

# IMPACT

YEAR IN REVIEW | 2021



## Advancing Racial Justice

Last year, the Conference of Chief Justices and Conference of State Court Administrators (CCJ/COSCA) pledged to improve a system in which “too many persons, especially persons of color, lack confidence in the fairness of our courts and our criminal justice system.” From there, NCSC’s **Blueprint for Racial Justice** initiative was born. The Center also announced a two-pronged plan to establish a racial justice resource center and develop a data-driven tool to guide court leaders. The **Blueprint for Racial Justice** steering committee workgroups are focused on fairness and awareness, systemic change, communication and implementation, and increasing the diversity of the bench, bar and workforce.



[nsc.org/racialjustice](https://nsc.org/racialjustice)

## Examining Mental Health

The **National Judicial Task Force to Examine State Courts’ Response to Mental Illness** is establishing a framework to divert cases from the court system and move people with mental health issues out of jails and into community services that can address their needs. This year, the task force adopted a detailed work plan that outlines its objectives for the next two years.

*“Our ability to align justice system responses and individual needs depends on state court leaders and behavioral health leaders at all levels understanding the breadth of challenges, identifying intersections between courts and behavioral health, and finding innovative solutions.”*

— Chief Administrative Judge Lawrence Marks  
New York State Court Administrator and Task Force Co-Chair

## Improving Guardianship

NCSC continues to examine issues related to **guardianship and conservatorship** cases at both a state and national level. In September, NCSC Vice President David Slayton testified before a U.S. Senate subcommittee reviewing the need for conservatorship/guardianship reforms.

## Expanding Rural Access

The **Rural Justice Collaborative**, an initiative managed by NCSC with Rulo Strategies, is calling attention to challenges rural residents face when seeking access to legal assistance, behavioral health treatment and job training, among other services.

[ruraljusticecollaborative.org](https://ruraljusticecollaborative.org)

## Building Global Networks

NCSC is working throughout the world to advance justice systems and enhance justice services. We recently completed a **five-year effort** to help courts in the northern African nation of Tunisia become more efficient, modern and accessible. This fall, our **International Programs Division** adopted a **new strategic plan** to more effectively serve international courts in the future.

## Preparing for Emergencies

Climate change was a huge issue worldwide in 2021, with a growing number of climatologists saying it is exacerbating natural disasters. NCSC responded with a **new emergency management planning guide** to help court officials better prepare for and respond to natural disasters and other emergencies that threaten court operations.



## Recognizing Judicial Excellence

Louisiana District Court Judge Scott U. Schlegel (pictured above), a pioneer in using technology to increase accessibility and efficiency in Louisiana state courts, received NCSC’s 2021 **William H. Rehnquist Award** for Judicial Excellence, one of the highest judicial honors in the country.

NEW — Public Face Mask Requirements

Virtual Hearings: Resources and Guides

Virtual Hearings: Channel Directory

Links to State Court COVID-19 Websites

# Public Face Mask Requirements

## Mask Orders by Category

Data reflects state Supreme Court orders/directives on statewide policy and is current as of 9/7/2021

- Statewide restriction lifted/local discretion
- Masks required
- No data



# Leading in Crisis: Responding to the Pandemic

Scan code below to follow NCSC's pandemic response.



*Our work to help courts operate efficiently in the face of a slew of pandemic-related challenges continued in 2021.*

This year, we continued to track rapidly changing pandemic-related policies associated with the explosion of virtual hearings and courthouse safety measures, presenting the information on our popular **pandemic data visualization map**. That dashboard has been viewed more than 150,000 times and has been linked to stories in *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*.

