



Eric S. Rosen
CHIEF JUSTICE

SUPREME COURT OF KANSAS
KANSAS JUDICIAL CENTER
301 SW 10TH AVENUE
TOPEKA, KANSAS 66612-1507

785-296-6290
kansascj@kscourts.gov

**House Judiciary Committee
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Chief Justice Eric Rosen**

Chairperson Humphries and members of the House Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss judicial branch operations and to expand on several topics raised in my State of the Judiciary address.

I am grateful for the opportunity to appear before you in my role as Chief Justice. As I noted yesterday, the judicial branch has made significant strides in access to justice and other key initiatives because of the Legislature's sustained investment, as well as the leadership of former Chief Justice Luckert.

I am joined today by Sarah Hoskinson, Chief of Access to Justice Initiatives with the Office of Judicial Administration, who will demonstrate the virtual self-help center launched by the judicial branch in 2025. I am also joined by Dave Rebein, an attorney from Dodge City and a member of the Rural Justice Initiative Committee, who will discuss the committee's ongoing work.

Strategic Plan

Several years ago, the judicial branch, with assistance from the National Center for State Courts, developed a strategic plan to guide the branch as it entered a new phase—particularly during the rollout of the statewide case management system.

In 2025, Chief Justice Luckert convened a diverse group of judicial branch employees from across Kansas to develop an updated strategic plan. Working again with the National Center for State Courts, the committee engaged in in-person meetings and online discussions, reviewed extensive survey data, and ultimately crafted a new mission and vision that reflects both where the branch is today and where we are headed.

Our mission: Administer justice by applying the law to resolve disputes and protect rights.

Our vision: Provide accessible justice with integrity, excellence, innovation, and fairness.

Our branch priorities:

- Enhance access to justice for court users
- Build public trust, confidence, and understanding.
- Improve court operations and efficiencies.
- Foster a strong workforce.

Second Mental Health Summit

On August 26 and 27, 2025, multibranch teams convened at Fort Hays State University for the second Kansas Mental Health Summit, following the inaugural summit held in 2022. Like the first summit, the 2025 event was organized and attended by all three branches of government and drew more than 500 participants from across the state.

Attendees included judges, legislators, attorneys, court services and community corrections officers, and representatives from the executive branch, mental and medical health disciplines, law enforcement, first responders, and community leadership. Both local and national speakers contributed to meaningful discussions and helped identify new approaches to shared challenges.

The judicial branch encouraged chief judges to form local delegations to attend the summit and to coordinate with the multibranch Communities of Practice state delegation. Breaking down communication barriers remains an ongoing goal of the judicial branch, and collaboration—across branches and within judicial districts and counties—is essential to developing local solutions that can be adapted and replicated elsewhere.

Legislative investments in the judicial branch have been critical to sustaining this work. Several years ago, the branch requested and received funding for a statewide behavioral health coordinator position. That position plays a central role in supporting the Communities of Practice and advancing our mental health initiatives statewide.

Constitution Day

Kansas courts have long marked Constitution Day and Constitution Week, observed on September 17, through activities and orders acknowledging the importance of the occasion. District Judge Robert Wonnell of the 10th Judicial District in Johnson County has held a mock trial for third graders for several years now to mark the event. This year, he expanded nationwide. He was joined by Delaware Governor Matt Meyer (Delaware being the first state to ratify the Constitution), U.S. Senator Jerry Moran, and U.S. Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch. The mock trial was streamed to more than 17,500 third graders in 14 states.

Online Self-Help Center

The branch launched a new online self-help center for people involved in court cases who are not represented by an attorney. The online self-help center, self-help.kscourts.gov, shares information, forms, and tools to help Kansans with district court processes.

The homepage has an “I need help with” section that features in-demand resources based on input from the legal community, district court clerks, and data from the judicial branch website searches. The online self-help center also benefits district courts, especially those in smaller, rural counties that do not have enough staff to monitor their own physical self-help centers.

The online self-help center also includes a statewide hearings calendar that displays data for the next seven days. Users can search by county or judge and find the hearing time, case type, and the presiding judge.

