

Tulane University

4th Annual Political Economy & Access to Justice Judicial Education Seminar (PEAJJES)

SHINE A LIGHT ON IT: ILLUMINATING THE WORK THAT JUDGES AND COURTS DO TO INNOVATE AND IMPROVE ACCESS TO JUSTICE

The justice system forms one of the cornerstones of American Democracy. Of all of the branches of U.S. government, the judicial branch, arguably, engages the public with the most immediate, tangible, and consequential impact. One out of every 5 Americans has contact with the justice system each year: 10 million, as a result of being charged with a crime and 55 million through a civil process, involving, among other issues, evictions, child custody, contract disputes, and child support.¹ The day-to-day work of judges and judicial administrators underscores the vital roles that courts play in deciding cases and establishing policies and praxes that impact people's lived experiences, affect the stability and safety of communities, and inform the social, political and economic structures of our nation. Because of the indispensable role the judicial branch plays in Americans' lives, facilitating transparency and usability, remaining on the cutting edge of technology, and fostering clear understanding of how the system works, are vital both to the health of the justice system and to American Democracy. For years, institutions of higher education have taken the lead in studying the justice system with the laudable goal of theorizing best practices for improving it. "Shine a Light on It," the theme of PEAJJES 2026, proposes to bring in the voices of sitting and retired judges and court administrators to bear upon, ground, and flesh these academic discourses. Judges and judicial administrators representing court systems throughout the country will lead sessions that spotlight the many ways that stakeholders in the justice system have taken the lead in fostering innovation and improving the system, by developing new and creative interventions and services; implementing new technologies; and facilitating practical integration of modernizing practices and efficient administrative policies. Working lunches and collective debriefings give judicial participants time and space to discuss and troubleshoot ways to model, scale, and adapt what they learn from sessions, upon returning to their respective jurisdictions. Registration is open to sitting and retired judges. To register, visit www.peajjes.com. For more information, email peajjes@tulane.edu, or call (985) 497-5508.

This seminar has been approved by the Louisiana State Bar MCLE Committee for 11.75 CLEs, 1.25 ethics hours. Applications for CLE credit are pending with the State Bar of Texas and Mississippi State Bar.

¹ Georgetown Law, Institute for Technology, Law, & Policy.

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2026 Schedule

Day 1: January 16, 2026

9:00AM-9:15AM

Welcome

Gary A. Hoover, PhD, Professor of Economics and Executive Director of The Murphy Institute

Professor Hoover is the Executive Director of The Murphy Institute and Professor of Economics at Tulane University. His research focuses on the intersection of economics, race, and public policy. He is the current and founding editor of the *Journal of Economics, Race and Policy*, past Vice-President of the Southern Economic Association, and a fellow of CESifo Group Munich.

SESSION I (1.25 Hours)

9:15-10:30AM

Homeless Court: A Model for Responding to a National Crisis

Unhoused, or homeless, persons involved in the justice system face distinct access-to-justice challenges that include high rates of recidivism for low-level offenses and failures to appear; unreliable transportation; and limited access to interventionist health, mental, and substance abuse services. Troubleshooting these challenges are crucial for supporting cost-efficient process, meeting the health and safety needs and interests of communities, and administering justice. This session spotlights Nashville's Homeless Court and the work it has undertaken to innovate and problem-solve issues that relate to justice-involved homeless/unhoused populations.

Presenter:

Honorable Judge Lynda Jones, General Sessions Court, Metropolitan Nashville and Davidson County, Division IX

Judge Lynda Jones was elected to the bench on August 7, 2014. She was the Presiding Judge of Davidson County General Sessions Court from September 1, 2019 – September 1, 2020. She is a Chair of the General Sessions Court

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Committee for Nashville Bar Association and Fellow of the Nashville Bar Foundation; and she presides over the Nashville Homelessness Court.

Judge Jones is heavily involved in the Nashville community. She is the Chairman of the Board of Dismas House which helps to improve lives and communities by providing the formerly incarcerated with a holistic reentry program; and she is a member of the Nashville Behavioral Health and Wellness Advisory Council, which strives for a safe, stable and nurturing community for all, with a behavioral health system that supports recovery and resilience by ensuring access to comprehensive and affordable care.

Judge Jones is the recipient of several awards for her public service, including the 2021 Nashville Cable Spirit of Leadership Award, 2015 Nashville Business Journal Women of Influence, Public Policy Award, 2014 Athena Nominee, 2014 NAWBO Woman of the Year Award, 2013 Athena Nominee, 2013 Mid-South Super Lawyer, and the 2011 NAMI Mental Health Advocacy Award.

