application of the Dayton Power and Light Company*. Speaking with Court News Ohio about the experience, Judge Zayas said, “I’m incredibly grateful. The gravity of the work at the Supreme Court is enormous. Every ruling has a far-reaching impact, not just within a district, but across the entire state.” Judge Zayas also invited law students from across Ohio to attend the proceedings and participate in a behind-the-scenes tour of the Supreme Court of Ohio.



In September, Judge Candace Crouse took the bench at the Supreme Court of Ohio to hear oral arguments in *In re Commissions Investigation into RPA Energy, Inc.* In the Court News Ohio article, Judge Crouse reflected on her career journey from performing arts to law and from Morgantown, West Virginia to Cincinnati, Ohio. “I always remember that my job is as a public servant. My goal is to make the court better than when I joined it,” she noted. “I continuously ask what we can do to make our court more efficient, convenient for litigants, and transparent.”



Data and Performance

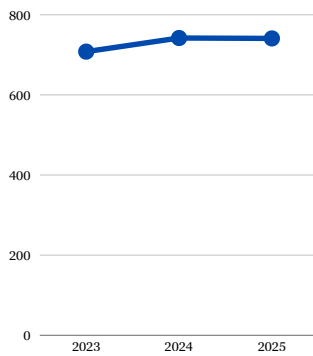


The First District maintains data on a number of key measures related to its caseload and performance. These metrics provide insights on the community’s demands for appellate review and the First District’s responsiveness to that need.

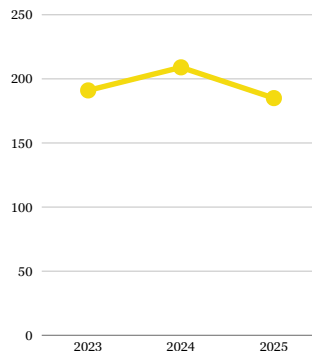
Incoming Cases: The Court Sees an Increase in Overall Filings.

In 2025, the First District saw an increase in the overall number of appeals, with the largest increase coming from criminal and civil appeals arising out of the Hamilton County Municipal Court. Civil appeals from both the Hamilton County Court of Common Pleas and the Hamilton County Domestic Relations Court also saw significant increases. These trends are depicted in the tables below.

