

2024

Technology Strategic Plan

for Tennessee's Judicial System



From Chief Justice Holly Kirby

In 2023, the Tennessee Supreme Court created the Court System Information Technology Oversight Committee, headed by Justice Sarah Campbell, to bring together a variety of stakeholders and participants in Tennessee's justice system to discuss the challenges and opportunities that technology presents for our justice system. That same year, Governor Lee and Tennessee's General Assembly provided funds for our Administrative Office of the Courts, under the leadership of Director Michelle Long, to partner with the Department of Finance and Administration's Strategic Technology Solutions to develop a plan for statewide e-filing and other related technological improvements to the court system.

The Committee's deliberations revealed that the piecemeal, incremental approach the judicial branch has used up to now could not bring about the systemwide changes needed. Under Justice Campbell's capable leadership, the Technology Oversight Committee has produced this Strategic Plan to deploy scalable technology solutions statewide, establish connectivity, enable digital operations, capture data for policymakers, and allow the public to access the court system virtually. The Strategic Plan is intended to inform the AOC's planning and guide decisionmakers.

Bravo to the Technology Oversight Committee for its thorough and thoughtful work. We welcome ongoing conversation with stakeholders within the Judicial branch, and also with our partners in the Executive and Legislative branches, as we all move toward the common goal of providing citizens with the court system they need and deserve. Technology has a big role to play in achieving that goal. We're ready to link arms and get to work.

- Holly Kirby

From Director Michelle J. Long

On March 11, 2020, at the Tennessee Judicial Conference judges from around the state filed into the brand new Rutherford County Courthouse to watch Judge Barry Tidwell demonstrate the technology in his new and updated courtroom. Judge Tidwell interacted with remote litigants, showed evidence that was then presented on individual screens in the jury box, and accessed and printed case information from the courtroom. Just two days later, the Supreme Court, in response to a global pandemic, entered an Order limiting in-person hearings. Each judicial district and county held weekend conference calls and strategy sessions to best determine how to implement the Order in courtrooms accustomed to standing room only.

The pandemic forced our courtrooms to undergo significant changes. We improvised, pivoted, and adjusted. Justice continued to be served. The truth is the court system must continue to build on this progress. The intentional, deliberate development of statewide use of technology in the Tennessee court system is essential. Court systems in almost all other states—some more rural, some with non-unified court systems, states with tight budgets—are decades ahead of Tennessee when it comes to uniform electronic filing, case management systems, data collection and analysis, jury selection, and courtroom technology.

Tennessee is a large state with 95 counties, and legal cases and case information often do not respect county and judicial district boundaries. Courts need to be able to share information and need reliable, accessible data. Data can provide a wealth of information to courts working through difficult issues like bail and pre-trial detention, restraining orders, domestic violence, human trafficking, alternative sentencing, warrants, and other issues. In addition, policymakers are continually asking for court data. It is not uncommon for the answers to be difficult or impossible to provide.

To be effective, justice must be efficient, accessible, and transparent. To build trust and confidence in the court system, we must improve the experience for our constituents. Adopting new technology and modernizing the court system will serve everyone.

- Michelle J. Long

Overview

In June 2023, the Tennessee Supreme Court established a Court System Information Technology Oversight Committee to assist the Court in developing a strategic plan for the use and maintenance of technology in Tennessee's judicial system and in overseeing implementation of that plan. The members of the Committee include general sessions judges, trial judges, appellate judges, and court clerks from across the State, as well as the Director and the Chief Technology Officer of the Administrative Office of the Courts.

The Committee soon got to work. Committee members reviewed strategic technology plans from other state court systems. Through monthly presentations, members gained insight and understanding about the current state of technology across Tennessee's judicial system.

In October 2023, the Committee held a strategic planning retreat facilitated by Tennessee's Office of Customer Focused Government. The culmination of that retreat was a draft strategic plan that the Committee continued to refine over the following months. The Tennessee Supreme Court unanimously approved that plan in December 2023.

The Technology Strategic Plan is the product of many hours of careful deliberation and hopeful discussion. It is informed by years of in-the-trenches experience in courtrooms and clerk's offices. It is the Committee's hope that the plan will launch Tennessee's judicial system into a new technological era—one in which the effective and efficient use of technology will improve access to justice, enhance court operations, and increase public trust and confidence in the judiciary.

The Technology Strategic Plan sets five goals, with accompanying objectives:

1. Design, implement, and sustain a unified technology strategy for Tennessee's judicial system;
2. Build understanding and trust among user groups and other stakeholders regarding technological advances within Tennessee's judicial system;
3. Establish a data strategy for Tennessee's judicial system;
4. Establish minimum technology standards for Tennessee's judicial system; and
5. Deploy scalable technology solutions to promote justice and increase confidence in Tennessee's judicial system.