The online self-help center complements physical self-help centers in district courts and public libraries across Kansas. In 2025, the judicial branch opened 21 new self-help centers in 20 counties that reach nearly 500,000 people in those counties. Physical self-help centers are critical to increased access to legal resources. The judicial branch is also working to set up in-person self-help centers in public libraries. The Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library has an existing legal self-help area, and work is underway to add similar library-based areas in Arkansas City and Winfield. A collaborative effort with Fort Hays State University, Kansas Legal Services, and members of the Kansas Library Association is also underway.

FY 2027 Budget Requests

Specialty Courts

Last year, the judicial branch requested a transfer of funds to the Specialty Court Resources Fund, established under K.S.A. 20-173(c). The Legislature appropriated \$1.5 million from the State General Fund to this resources fund—the first direct transfer dedicated to specialty court operations.

The Specialty Court Funding Advisory Committee, which includes legislators, judges, district court staff, prosecutors, and defense attorneys, reviewed statewide specialty court needs. For fiscal year 2027, the judicial branch requests an additional \$1.5 million transfer to the fund, along with three full-time equivalent regional coordinator positions. These coordinators would assist specialty courts with planning, staffing, and aligning operational responsibilities.

Specialty court funding has historically been piecemeal and unstable, creating challenges for long-term planning and program sustainability. Providing a reliable mechanism for courts to seek operational support is essential to maintaining these programs and ensuring their long-term effectiveness.

Rural Justice

In 2022, the Supreme Court convened the Rural Justice Initiative Committee to gather data and make recommendations about how to respond to the attorney shortage. The committee, led by Justice K.J. Wall, included leaders from across the state with a passion and interest in serving rural Kansas, including Senator Elaine Bowers and Senator (formerly Representative) Tory Blew. The committee released a report in December 2024 that included both legislative and nonlegislative strategies for addressing the attorney shortage.

During the 2025 legislative session, this body held hearings on legislation that would establish two programs – a rural attorney training program and a tuition reimbursement program for those who attend a Kansas law school and ultimately live and practice in rural Kansas. These programs were modeled after other initiatives in Kansas that seek to address similar challenges – most notably involving physicians and veterinarians. That legislation (SB 214) remains alive for your consideration this year and the judicial branch’s fiscal year 2027 budget request includes funding to get these programs started.

The RJIC found that the cost of legal education and student loan debt are significant barriers to recruiting and retaining attorneys in rural Kansas. 93% of rural Kansas attorneys who have graduated since 2011 report graduating with student loan debt. And law school costs more than ever. These attorneys reported an average law school debt of \$98,032 and a total educational debt of \$124,614.

Despite this financial barrier, most Kansas law students indicated that they would pursue rural practice opportunities if there were financial incentives to offset tuition costs and education debt. SB 214 does just that by offering two different financial incentive programs promoting rural legal practice. Both programs are modeled after and build upon the success of programs the Legislature created to encourage veterinarians and physicians to practice in rural Kansas.

The attorney training program would offer law students a loan to cover law school costs and tuition. That loan would then be forgiven over time, provided the attorney practices law on a full-time basis in rural Kansas. Program requirements would include:

- completing all coursework required for a juris doctor;
- completing all required courses (including any required rural internship or mentorship requirements) in a curriculum designed to prepare students for rural practice;
- passing the Kansas bar exam; and
- actively practicing law on a full-time basis in a rural Kansas county within 90 days of passing the bar. If such requirements are fulfilled, we recommend that 1/3 of the participant's loan be forgiven for each year of full-time practice in rural Kansas.

In addition, SB 214’s student loan repayment program is designed to attract both in-state and out-of-state attorneys to rural Kansas practices. Under the program, a qualifying attorney would receive an annual loan payment incentive for practicing law on a full-time basis in a rural Kansas county. Attorneys participating in the program would receive annual financial assistance of up to \$20,000 for each year they practice in a rural community, for a total contract benefit of \$100,000 over the five-year term. This financial incentive is available during the initial start-up

period, when expenses are higher and revenues are lower. At the end of the five-year program, the attorney will have developed meaningful ties to the community, promoting retention.

Learning Center

In fiscal year 2025, the Legislature approved funding to begin planning for a Kansas Judicial Learning Center. The center would be located on the first floor of the Judicial Center and would provide an educational space for students and visitors to learn about the history, processes, and interrelationship of the three branches of government, with a particular focus on the judicial system.

The fiscal year 2027 budget includes funding to begin development and construction of one or two cornerstone exhibits. This phased approach allows the project to demonstrate progress while leveraging additional funding sources, including foundation grants and private partnerships currently under consideration.