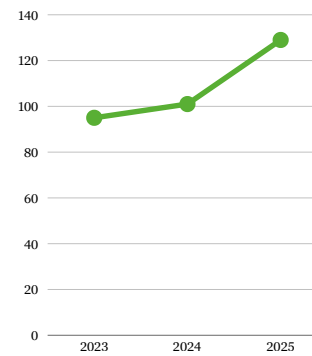
New Filings – Overall



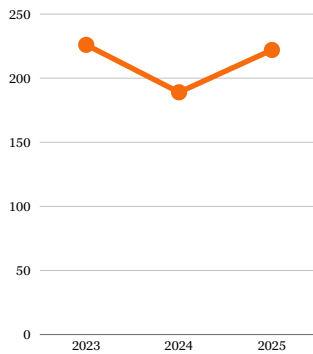
New Filings – Criminal Common Pleas



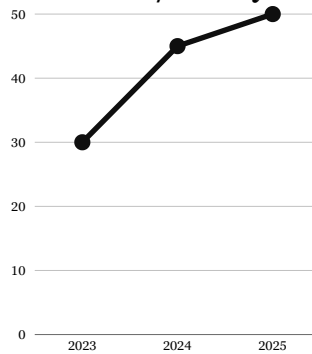
New Filings – Criminal Muni/County



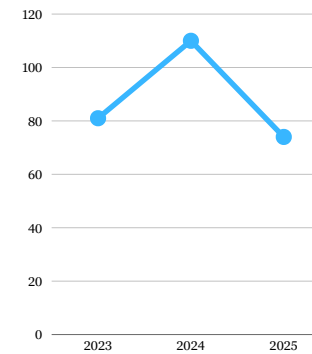
New Filings – Civil Common Pleas



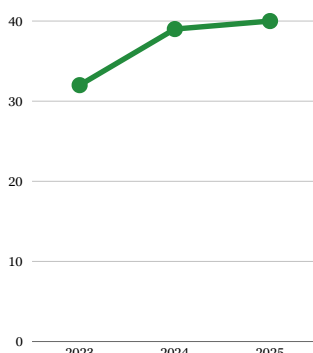
New Filings – Civil Muni/County



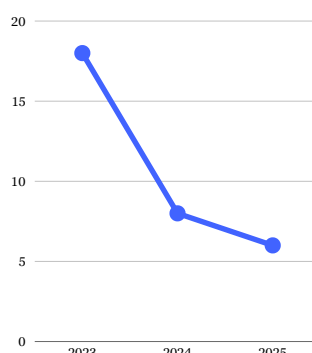
New Filings – Juvenile



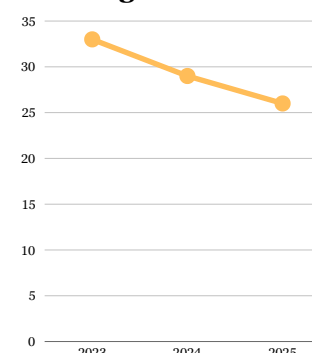
New Filings – Domestic Relations



New Filings – Probate



New Filings – Original Actions

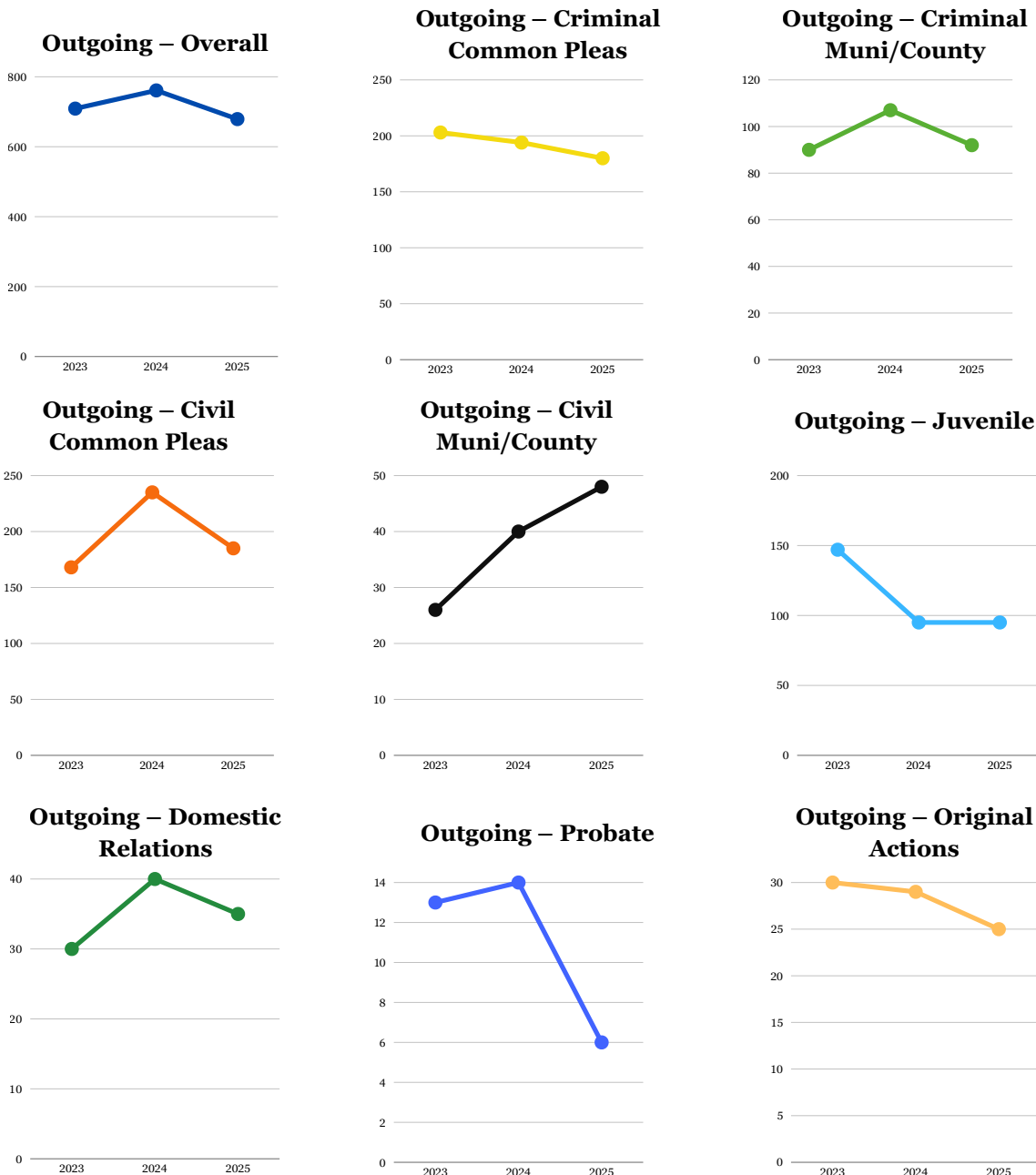


Performance Standards: Clearance Rate Reflects Judicial Turnover and Increasing Case Complexity

As in years past, the First District continues to evaluate its performance using the Supreme Court of Ohio’s case management performance measures. These metrics provide an objective framework for both assessing caseload and recognizing that individual case timelines will naturally vary. By monitoring these indicators throughout the year, the First District identifies case trends, allocates its resources efficiently in real time, and deploys key strategies to support timely case resolution.

Clearance Rate

The first caseload statistic mandated by the Supreme Court of Ohio is the clearance rate. The clearance rate compares the number of incoming cases—or the number of appeals filed in a given time period—against the number of outgoing cases—or the number of cases decided by a court in that same period of time. The First District’s incoming case numbers are depicted in charts on page 12. The charts below depict the outgoing number of cases, by case type, over the past three years, including 2025.

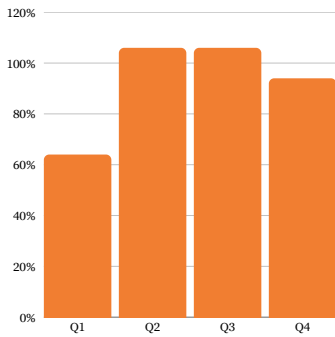




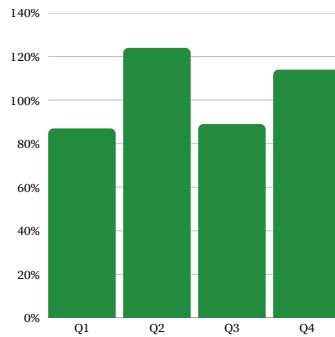
Clearance Rate

The tables below represent the First District’s clearance rates over the past three years.