These goals cannot be accomplished overnight. Success will require incremental steps and sustained vision. Over the coming months and years, the Committee will develop concrete action steps for each goal and objective and

begin carrying out those tasks. This work necessarily will occur in phases. Some objectives must be completed before we know how best to accomplish others. During the first phase, the Committee—working hand in hand with the Administrative Office of the Courts—will collect detailed information from stakeholders to enable us to better understand where we are and what obstacles we will need to overcome as we move forward.

Successful completion of this plan also will require frequent and meaningful input from all stakeholders. The Committee will be conducting surveys, interviews, focus groups, and other outreach efforts to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to be heard. We look forward to engaging with you and welcome your feedback and participation.

- Sarah K. Campbell

Committee Members

APPELLATE COURTS

The Honorable Holly Kirby

Chief Justice, Tennessee Supreme Court

The Honorable Sarah K. Campbell (Chair)

Justice, Tennessee Supreme Court

The Honorable Tom Greenholtz

Judge, Tennessee Court of Criminal Appeals

James M. Hivner

Clerk of the Tennessee Appellate Courts

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS

Michelle Long

Director, Administrative Office of the Courts

Brandon Bowers

Chief Technology Officer, Administrative Office of the Courts

STATE COURTS

The Honorable Zack Walden

Criminal Court Judge, Eighth Judicial District

The Honorable Jimmy Turner

Circuit Court Judge, Sixteenth Judicial District

The Honorable Rhynette Northcross Hurd

Circuit Court Judge, Thirtieth Judicial District

GENERAL SESSIONS COURTS

The Honorable Kee Bryant-McCormick

Judge, Sumner County General Sessions Court

COURT CLERKS

Scott Griswold

Clerk and Master, Knox County

Joseph P. Day

Clerk, Davidson County Circuit and General Sessions Civil Courts

Sarah Bradberry

Clerk, Carroll County Circuit, General Sessions, and Juvenile Courts

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GOAL

Design, implement, and sustain a unified technology strategy for Tennessee's judicial system.

Objectives:

- ▶ Lead a culture shift from paper-dependent court operations and processes to a digitized environment.
- ▶ Create user groups to inform and advise deliberate use of technology across the judicial system.
- ▶ Produce a report on the current state of technology used in all courts including but not limited to videoconferencing, video arraignments, case management, electronic evidence, document management, remote proceedings, e-filing, and audio-visual systems.
- ▶ Produce a report detailing the current funding mechanisms for court systems in all 95 counties.
- ▶ Identify effective technology unification practices from other States capable of being deployed in Tennessee.
- ▶ Create a tactical change management plan to move from the current state of technology to a desired future use of technology.
- ▶ Invest in information technology resources necessary to implement and sustain the unified technology strategy.
- ▶ Advocate for necessary statutory, rule, and policy changes to implement a unified technology strategy.

GOAL

Build understanding and trust among user groups and other stakeholders regarding technological advances within Tennessee's judicial system.

Objectives:

- ▶ Educate user groups and other stakeholders about the importance and relevance of technology to the judiciary.
- ▶ Catalog resources for reference by user groups who have questions.
- ▶ Build awareness of technological advances among user groups to promote best practices.
- ▶ Continually educate user groups through online and face-to-face classes.
- ▶ Inform user groups of best practices to optimize data reporting.

GOAL 3

Establish a data strategy for Tennessee's judicial system.

Objectives:

- ▶ Identify the data needs of stakeholders through a continual needs assessment.
- ▶ Standardize data entry and collection.
- ▶ Streamline data analytics and reporting to help facilitate decisionmaking.
- ▶ Identify and implement industry best practices for data security.
- ▶ Enhance the data user's experience.
- ▶ Adopt effective practices for data validation.
- ▶ Conduct a comprehensive review of the systems and practices used to collect, analyze, and report data across the judicial system.

GOAL 4

Establish minimum technology standards for Tennessee's judicial system.

Objectives:

- ▶ Determine current practices in each courtroom for technology infrastructure, hardware, software, and security.
- ▶ Identify best practices for standards in technology infrastructure, hardware, software, and security.
- ▶ Propose draft standards for technology infrastructure, hardware, software, and security and seek feedback from judicial districts and other stakeholders.
- ▶ Adopt standards for technology, infrastructure, hardware, software, and security.
- ▶ Identify minimum technology needs for a modern courtroom by researching best practices and surveying stakeholders.

GOAL 5

Deploy scalable technology solutions to promote justice and increase confidence in Tennessee's judicial system.

Objectives:

- ▶ Establish, equip, and support connectivity.
- ▶ Enable user groups to operate in a digital judicial system.
- ▶ Equip judges and clerks with tools to conduct court business remotely.
- ▶ Survey and identify emerging technologies on an annual basis to determine statewide scalability.
- ▶ Identify emerging technologies to better capture relevant data for policymakers.
- ▶ Implement systems that enable the public to access the judicial system virtually.