10:30-10:45AM

Break

SESSION II (1.25 Hours)

10:45AM-12:00PM

Aiming for the STARs: Countering the Human Trafficking Epidemic in Juvenile Courts

Access to justice issues involving young adults and children charged with delinquency offenses are often complicated by the fact that these populations are common targets of human trafficking and, thus, are, also, themselves crime victims. This session discusses the history and programmatic successes of the Succeeding through Achievement and Resilience (STAR) court, Louisiana's first specialty court established to address human trafficking and the mechanisms and procedures needed to provide for the fair, effective, and efficient resolution of delinquency cases involving youth victims of sex crimes.

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Presenter: Honorable Judge Ree Casey-Jones, Chief Judge, Caddo Parish Juvenile Court

Judge Ree Casey-Jones is Chief Judge of the Caddo Parish Juvenile Court. She is a 2017 alumnus of the National Judicial College in Reno, Nevada, and she completed a judicial fellowship at Georgetown University in Washington, DC. Judge Casey-Jones is a recipient of the Angels in Adoption Award, a United States Congressional award for outstanding work in child welfare and the Mt. Canaan Baptist Church/Harry Blake Trailblazer Award. And she has been recognized as one of the Shreveport Chamber of Commerce Young Professional's *40 Under 40*. Her civic involvement includes membership in Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. She serves on the board of directors for the Claiborne Fundamental Magnet School, Cedar Grove Community Development Corporation, and the Pearls of Humanity Foundation. She is an avid public speaker and volunteers several hours throughout the state of Louisiana speaking and mentoring young people. In her spare time, she enjoys traveling and spending time with her husband, Darwin Jones, a Captain with the Caddo Parish Sheriff's Office and a Marine Corps Veteran and their son, Dawson.

12:00PM-1:15PM Working Lunch

SESSION III (1.25 Hours)

1:15-2:30PM To Proceed or Not to Proceed: The Intersecting Challenges of Competency Law, Criminal Procedure, and Access to Justice

Competency to stand trial is not only a requirement for persons accused in the context of criminal proceedings, it is also mandated by the U. S. Constitution. Between 2% and 8% of persons facing felony offense charges require competency evaluations and restorations. Too often process is interrupted, and the administration of justice is delayed, because of unknowns about, or late identification of, competency issues that justice-involved individuals experience. This session addresses strategies for identifying and eliminating barriers to access to justice that relate to competency, including: understanding substantive distinctions between competency and sanity defense pleadings; inpatient

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and outpatient restoration; mental health services; and resource availability. The session specifically draws insight from successes in enhancing docket efficiency through the establishment of Colorado's first competency docket and outlines best practices for scaling and modeling this procedural innovation in other jurisdictions.

Presenter:

Hon. Judge Susan Blanco, District Court Chief Judge, Colorado Judicial Branch

Susan Blanco was appointed to the 8th Judicial District Court Bench by Governor Hickenlooper and was sworn in January 2017. Judge Blanco was appointed as Chief Judge of the 8th Judicial District, effective January 12, 2021. Prior to serving as a judge, She worked as a deputy District Attorney in the 8th Judicial Office and in private practice from 2007 to 2016. In private practice she predominately worked on criminal cases, juvenile delinquency, dependency and neglect matters and municipal prosecution.

Judge Blanco graduated with a Bachelor of Science from Colorado State University in 2000 and her Juris Doctorate from University of Colorado School of Law in 2003. In 2024, Judge Blanco received the 46th Judge Conrad L. Ball Award, for her visionary justice-related worked. In 2025, she earned an LLM from Duke Law School in 2025. She teaches at Colorado State University.

2:30-2:45PM

Evaluation

SESSION IV (1.25 Hours)

2:45-4:00

Indiana Family Recovery Courts: Holistic Models for Serving Families and Administering Justice

Drawing on the success of drug court programs operating throughout the United States, Family Recovery Courts launched as mediums for identifying and implementing best practices for serving children involved in child welfare systems and parents and caregivers of these children who are concurrently involved in criminal justice systems for drug/substance abuse related offenses. This session offers insight into the operation of family recovery courts in Indiana and collaborations among justice

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stakeholders and use of justice reinvestment funding, which have facilitated the operation and success of these courts for several decades.

Presenter: **Hon. Chief Justice Chris Goff, Indiana Supreme Court**

Chris Goff has served on the Indiana Supreme Court since 2017. He attended Ball State University, graduating *summa cum laude* in 1994. He earned his JD from Indiana University in 1996. And, most recently, he earned his LLM from Duke Law School.

After law school, Justice Goff worked as a general practitioner in a three-person law firm in rural Indiana. He served as Huntington County Public Defender for two years. His work led to the establishment of the Huntington County Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program. Justice Goff was named Huntington County Pro Bono Attorney of the Year in 2001 and again in 2002. He also served as President of the Huntington County Police Merit Board and Vice President of the Huntington County Bar Association.