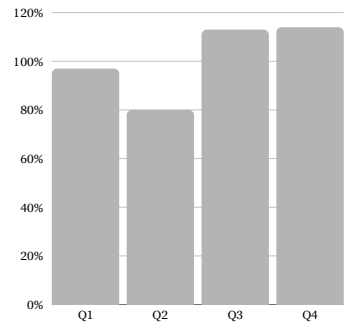
Clearance Rate 2025 *Overall Rate: 92%*



Clearance Rate 2024 *Overall Rate: 103%*



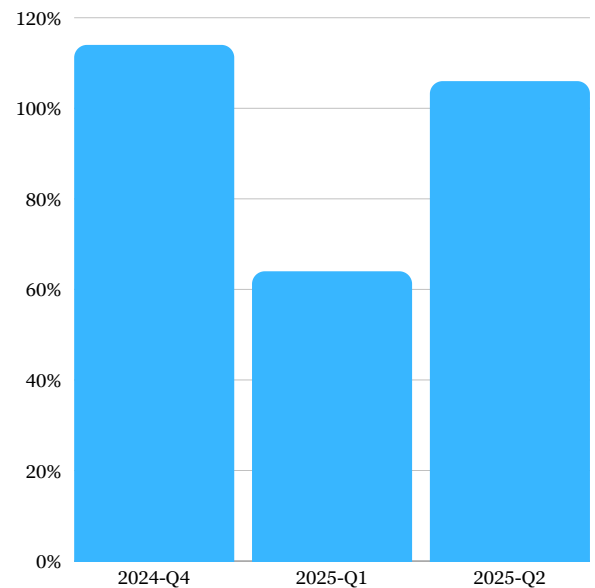
Clearance Rate 2023 *Overall Rate: 100%*



The First District’s clearance rate for 2025 was 92 percent, which represents a lower rate than previous years. This reduction in case clearance is explained by two key drivers.

First, the First District experienced turnover in one-third of its judges in early 2025. The departure of two experienced judges, followed by the onboarding of two new judges, impacted caseflow during the first quarter of the year. All appeals involving the outgoing judges were submitted before January 2025 to ensure that the cases could be resolved by the judges who heard them. And, because the two new judges did not join the First District until February 2025, no new appeals could be submitted to these judges until later that month. This created a seven-week gap during the first quarter of 2025 when one-third of the First District’s judges could not hear cases. The resulting reduction in case clearance during that time period is reflected in the graph depicted on the right. Notably, despite a slow first quarter, the First District’s clearance rate returned to 114 percent for the second quarter of 2025.

Q4 2024 - Q2 2025 Clearance Rates



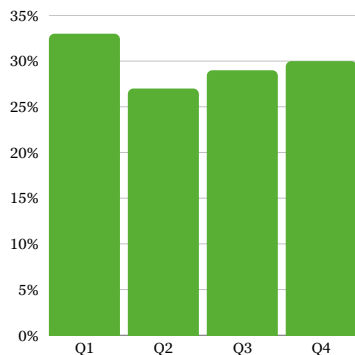
The second factor impacting the 2025 clearance rate was case complexity. As the incoming case statistics show, the First District experienced an increase in civil appeal filings from the Hamilton County Court of Common Pleas, 32 percent of which involved lengthy multi-week trials. The criminal docket also presented unique challenges. Approximately 20 percent of the criminal appeals raised constitutional questions under either the United States or Ohio Constitutions, or both. While these matters may take longer to resolve, they reflect the First District’s commitment to ensuring due process and issuing well-reasoned decisions in all cases.



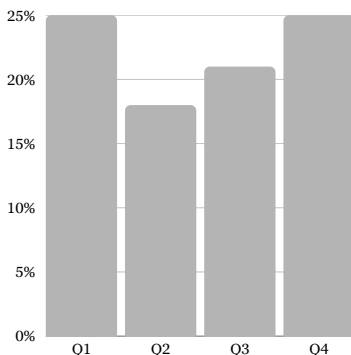
Overage Rate

Like the clearance rate, the First District’s overage rate was also impacted by judicial transitions and shifting case patterns. As mandated by the Supreme Court of Ohio, the overage rate tracks the percentage of appeals that are resolved beyond the applicable time standards. In 2025, the First District’s overage rate was 30 percent. This number is higher than its previous 2024 overage rate of 23 percent.

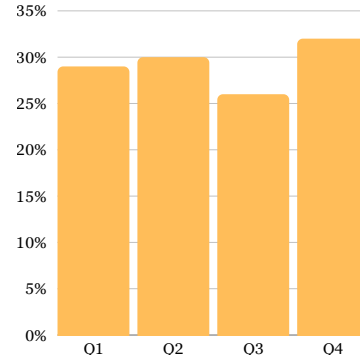
Overage Rate 2025
Overall Rate: 30%



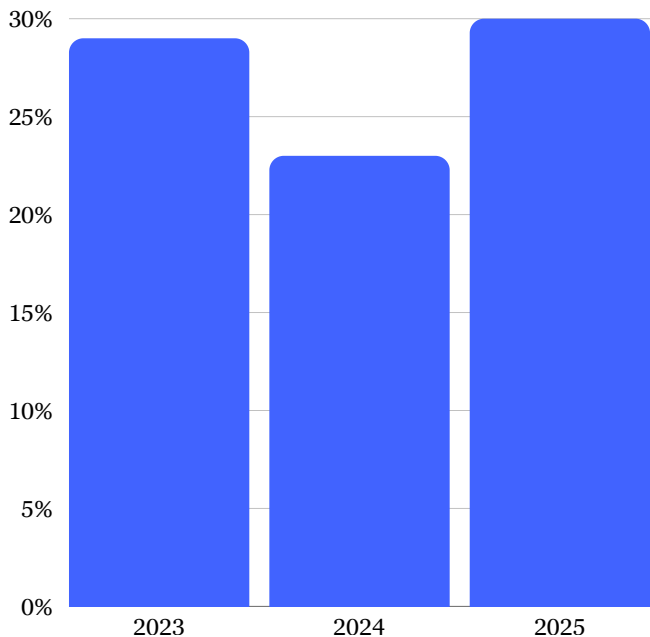
Overage Rate 2024
Overall Rate: 23%



Overage Rate 2023
Overall Rate: 29%



Overall Overage Rates



To ensure that future overage rates return to 2024 levels, the First District has analyzed sources of delay and implemented strategies in 2026 to clear the backlog. For example, in the first quarter of 2026, the First District increased the number of cases being submitted to a panel of judges in select weeks from nine to fifteen.