[ncsc.org/pandemic](https://ncsc.org/pandemic)

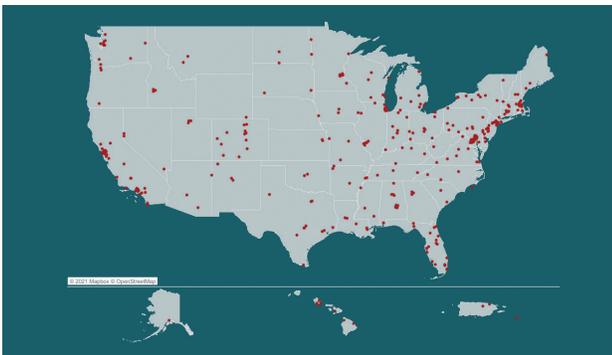
## CTC 2021

More than 500 people attended the 2021 Court Technology Conference in late September in Columbus, Ohio. Sessions focused on spreading pandemic-era innovations and sharing lessons learned.



## Professional Education

The pandemic also prompted NCSC's Institute for Court Management to change the way it educated court professionals. ICM responded by offering more than **65 virtual courses** since the pandemic began, serving **2,236 attendees**.



## Eviction Assistance

With an eviction crisis looming, NCSC developed an eviction diversion diagnostic tool as part of the RRT Implementation Lab. The guided, online interview helps courts determine their readiness for eviction diversion and provides a recommended course of action. Working with partners that include the White House, U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Treasury Department, NCSC also published an online evictions resource center for courts, attorneys and the public, which features a locator map of legal aid providers.

[npsc.org/eviction](https://npsc.org/eviction)

## Pandemic Rapid Response Team

# IMPLEMENTATION Lab

The CCJ/COSCA **Pandemic Rapid Response Team** (RRT) and NCSC have identified and developed innovations and new practices in response to the pandemic. That work has produced dozens of resources. To help spread innovation widely and continue to learn from courts implementing new practices, the RRT and NCSC launched the **Implementation Lab Initiative**.



## Backlog Simulator

Addressing caseload concerns, NCSC developed a **backlog simulator** to help courts evaluate the number and types of pending cases while also identifying where the delays are. The tool also uses historical data to show caseload projections with and without interventions.

## Outreach

When you think about court operations, access-to-justice issues, online dispute resolution and eviction moratoria, you probably don't think about chef hats, Einstein wigs, construction hard hats and Michael J. Fox *Back to the Future* costumes. Those are just a few of the props that NCSC consultants Danielle Hirsch and Zach Zarnow use when they host **Tiny Chats** – a series of brief, informal videos about court operations and access-to-justice topics that try to use humor and fun themes to inform viewers. Tiny Chats recently passed a significant milestone – 50,000 views!

[npsc.org/tinychats](https://npsc.org/tinychats)



# Celebrating 50 Years of Service

The vast majority of state supreme court chief justices and state court administrators, among many other guests and friends, came to Williamsburg on July 25 to celebrate **our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary**. The event included speeches, a flag raising and the dedication of Legacy Circle, which features commemorative pavers that recognize each state's court system and NCSC supporters.



**NCSC has always been about solving the most difficult problems.**

**When there's a crisis, we get involved and we get to work!**

*"Despite all the challenges presented in 2020, NCSC continued its work to improve court operations and public trust and confidence in the justice system. And it will continue to do so through 2021 and beyond."*

**– Mary C. McQueen**  
President, National Center for State Courts

*"I can check off a long list of innovations where the Center has provided leadership – things like racial inequity and fairness, criminal justice reform, civil justice reform, interpreter services. The list goes on and on."*

**– Dan Becker**  
Retired Utah State Court Administrator

*"There's never a monopoly on good ideas, and a lot of times it's knowing who to reach out to, and through the National Center, we make those connections."*

**– Sally Holewa**  
North Dakota State Court Administrator



## Planning for the Future

The 19-member **Just Horizons Council**, a group of expert practitioners and scholars, met several times in 2021 to discuss weighty questions such as: What core values do we want to preserve? What trends might affect courts in the next 10-15 years? What actions do we take to prepare and shape the role of courts in delivering justice?

[ncsc.org/justhorizons](https://ncsc.org/justhorizons)

*"The National Center is the best at helping courts figure out workload and how to allocate your staff in the most efficient way. Being efficient is really important, and the National Center has been critical in that regard."*

**– Thomas W. Ross**  
Former North Carolina Superior Court Judge and State Court Administrator



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