Specialty Courts

LEVEL	COURT	J.D.	COUNTIES SERVED	TYPE
District	Leavenworth County District Court	1	Leavenworth	Veteran's Treatment Court
District	Shawnee County District Court	3	Shawnee	Adult Drug (Treatment) Court
District	Shawnee County District Court	3	Shawnee	Veteran's Treatment Court
District	Shawnee County District Court	3	Shawnee	Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT)
District	Franklin County District Court	4	Franklin	Truancy Court
District	Lyon County District Court	5	Lyon	Adult Drug (Treatment) Court
District	Lyon County District Court	5	Lyon	Family Treatment Court
District	Miami County District Court	6	Miami	Family Treatment Court
District	Douglas County District Court	7	Douglas	Behavioral Health (Treatment) Court
District	Douglas County District Court	7	Douglas	Adult Drug (Treatment) Court
District	Douglas County District Court	7	Douglas	Veteran's Treatment Court
District	Douglas County District Court	7	Douglas	Reentry/Post-Release
District	Douglas County District Court	7	Douglas	Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT)
District	Dickinson County District Court	8	Dickinson	Adult Drug (Treatment) Court
District	Harvey County District Court	9	Harvey/McPherson	Adult Drug (Treatment) Court
District	Johnson County District Court	10	Johnson	Adult Drug (Treatment) Court
District	Johnson County District Court	10	Johnson	Juvenile Drug (Treatment) Diversion
District	Johnson County District Court	10	Johnson	Juvenile Drug (Treatment) Court
District	Johnson County District Court	10	Johnson	Behavioral Health (Treatment) Court
District	Johnson County District Court	10	Johnson	Veteran's Treatment Court
District	Johnson County District Court	10	Johnson	Youth Court/SKIP
District	Johnson County District Court	10	Johnson	Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT)
District	Eleventh Judicial District Recovery Court	11	Cherokee, Crawford, & Labette	Adult Drug (Treatment) Court
District	Labette County District Court	11	Labette	Behavioral Health (Treatment) Court
District	Ford County District Court	16	Ford	Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT)
District	Sedgwick County District Court	18	Sedgwick	Veteran's Treatment Court
District	Sedgwick County District Court	18	Sedgwick	Adult Drug (Treatment) Court
District	Cowley County District Court	19	Cowley	Adult Drug (Treatment) Court
District	Cowley County District Court	19	Cowley	Family Treatment Court
District	Cowley County District Court	19	Cowley	Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT)
District	Riley County District Court	21	Riley	Adult Drug (Treatment) Court
District	Riley County District Court	21	Riley	Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT)
District	Ellis County District Court	23	Ellis	Adult Drug (Treatment) Court
District	Ellis County District Court	23	Ellis	Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT)
District	Seward County District Court	26	Seward	Truancy Court
District	Reno County District Court	27	Reno	Adult Drug (Treatment) Court
District	Saline County District Court	28	Saline	Adult Drug (Treatment) Court
District	Saline County District Court	29	Saline	Behavioral Health Treatment Court
District	Wyandotte County District Court	29	Wyandotte	Adult Drug (Treatment) Court
District	Wyandotte County District Court	29	Wyandotte	Veteran's Treatment Court
District	Wyandotte County District Court	29	Wyandotte	Behavioral Health (Treatment) Court
District	Sumner County District Court	30	Sumner	Adult Drug (Treatment) Court
District	Sumner County District Court	30	Sumner	Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT)
District	Allen County District Court	31	Allen, Woodson, Wilson, & Neosho	Adult Drug (Treatment) Court
Municipal	Liberal Municipal Court	Municipal	Seward (Liberal)	Behavioral Health (Treatment) Court
Municipal	Topeka Municipal Court	Municipal	Topeka (Shawnee)	Alternative Sentencing Court
Municipal	Wichita Municipal Court	Municipal	Sedgwick (Wichita)	Adult Drug (Treatment) Court
Municipal	Wichita Municipal Court	Municipal	Sedgwick (Wichita)	Behavioral Health (Treatment) Court
Tribal	Kickapoo Nation Tribal Court	Tribal	Brown & surrounding area	Tribal Healing to Wellness Court
Tribal	Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation Tribal Court	Tribal	Jackson & surrounding area	Tribal Healing to Wellness Court