Taken together, this year’s case statistics illustrate a court navigating significant transitions and complex legal demands. The data underscores not only the volume of work handled but also the evolving nature of the First District’s docket and its ongoing efforts to balance efficiency with fairness and thorough adjudication.

Mediation Update



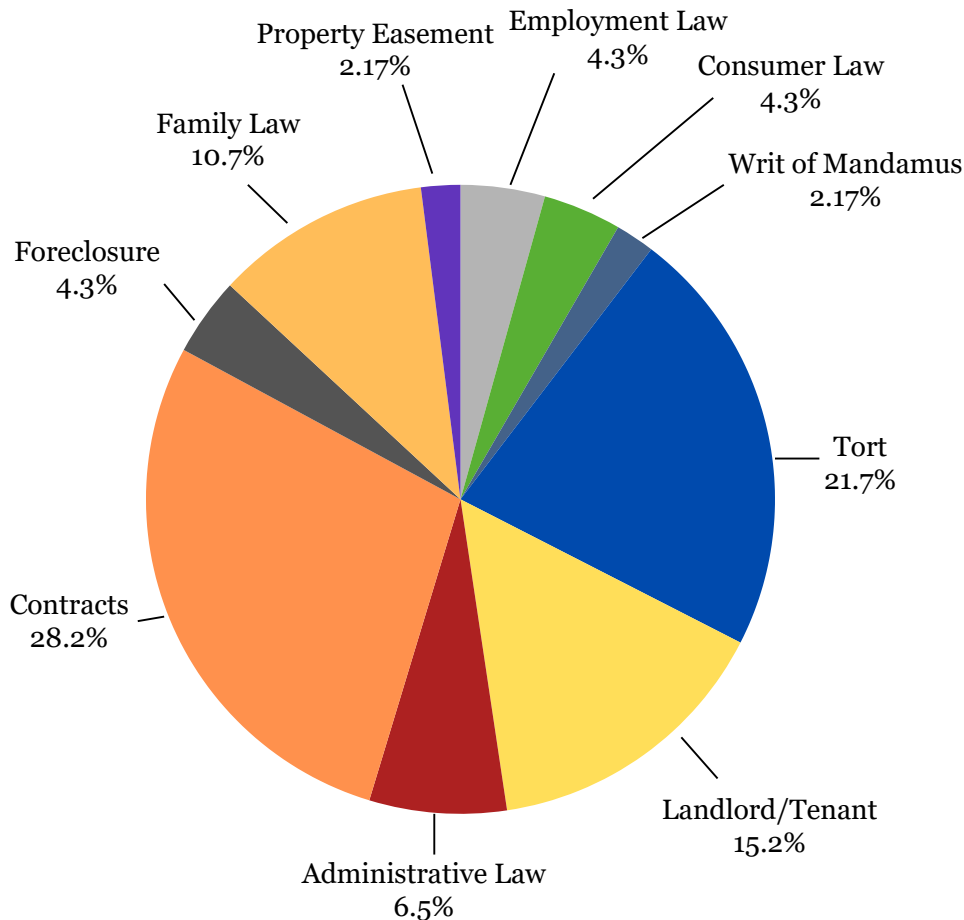
In 2025, the First District continued to grow its no-fee mediation program, which allows parties in eligible civil cases to explore settlement of their appeals and any related disputes. Throughout the year, the First District's trained mediator, Mary Minnillo, conducted virtual premediation conferences and, when warranted, mediation sessions. These sessions were offered in person at the First District, virtually, or in a hybrid format to best accommodate participants.

In 2025, Mediator Minnillo facilitated 46 mediations, including 16 held in person or hybrid and 30 conducted virtually. The overall rate of settlement was approximately 65 percent. The types of mediated cases varied, but employment and consumer law cases along with mandamus actions had the highest success rates.



Mary Minnillo
Mediator

2025 Mediations By Case Type



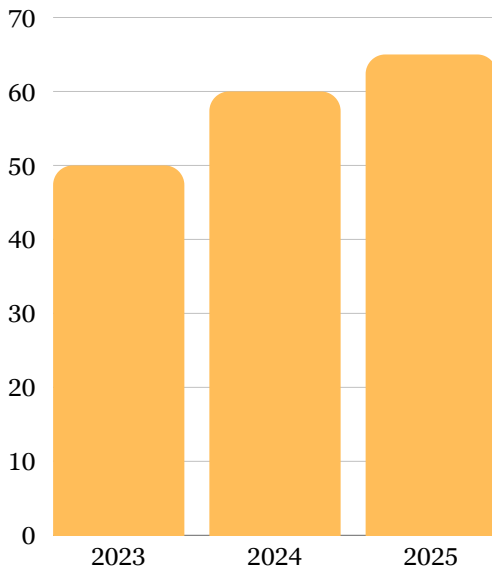
2025 Mediation Settlement Rates

Employment Law:	100%
Consumer Law:	100%
Writ of Mandamus:	100%
Tort:	80%
Landlord/Tenant:	71.4%
Administrative Law:	66%
Contract:	61.5%
Foreclosure:	50%
Family Law:	20%
Property Easement:	0%

Many of the settlements resolved issues beyond the scope of the issues appealed, resulting in efficient global settlements. This saved the parties money, including the costs of separate litigation and arbitration.

Beyond settlement outcomes, the mediation program provides valuable procedural benefits. When appropriate, the First District may issue a mediation stay, pausing certain appellate deadlines so the parties may meaningfully pursue settlement. The First District also encourages appellants to signal their interest in mediation early in the process through docket statements filed with their notices of appeal. Appellees may likewise express their interest in mediation by contacting Mediator Minnillo directly.

Success Rate by Year



In 2025, Mediator Minnillo facilitated 46 mediations. The overall rate of settlement was approximately 65%.