After eight years, Justice Goff left his practice to become Judge of the Wabash Superior Court judge, a position he held for twelve years. During that time, he established the Wabash County Drug Court, Wabash County Family Recovery Court, and Wabash County Reentry Court. Justice Goff served on the Board of Directors of the Indiana Judicial Conference. He also chaired the Protection Order Committee of the Indiana Judicial Conference, which provides guidance to judges, lawyers, and individuals around the state. All told during his time on the trial bench, Justice Goff disposed of over thirty thousand cases and had only one decision overturned on appeal.

Since joining the Indiana Supreme Court, Justice Goff has continued serving his fellow Hoosiers, both on and off the bench. He led a successful statewide initiative to expand Family Recovery Courts in Indiana, nearly tripling the number of programs in just two years. In May 2020, he was appointed to serve as Chair of the Indiana Justice Reinvestment Advisory Council (JRAC). He also serves or has served as a member of the National Judicial Task Force to Examine State Courts' Response to Mental Illness, and as Vice Chair of the Appellate Judges Conference of the American Bar Association. He is an adjunct

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professor of law at the Indiana University McKinney School of Law where he teaches on problem-solving courts. He is also the author of a one-volume treatise on Indiana Criminal Law and Procedure.

Justice Goff and his wife, Raquel, have been married since 1993. They have four children and six grandchildren.

4:00-4:15PM

Evaluations and Afternoon Winddown

SESSION V (1.25 Hours)

4:15-5:30PM

Innovation in Rural Spaces: Expanding Access to Justice in Rural Courts through Cost-Effective Use of Technology

Among the critical issues in the administration of justice facing justice systems throughout rural America is access to economic resources needed both to implement basic technology and remain at the cutting edge of technological innovation. This session uses the 11th Judicial District in/for Sabine Parish, State of Louisiana, as a case study of how bold judicial vision and collaborative effort among justice stakeholders can foster the development and implementation of successful strategies for implementing affordable and effective technology that improves access to justice for underresourced communities.

Presenter:

Hon. Verity Gentry, Judge, 11th Judicial District, State of Louisiana

A proud native of Sabine Parish, Louisiana, Judge Gentry serves as district judge for the 11th Judicial District Court, having been elected to this position in 2022. Judge Gentry earned a bachelor's degree in business administration from Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. After graduating from LSU, she worked in the Louisiana Attorney General's office and interned for Sen. Mary Landrieu in Washington, D.C. She then earned a Juris Doctorate, *Cum Laude*, from Loyola University College of Law in New Orleans. While in law school, Judge Gentry interned with the Hon. Mary Milloy of the United States District Court for the Southern District of Texas and clerked with the Orleans Public Defenders Office.

5:30-5:45PM

Evaluations

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6:30PM **Dinner Debriefing and Social Gathering—High Hat Café—4500 Freret Street**

Day 2: January 17, 2025

8:30AM-9:00AM **Registration and Breakfast**

SESSION VI (2.5 Hours)

9:00-11:30AM **AI Readiness for State and Federal Courts: Findings from Pilot Programs**

This session brings together justice system stakeholders working at the cutting-edge of technology innovation to discuss current policy developments and pilot programs that are responsive to the opportunities and challenges presented by Artificial Intelligence (AI). The ultimate goal of this session is to empower courts with the knowledge needed to make informed decisions about how to integrate AI into its operations in ways that are cost-efficient, ethical, and effective.

Presenters: **Associate Justice Robert J. Torres, Judiciary of Guam**

The Honorable Robert J. Torres, Jr., born and raised on Guam, was sworn in as Justice of the Supreme Court of Guam in 2004. He served as Chief Justice of Guam from January 15, 2008 to January 18, 2011 and served his second term from January 21, 2014 to January 17, 2017. Justice Torres played a central role in expanding court services on Guam with the opening of the Northern Court Satellite, enabling wireless technology and videoconferencing in the courtrooms, and implementing e-filing and increased online services. A self-professed technophile, he laid the groundwork for the design and acquisition of a modern case management system and continues to oversee various technological advancements for the Judiciary of Guam.

Justice Torres is on the American Judges Association’s Executive Committee and Board of Governors, and since 2016 has been on the Social Media and Technology Committee for the American Judges Association. He has spoken at numerous conferences on “Judicial Ethics and Social Media,” and has lectured in over twenty countries on a variety of subjects including

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the International Framework for Court Excellence, case flow management, cultural responsiveness, court community communication, alternative dispute resolution, technology, and judicial ethics and discipline. He presently serves as the Membership Secretary for NAPABA's Judicial Council and chairs numerous Judiciary of Guam subcommittees.

