

The Supreme Court of Ohio

MEMORANDUM

TO: Chief Justice Sharon L. Kennedy, Justices, and Administrative Director Robert W. Horner, III

CC: Gina White Palmer, Deputy Administrative Director – Legal Services

FROM: Hon. David A. Hejmanowski, Delaware County Court of Common Pleas, Probate/Juvenile Division
Christopher Fields, Director, Office of the Judicial College

DATE: January 28, 2026

SUBJECT: 2025 Annual Report on the Supreme Court of Ohio Office of the Judicial College

In compliance with Rule V, Section 10 of the Rules for the Government of the Judiciary of Ohio (Gov.Jud.R. V(10)), we are pleased to submit this annual report summarizing the activities and accomplishments of the Supreme Court of Ohio Judicial College and its Board of Trustees during 2025.

Mission of the Supreme Court of Ohio Judicial College

The Supreme Court of Ohio Judicial College provides continuing legal and professional education for judges, magistrates, acting judges, and non-judicial court personnel to ensure the effective administration of justice for all Ohioans. In addition, the Judicial College offers education opportunities for court affiliates, including custody evaluators, guardians ad litem, and guardians of adults. Working in partnership with Ohio's judicial associations, the Judicial College supports the courts through accessible, high-quality education grounded in professionalism, ethics, and public service.

Role of the Judicial College Board of Trustees

Pursuant to Gov.Jud.R. V(2)(B), the Judicial College is advised by a Board of Trustees composed of judicial officers. In 2025, the Board met on March 14, May 30, August 13, and October 17 to provide guidance on the College's operations, strategic priorities, and educational initiatives. The Executive Committee continued to meet as needed to review and make recommendations regarding requests for waivers or extensions of mandatory orientation requirements under Gov.Jud.R. IV. During the year, they reviewed 11 requests from judges and 38 requests from magistrates. The Board's engagement and leadership assist the College in adapting to emerging needs.

Overview - A Year of Transition and Continuity

The year 2025 marked a period of significant transition for the Judicial College. Director Christy Tull retired in July after 28 years of dedicated service. To ensure continuity and to support future-focused goals, leadership transitions were completed through competitive selection processes. Christopher Fields was selected as Director of the Judicial College, Kim Eggerton assumed the role of Deputy Director, and Rick Loutzenhiser was promoted to Senior Education Program Manager. Throughout these transitions, staff across the College assumed new responsibilities and demonstrated exceptional professionalism, collaboration, and adaptability.

Despite leadership changes, the College remained committed to fulfilling its core responsibilities: delivering timely, relevant, and high-quality education to judges, magistrates, court staff, and other court-related professionals across Ohio. The College invested in strengthening internal operations by expanding staff capabilities, cross training and enhancing coordination between the College's online and live education teams. The College also continues leveraging technology to improve internal processes and service to learners. These efforts included enhanced peer collaboration, refined standard operating procedures, and technology-driven improvements to programs such as judicial mentorship.

Highlights and Strategic Initiatives

In 2025, the Judicial College delivered approximately 400 educational opportunities, reflecting continued growth in both the scope and reach of its programs. Course participation and completion numbers increased again this year, underscoring the demand for accessible and relevant judicial education across the state.

- **Enhancing Educational Infrastructure** The Judicial College continued to strengthen its educational infrastructure through ongoing refinements to OhioCourtEDU, the learning management system implemented in 2024. The platform supports online course delivery, credit tracking, registrations, and access to on-demand education. Since its launch, more than 35,000 judges, magistrates, court staff, and members of the public have accessed the system, underscoring the importance of judicial education statewide.
- **Mentorship Pairing Improvements** This year the Judicial College implemented process and technology improvements to significantly reduce the time required to pair new judges and magistrates with experienced mentors, as required by New Judges Orientation and New Magistrates Orientation in Gov.Jud.R. IV. By consolidating more than 20 internal reports into a single, streamlined tool for judges and magistrates, the College reduced average pairing times for new magistrates from approximately 20 business days in 2024 to approximately four business days by year's end. All appointed judges in 2025 were paired with a mentor within one week of their appointment being announced, typically before taking the bench, and all elected judges were paired by the conclusion of New Judges Orientation – Part I, approximately one month prior to assuming office.
- **New Judges Orientation** Ensuring that new judicial officers are well-prepared to assume the bench remains a top priority of the Judicial College. In addition to delivering New

Judges Orientation and New Magistrates Orientation, the College launched a comprehensive review of the New Judges Orientation program. Beginning in March 2025, more than 70 judges and magistrates participated in a steering committee and subcommittees to evaluate content, timing, and delivery methods. The goal of this work is to ensure that new judicial officers receive the most essential education at the optimal time through flexible, accessible formats tailored to individual learning needs. This collaborative effort will continue into 2026.

- **Resources for the Bench** Closely aligned with efforts to enhance New Judges Orientation, the College continued to expand Resources for the Bench, an initiative highlighted by the Chief Justice in the 2025 State of the Judiciary. Over the past year, the College invested in identifying, curating, and preparing educational materials and course resources for broader access. In 2026, the College will develop and implement a process for making course resources and practical tools available to judicial officers, lawyers, and the general public statewide on the Supreme Court of Ohio website.
- **Responsive Education to Emerging Needs** In response to ongoing needs and Court priorities, the Judicial College expanded education in several critical areas. Court and personal security education was enhanced through updates to orientation programming and the expansion of online, on-demand courses. The College also collaborated with the Office of Court Services to deliver caseload and docket management education, including webinars and online courses focused on effective practices, statutory reporting, and jurisdiction-specific challenges. These collaborative efforts will continue in 2026 and beyond.
- **Artificial Intelligence and the Courts** Recognizing the rapid evolution of artificial intelligence and its implications for the judiciary, the College offered two statewide webinars in February and May 2025 addressing ethical considerations, access to justice, and the practical impact of AI in the courts. Nearly 2,700 judges, magistrates, and attorneys participated. These programs supported consistent messaging and provided guidance on navigating emerging technologies while upholding ethical standards.
- **Court Personnel Education** Consistent with its mission, the Judicial College provided extensive education to thousands of court personnel across the state. The majority of this education was offered at no cost to local courts, helping to reduce training expenses while ensuring high-quality professional development statewide. In 2025, key initiatives included case flow management skills and leadership development opportunities through the Court Management Program, Civil Treatment for Leaders, and Civil Treatment for Employees. The College also advanced efforts to assess and address the needs of probation officers throughout the state to ensure that education aligns with the realities of local court operations.
- **Faculty Development** The Judicial College relies on more than 500 faculty members each year, most of whom regularly volunteer their time and efforts to strengthen the judiciary through education. The College continued its commitment to faculty development by

offering a two-day instructional skills seminar designed to enhance teaching effectiveness, which was grounded in adult learning theory, instructional design, and effective presentation techniques.

- **Other Audiences: Guardians ad Litem and Adult Guardians** In addition to judicial officers and court personnel, the College is charged with educating guardians ad litem in juvenile, family, and domestic relations courts and guardians of adults appointed in probate courts. Participant feedback consistently rated these programs as excellent and emphasized their ongoing practical value.

The Judicial College and the Board of Trustees remain committed to advancing competence, professionalism, and public trust through education. The Board appreciates the continued support of the Supreme Court of Ohio and welcomes ongoing feedback as we work to meet the evolving needs of Ohio's courts.