In 2025, Mediator Minnillo further strengthened the program through continued professional development at the top-ranked, globally recognized Straus Institute for Dispute Resolution at the Pepperdine University Caruso School of Law. While attending the course Mediating the Litigated Case, she learned and practiced innovative and effective dispute resolution strategies from industry leaders to use in the First District’s mediation program. In addition, she gained valuable insights for reaching agreements from the other participants—seasoned negotiators from around the world. Mediator Minnillo has used the refined skills she learned at the Straus Institute to create a more effective mediation process for the wide spectrum of disputes in the First District, from small-claims lawsuits filed without counsel to complex commercial litigation. Mediator Minnillo earned 40 Ohio continuing legal education (“CLE”) credits for the specialized training.

Also in 2025, Mediator Minnillo attended several in-state mediation CLE programs, continued her participation in the Ohio Appellate Mediator’s Roundtable, and joined the Cincinnati Bar Association’s Lawyers Connecting Beyond the Law. Finally, she presented at the September 2025 Ohio Association of Magistrates Conference on the effective use of mediation in appellate courts, along with a panel of mediators from other Ohio district appellate courts and the Supreme Court of Ohio.

Education and Training



The First District remains committed to developing a knowledgeable, well-trained team equipped to serve the public effectively. Throughout 2025, judges and staff engaged in professional development experiences offered locally, statewide, and nationally.

▶▶▶ Judicial Scholarship and International Engagement ◀◀◀

New Judges Orientation

After being elected but before stepping into their new roles as judges at the First District, Judge Terry Nestor and Judge Richard Moore completed New Judges Orientation at the Supreme Court of Ohio, alongside 39 other newly elected judges. New Judges Training is given in two sessions with the first session taking place in December, shortly after the election, and the second session taking place in May. The training assists judges in understanding their new role and provides resources to guide them along the way. When asked about his experience, Judge Moore said, “The highlight of training was hearing the oral argument in the Supreme Court and afterwards hearing from the justices. It was also a good chance to reconnect with the other new judges we met in December and see how they’re doing and what their districts are like.”

Judge Nestor added, “The best thing about New Judges Training was meeting other appellate court judges in Ohio and talking to them about how other courts work. The opportunity to meet and discuss appellate law with new and experienced judges was extremely helpful.”

Northern Kentucky University (NKU) Chase Law Review Symposium

In March, along with the original parties to the case, Judge Jennifer Kinsley was a featured participant in NKU Chase College of Law’s Law Review Symposium recognizing the 10th anniversary of the United States Supreme Court’s decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, which extended the right of marriage to all persons regardless of sexual orientation. Judge Kinsley’s law review article, *Speak Now: A New Paradigm for Assessing Wedding Vendors’ First Amendment Objections to Same-Sex Weddings*, was published in the Northern Kentucky Law Review’s symposium edition.



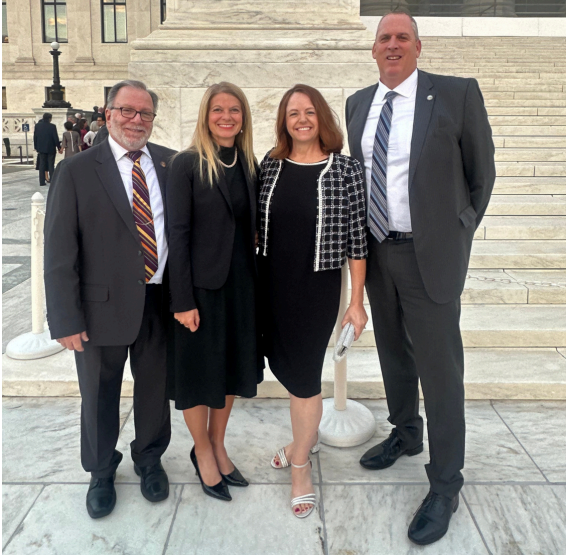


International Discussion Forum

In June, Judge Kinsley also spoke at the International Free Speech and Media Law Discussion Forum, hosted by the University of Public Service in Budapest, Hungary. The forum convened prominent free speech and media scholars from around the world to discuss emerging free speech topics.



Judge Kinsley in front of the National University of Public Service in Budapest, Hungary



Judge Kinsley and Judge Bock pictured with Judge Eugene Lucci and Judge Robert Patton from Ohio's 11th District Court of Appeals

Annual Conference in Washington, D.C.

In October, Judge Kinsley and Judge Ginger Bock attended the Council of Chief Judges of State Courts of Appeal Annual Conference in Washington, D.C. The conference focused on strategies for effective appellate docket management, integration of artificial intelligence tools into appellate litigation, and techniques for producing clear, accessible legal writing. A highlight of the event was a conference dinner at the United States Supreme Court attended by Justice Sonia Sotomayor.

▶▶▶ Investing in Court Leadership ◀◀◀

Ohio Association of Court Administration (OACA)

In 2025, Court Administrator Julie Kahrs Nessler and Assistant Court Administrator Angela Hayden continued their training and involvement with the Ohio Association of Court Administration (OACA). OACA supports court leaders throughout the State of Ohio. OACA presents two conferences each year, one in the fall and one in the spring. These trainings provide opportunities for the First District's administrators to network with other Ohio court professionals and receive exceptional continuing legal education and professional development. At the fall conference, Assistant Court Administrator Hayden completed training sessions focused on record retention, human resources, and enhancing the First District's best operational practices.





Ohio Association of Magistrates

Assistant Court Administrator Angela Hayden is also a member of the Ohio Association of Magistrates and attended the organization’s fall 2025 conference. At this three-day conference, she participated in training on a variety of topics, including institutional cultures, vexatious litigators, human resources, use of mediation in the appellate court, cybersecurity, and the ethical use of AI.

