

# MESSAGE FROM THE STATE COURT ADMINISTRATOR

## Annual Report 2022

Welcome to the Delaware Judicial Branch's Annual Report for 2022.

After nearly three years, I hoped to avoid any COVID-19 references in this Report. Unfortunately, the pandemic still had a grip on us in 2022; but, better vaccines and better vaccination rates made it possible for the Judicial Branch to end our masking requirements and our COVID-19 testing program for employees. We also eased our social distancing requirements to permit expanded access to the courts, which allowed us to schedule more jury trials and continue clearing the backlog as we resumed regular operations.

Pandemic notwithstanding, this year gave us much to celebrate as a Branch – groundbreakings for two new Family Court facilities in Kent and Sussex Counties; funding to begin design plans to renovate the Custom House; the 230<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Court of Chancery; the release of the Strategic Plan for Improving Diversity in the Delaware Bench and Bar (“the Diversity Report”); and the unification of our employees under a single system of personnel administration solely within the Judicial Branch – just to name a few.

I am extremely proud of the team at the Administrative Office of the Courts and the work they do every day in support of the Courts' mission to provide equal access to justice. Some highlights from this year include:

**Project CASCADE:** Our multi-year technology initiative to establish a unified solution for electronic filing, case management, and document management for all courts and case types made significant gains in 2022. We established a governance structure and branding for the project and hired a project manager. Most exciting, we engaged vendors and have nearly completed civil case discovery, which is the first phase of the project.

**Courtroom Technology Upgrades:** Using grant funding provided under the American Rescue Plan Act, our Judicial Information Center team has been hard at work upgrading the technology in our courtrooms throughout the state. These long-term technology investments expand our capacity to hold remote and hybrid hearings, allowing access to those who cannot appear in person and greatly improving the quality of the proceedings.

**Accessibility:** We continued progress toward improved access to the courts for those with disabilities and limited English proficiency. The AOC began executing a remediation plan for our web content, including court forms, to ensure that the content is ADA-compliant and is translated into other languages. We also filled our first of three full-time court interpreter positions.

**Fees and Fines Reform:** Working with many other stakeholders, the Judicial Branch supported significant reforms to Delaware's system of criminal fees and fines, which disproportionately affect our poorest citizens.

**Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:** Under Chief Justice Seitz's leadership, the AOC dug into the Diversity Report and began working with stakeholders on implementation of specific recommendations. One of those recommendations was realized when the Judicial Branch hired its first Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer who will help lead the Judicial Branch's efforts to enhance DEI training for judges and employees, expand civics and law-related educational programming in our schools, and build pipelines and structure paid internships for students of color to encourage pursuit of a career in the courts or legal profession.

**Supervisor Series Training:** Judicial Branch employees had the opportunity to participate in a comprehensive training series created specifically for new supervisors within the courts to help build management skills and cultivate professional growth.

**Employee Wellbeing Program:** In order to foster a sense of wellbeing for our employees, a Judicial Branch team created a program to bring awareness to mental and emotional wellness and the impact of vicarious trauma caused by the difficult work court employees do.

I hope you find the contents of this Report useful in understanding the Delaware Judicial Branch and our ongoing initiatives. I encourage you to visit our website at <http://courts.delaware.gov/> for the latest information about the Delaware Judicial Branch.

Sincerely,



Gayle P. Lafferty  
State Court Administrator