Justice Torres received his B.B.A. from the University of Notre Dame (Magna Cum Laude; Beta Gamma Sigma; Beta Alpha Psi) and J.D. from Harvard Law School. He was also awarded two Doctor of Laws (LL.D.), *Honoris Causa*, from the University of Cebu and Centro Escolar University in the Philippines

(Ret.) Judge Jennifer Bailey, Partner, BASS Law

(Ret.) Judge Bailey served for 30 years in Florida's Eleventh Judicial Circuit Court in Miami-Dade County. She is recognized nationally, statewide, and locally as an expert on case management. In addition to her law practice, private judging, and alternative dispute resolution, Judge Bailey teaches and consults with various court systems on court leadership and how to innovate, deploy technology and improve judicial efficiency. She frequently working with the National Center for State Courts as a Senior Judicial Advisor. She is often consulted on cutting edge issues such as data quality, change management, and AI in the justice system. Judge Bailey earned her L.L.M. in Judicial Studies from Duke University School of Law in 2018 and her Juris Doctorate from the University of Georgia School of Law.

Aaron Judy, Chief of Innovation and Emerging Technologies, Maricopa County

Aaron Judy is a visionary leader at the intersection of innovation and technology and has been recognized s a trailblazer in his field. In 2021, he and his team received the prestigious 2021 GovTech FutureReady Award and the GovX Experience Award, showcasing their commitment to shaping the future of government technology. Additionally, their remarkable contributions earned them the 2021 CIO Magazine and IDC FutureEdge Award, along with two NACO Awards for AI.

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With a proven track record, Mr. Judy was distinguished as one of CIO Magazine and IDC's "Ones to Watch" in 2020, highlighting his dedication and foresight in technology. His passion for innovation extends beyond AI; he has been honored twice with Esri's Special Achievement in GIS and received the AACo Summit Award for outstanding innovation, having developed a state-aware, self-healing database management solution.

11:30-11:45AM **Evaluations & Break**

11:45AM-12:45PM **Working Lunch**

SESSION VII (1.25 Hours)

12:45PM-2:00PM **What Every New Judge Should Know—The Court as a Site of Justice and Business Administration**

Judges must adhere to high standards embodied in ethical rules that regulate their conduct. This is the case for both the adjudicative and administrative functions of the court. Rarely are judges educated about exactly what their administrative functions are, how these functions interact with issues of access to justice, and how failure to discharge their administrative duties may adversely impact the administration of justice. This session addresses the basics of the administrative functions of the court. It considers the meaning of “faithful and proper adherence” to canonical and constitutional provisions that implicate judges’ administrative duties. And it affords judges the opportunity to troubleshoot issues that may arise in their capacities as court administrators.

Presenter: **Hon. LaShawn Williams, Civil Court at Law No. 3, Harris County Courts**

Judge LaShawn Williams graduated from Thurgood Marshall School of Law at Texas Southern University in May 1995. Prior to serving on the bench, she was in-house counsel for a national Fortune 500 company, counsel for several non-profit

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organizations, counsel to governmental entities, a criminal prosecutor and a criminal defense attorney.

Judge Williams' decision to run for the judgeship that she currently holds was informed by her recognition of the need for judges who appreciate what average citizens, families, small businesses, and communities expect and experience when engaging with the justice system. Judge Williams presides intentionally with a spirit of servitude, patience, open-mindedness, kindness, respect for the rule of law, integrity, and honor, because she views her service as a judge and to her community as callings to represent and respect the law and the individuals, families, and communities of Harris County.

2:00-2:15PM

Evaluations and Break

SESSION VIII (1.25 Hours)

2:15-3:30PM

Continuing Education for Judicial Knowledge and Systemic Strengthening

The code of judicial ethics safeguards the independence of the judiciary, by providing judges guidance for conduct on and off the bench. The code also anticipates that judicial participation in continuing educational programs and other extrajudicial activities serves as a means of strengthening the judiciary, by keeping judges abreast of new developments in the law, integrating judges in their communities, and fostering public knowledge of and respect for the judicial system. This session uses one judge's experiences with extrajudicial activity and training through *Empower Initiative*, a leadership development organization. Among the access to justice issues that participation in this program prepares judges and other organizational leaders to better understand and draw from, when serving and interacting with the public are: managing disputes between parties with empathy and utilizing solutions-driven approaches to addressing intimate partner violence/domestic violence.

Presenter:

Judge Genesis Draper, Criminal Court at Law, No. 12, Harris County

Judge Draper earned a Bachelor of Arts in English from Spelman College and a Doctor of Jurisprudence from The University of Texas at Austin School of Law. Upon graduating from law school, she moved to Nashville, Tennessee and began her career as

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an assistant public defender and served in this capacity at the federal and state level for a decade. Judge Draper took the bench in April 2019 and was elected to a four-year term in November 2022. Since that time, she has been committed to reducing the length of time from arrest to trial, so that defendants and victims of crime don't have to wait years for justice. Judge Draper champions bail reform and offers her court as a model for efficient misdemeanor and felony court proceedings and operations.

3:30-3:45PM

Summative Evaluations and Debriefing