National Court Management Programs

In 2025, the First District continued its investment in high-quality education for its court managers. The First District’s Court Administrator Julie Kahrs Nessler and Assistant Court Administrator Angela Hayden continued their training in the nationally recognized programs offered by the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) Institute for Court Management (ICM). The NCSC is a non-profit organization and resource for state courts that aims to promote the rule of law and improve the administration of justice in courts around the world. The NCSC offers three levels of certification: the Certified Court Manager (CCM), the Certified Court Executive (CCE), and the ICM Fellows Program. Both the CCM and CCE programs are delivered by the Supreme Court of Ohio Judicial College.



The CCM program is a three-year course which aims to improve the performance of courts and access to justice. The program provides advanced study of caseflow, workforce management, court performance measures, fiscal management, and project management. Additionally, the class provides opportunities for participants to develop relationships with other court managers across the State of Ohio. At the end of the course, graduates receive the nationally recognized designation of Certified Court Manager.

In 2025, Assistant Court Administrator Hayden continued her participation in the CCM Program of NCSC attending two sessions, each consisting of three days of intensive training. She will graduate from the program with the Certified Court Manager designation in 2026.

Court Administrator Nessler began her next level of training as a part of the CCE Class of 2027. The CCE program is the second-level certificate in NCSC’s Court Management Program. The CCE program curriculum includes seven courses of advanced study designed to further develop a court leader’s knowledge and skills necessary to support the administration of justice. This certificate is a three-year program. In 2025, Court Administrator Nessler attended two sessions, each consisting of three days of intensive training.



▶▶▶ Collaborative Trainings ◀◀◀

In 2025, the First District collaborated with multiple county agencies to deliver quality training opportunities for staff, other Hamilton County agencies, and local practitioners.

Juvenile Court Trainings

In partnership with the Hamilton County Juvenile Court, the First District hosted an in-house training program in March. The training was led by Deputy Chief Magistrate Elizabeth Stringer of the Hamilton County Juvenile Court. The program focused on statutory requirements in parental termination cases and the fundamentals of dependency cases.



In August, the First District and the Hamilton County Juvenile Court collaborated once again, this time to provide training to counsel appointed in juvenile cases and those serving as guardians ad litem for children. Staff Attorney Ashley Coffaro and Court Administrator Julie Kahrs Nessler presented to the group on the basics of filing an appeal and best practices in writing appellate briefs.



Nicha Zingarelli from the Hamilton County Help Center delivers a training session on eviction proceedings

Eviction Training

In June, the Director of the Hamilton County Help Center delivered a training session for First District staff on eviction proceedings. This training covered notice requirements through the litigation of monetary claims. The training enhanced staff familiarity with this type of frequently handled appeals.

Post-Conviction Training

In the fall, and in collaboration with the University of Cincinnati College of Law’s Ohio Innocence Project, the First District hosted a continuing legal education training focused on post-conviction procedures. The event was attended by attorneys from the First District, the Hamilton County Prosecutor’s Office, and the Hamilton County Public Defender’s Office. The two-hour session provided participants with information on current statutes and procedures governing petitions for post-conviction relief, motions for new trial, and delayed appeals. The training supported practitioners in navigating this vital area of criminal appellate work.



Brian Howe, Lauren Staley, and Kate Flexter from The Ohio Innocence Project, University of Cincinnati College of Law

▶▶▶ 2025 Appellate Seminar ◀◀◀

In addition to providing training opportunities for staff and other Hamilton County agencies, the First District once again focused on providing training opportunities for the Hamilton County legal community at large. On December 5, 2025, the First District held its third annual Appellate Seminar and Continuing Legal Education Event in collaboration with the University of Cincinnati (UC) College of Law. The 2025 Appellate Seminar was held at the UC College of Law and attended by 80 local attorneys, magistrates, and judges. This year's event included four sessions on a range of different topics. First District Staff Attorney Matthew Doktor opened the event with a case law update which provided attendees with an overview of the most significant decisions released by the First District in 2025. Several staff members from the UC College of Law Library and Associate Dean Mike Whiteman also held a practical session detailing how to use artificial intelligence in the practice of law. Later, First District Judge Marilyn Zayas presented a deep dive on standards of review with help from First District Staff Attorneys Heather Heineman and Stacy Majba. To conclude the event, attendees participated in a question-and-answer panel session with First District Judges Marilyn Zayas, Ginger Bock, Terry Nestor, and Richard Moore. This session provided attendees with the opportunity to engage directly with members of the bench.



Community Engagement



In 2025, the First District continued its strong commitment to public service, community partnerships, and educational outreach. Through volunteer initiatives, student programs, and hands-on learning experiences, the First District worked to make the judicial process more accessible and to inspire future members of the legal profession.

Community Service and Volunteer Efforts

Tender Mercies Volunteer Event

Judge Jennifer Kinsley and court intern Chyenne Hoge volunteered with the Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky Chapter of the Federal Bar Association at Tender Mercies, an organization that provides housing and supportive services to adults experiencing homelessness. The volunteers assisted with meal service and engaged with residents as part of the First District's broader commitment to community outreach.



Chyenne Hoge, Nicole Newton, and Judge Kinsley volunteer at Tender Mercies

CAIN Food Drive

In November, judges and staff came together to support the CAIN (Churches Active in Northside) organization. CAIN is a local non-profit organization devoted to combating poverty and promoting food security. Employees donated funds and spent their lunch breaks assembling snack bags filled with shelf-stable food items designed to provide a full day of meals. 60 snack bags were collected and donated to CAIN through this food drive.



▶▶▶ On Site ◀◀◀ Educational Experiences

The First District continued offering in-person visits for students and community groups, providing an opportunity to observe oral arguments, meet with judges, and tour the courthouse. During these visits, students typically observe two or three cases and participate in a question-and-answer session to deepen their understanding of the appellate process.

Interested parties may schedule their visit to the First District by contacting coa@firstdistrictcoa.org.

Northern Kentucky University Chase Moot Court

In March, two moot court teams from Northern Kentucky University Chase College of Law (NKU) scrimmaged in the First District courtroom to prepare for the National Moot Court Competition in Child Welfare & Adoption Law. The scrimmage was arranged by Judge Jennifer Kinsley, who is also a professor at NKU. Judge Richard Moore and Staff Attorneys Jared Snow and Evan Thompson helped prepare the two teams by serving as judges during the scrimmage. The official competition took place in Columbus the following weekend and both teams made it to the “sweet sixteen” level of the competition.



Judge Richard Moore and staff attorneys Jared Snow and Evan Thompson pictured with NKU moot court teams

GENESIS Program Court Visit

In April, Judge Marilyn Zayas collaborated with the University of Cincinnati College of Law and Judge Ginger Bock, Judge Jennifer Kinsley, and Judge Richard Moore to provide GENESIS students with an on-site court experience. The program included a meet-and-greet with the judges, attorneys, and court staff, as well as a behind-the-scenes tour of the First District. GENESIS is a unique and groundbreaking program designed for incoming law students who are the first in their families to attend law school. It fosters a sense of belonging and community within the University of Cincinnati College of Law and the broader legal community, promotes inclusive excellence, and helps students navigate a new legal environment with confidence. The program is particularly focused on reducing barriers for first-generation students from underrepresented backgrounds and supporting their retention and academic success.



Judge Zayas speaks with students at the First District



Summer Interns Visit the First District

In June, the First District welcomed 46 interns from six local government agencies. The visiting interns observed oral arguments in the morning before breaking out into small panel sessions with various First District judges and staff attorneys. The panel sessions gave the interns a unique opportunity to learn more about appellate court proceedings and how each staff member came into their position. The panel sessions ended with a tour of the First District offices where the interns enjoyed lunch together and learned about each other's summer experiences. The visit provided students with insight into appellate procedures and legal career paths.



Staff attorneys Evan Thompson, Matthew Doktor, and Ben Martin take questions from interns after oral arguments.



Interns gather in the First District lobby before oral arguments

Students Shadow Judge Kinsley

In July, two local law students had the opportunity to shadow Judge Jennifer Kinsley and learn the day-to-day responsibilities of an appellate judge. The students, Will Smolinski and Julie Niesen, observed oral arguments in the morning and then received a tour of the First District. When asked about their experiences, Will stated, "I had a fantastic day at the Court and really enjoyed my shadowing experience. It was interesting to sit in on the oral arguments, and it was great to meet Judge Kinsley." Julie Niesen noted similar sentiments: "It was very interesting to observe appellate proceedings from the other side, and it was insightful to see the appeals perspective."





Miami University’s Women in Political Science

On October 17, the First District welcomed a group of young women from Miami University’s Women in Political Science, a new student organization dedicated to elevating women in the political science field. This organization strives to provide members with exposure to career opportunities available to them after they obtain a bachelor’s degree.

During their visit, the students toured both the First District and the Hamilton County Courthouse, where they learned about the legal process, explored various courtrooms, and met with Hamilton County judges and clerks. Later, they participated in a unique panel session with staff members from Hamilton County Juvenile Court, the Hamilton County Clerk of Courts, and the First District. Featured participants of this Women in Law panel consisted of professionals working in various positions within the court system to highlight the significant and vast roles that students can pursue post-graduation.

The group also met with First District judges. They took part in a question-and-answer session with Judge Jennifer Kinsley, Judge Marilyn Zayas, Judge Ginger Bock, Judge Terry Nestor, and Judge Richard Moore.



Members of Miami University’s Women in Political Science student organization pose in front of the Hamilton County Courthouse

President of the Women in Political Science organization, Natalie Janssen, said about the experience, “It was truly an insightful and wonderful field trip for my organization to visit the First District Court of Appeals. Many of us have never spoken to individuals in this field, which made this trip even more special. We are so appreciative to the Court of Appeals for having us because of how beautifully organized the trip was, and the opportunity we had to speak to so many impressive individuals involved in the court system!”





▶▶▶ Off-Site Student Visits ◀◀◀

Twice a year, the First District brings the courtroom to the community for off-site oral arguments. Typically held at a local high school or university, off-site oral arguments offer students the exciting and educational opportunity to witness the law in action. With the assistance of their instructors, students prepare in class to observe oral arguments, then apply what they see in court to classroom learning. Following oral arguments, students also participate in a question-and-answer session with the judges and their staff. This year, off-site oral arguments were held at the University of Cincinnati College of Law and Walnut Hills High School.

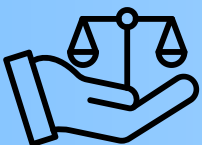


University of Cincinnati College of Law

In April, the First District held off-site arguments at the University of Cincinnati College of Law. Law students observed oral arguments in three cases heard by Presiding Judge Marilyn Zayas, Judge Candace Crouse, and Judge Terry Nestor.

Walnut Hills High School

In October, the First District held off-site oral arguments in the auditorium of Walnut Hills High School. During the visit, select Walnut Hills juniors and seniors observed oral arguments in two criminal cases and one civil case heard by Presiding Judge Jennifer Kinsley, Judge Terry Nestor, and Judge Richard Moore, a Walnut Hills alumnus. At the conclusion of oral arguments, students participated in a lively question-and-answer session with the judges.



To schedule an event or for more information on off-site student visits, please contact the First District at 513-946-3500 or by email at coa@firstdistrictcoa.org

Speaking Events and Presentations



The judges of the First District are passionate about volunteering their time, knowledge, and expertise to make a positive impact on the community. This year, several of the First District's judges presented on a wide range of topics at various legal seminars.

▶▶▶ Continuing Legal Education Contributions ◀◀◀

The First District's judges regularly participate in Continuing Legal Education (CLE) programs, which help attorneys maintain professional competency and remain informed about developments in the law.

Writing Effective Annual Reports

In March, the First District was among four Ohio courts selected to present at a CLE webinar on writing effective annual reports. The CLE training was presented to judges and court personnel from across the state. Judge Candace Crouse presented with Court Administrator Julie Kahrs Nessler and the First District's Communications and Engagement Specialist, Renata Freese. The presentation reviewed the First District's 2023 Annual Report and explained the process of writing and designing the report and the benefits of having an effective annual report.



View From the Bench: Tips for Lawyers

In May, Judge Terry Nestor presented a CLE training on his view from the bench to the Northeast Lawyers Club. In November, he provided tips for lawyers practicing before both the Hamilton County Court of Common Pleas and the First District at the Southwest Ohio Trial Lawyers Association.





Attorney Professionalism and Conduct

Judge Ginger Bock presented at two CLE trainings in 2025. As a member of the Supreme Court of Ohio’s Commission on Professionalism, Judge Bock presented trainings on Attorney Professionalism and Conduct. These presentations included a training for the Greene County Bar Association in August. In October, she co-presented an online CLE training with Judge Chris Epley from the Second District Court of Appeals on judicial conduct as part of the Supreme Court of Ohio’s Judicial College.



Appellate Advocacy

During nearly a decade on the First District bench, Judge Marilyn Zayas has identified key best practices that help attorneys effectively advocate for their clients. In the fall of 2025, she translated those insights into practical, skills-based CLE presentations designed to strengthen appellate advocacy. Judge Zayas presented at the Hamilton County Prosecutor’s Office, offering concrete guidance on avoiding common procedural and substantive pitfalls. She also presented at the First District’s annual CLE, where she provided strategic instruction on how to frame an appeal for success under Ohio’s appellate standards of review.

Leadership and Perseverance

In October 2025, Judge Zayas visited Saint Martin de Porres High School in Cleveland to speak with students about leadership, perseverance, and careers in the law. During her visit, she shared her personal journey to the bench, emphasizing the importance of hard work, integrity, and community. Judge Zayas encouraged students to pursue their goals with confidence, reminding them that their circumstances do not define their potential. Her message resonated with students as she underscored the power of education, resilience, and service in creating meaningful change.



Internships



The First District continued to offer comprehensive internship and externship programs focused on giving the next generation of lawyers and public servants the opportunity to collaborate with seasoned professionals and contribute to real-world projects. In 2025, the First District hosted a total of 25 interns. The students who were a part of this year's programs included undergraduate and law school students from Ohio, Kentucky, and North Carolina.

"My internship with the Court has taught me so much. From going to different organizations, working with the staff, and conducting legal research, my horizons have vastly expanded during my time here." –Henry Paull.

Summer Internships

In 2025, the First District continued its annual summer internship program under the leadership and supervision of Judge Jennifer Kinsley and Judge Ginger Bock. The summer internship program is one of the most immersive programs offered by the First District as it provides undergraduate and law students from around the country the chance to explore various Hamilton County courts and government agencies. Not only do the interns work alongside the First District's staff attorneys to complete legal research and draft judicial documents, they also are given numerous observation opportunities. In 2025, the interns visited the Hamilton County Courthouse, the Hamilton County Coroner's Office, and the Supreme Court of Ohio. Students work closely with the judges to meet their personal and professional goals. At the end of the internship, the summer interns presented their projects and experiences in the First District's courtroom.



In July, Judge Marilyn Zayas and Judge Richard Moore hosted an informal gathering with the First District's summer interns. Over cake and coffee, the judges shared their professional journeys and answered student questions about the legal profession.

Judge Zayas discussed the importance of perseverance and self-belief in her path to the bench, while Judge Moore reflected on building a career rooted in public service and community engagement. Both emphasized that there is no single path to success in the law and encouraged students to remain open to the opportunities that public service can offer.



Engaging in the Community



The judges of the First District continue to be involved in the community. Below is a sampling of each judge's involvement in the community during 2025.

Judge Marilyn Zayas

Expanded the reach of the "Educating Tomorrow's Leaders" program to counties across Ohio. The program provides students with opportunities to engage with judges and attorneys, learn about the legal system, and be inspired to dream big and persevere in pursuing their goals. Member of the University of Cincinnati College of Law Dean's Advisory Board and member of the Board of Directors at the Beech Acres Parenting Center.

Judge Candace Crouse

Serves on the Ohio Judicial Conference Jury Instructions Committee; is a Commissioner on the Ohio Board of Professional Conduct; is a Member of the Potter Stewart Inn of Court; and teaches Criminal Trial Practice as an adjunct professor at the University of Cincinnati College of Law.

Judge Ginger Bock

Commissioner of the Supreme Court of Ohio's Commission on Professionalism; Member of the Ohio Judicial Conference of Appellate Law and Procedure Committee; Member of the Karen Wellington Foundation Recipient Advisory Board; and a Lifetime Member of the Cincinnati NAACP.

Judge Jennifer Kinsley

Member of the Northern Kentucky University Chase College of Law faculty, teaching courses in constitutional law and legal analysis; Board of Trustees of the local chapter of the Federal Bar Association; Advisory Board of the Hamilton County Help Center; volunteer at Tender Mercies; law review articles published in the Harvard Journal of Sports and Entertainment Law and the Northern Kentucky Law Review.

Judge Terry Nestor

Serves on the Supreme Court of Ohio's Case Management Advisory Committee.

Judge Richard Moore

Serves on the Board of the Taft Museum of Art and became President of the Federal Bar Association, Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky Chapter.

