



alaska judicial council

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Alaska Judicial Council

Retention Questionnaire

2026 Candidates for Judicial Retention

Full Name: Ian Wheelles

Court: Anchorage Superior Court

1a. Please estimate your workload during your present term:

- **Case work:** 93%
- **Administrative work, outreach, continuing education, etc:** 7%

1b. Superior Court Judges:

- **Criminal:** 10%
- **Delinquency:** %
- **Domestic Relations:** 35%
- **Child in Need of Aid:** 35%
- **Probate:** 8%
- **General Civil (Including Appeals):** 12%

1c. Number of jury trials/year: 3

1d. Number of non-jury trials/year: 50

1e. Any additional information you would like to provide about your workload?

In Anchorage the superior court judges are assigned a primarily civil or criminal case docket. I am assigned civil. However, we are responsible for criminal trial back-up a handful of times per year. My first and second year, this was insignificant. In this past year, it has been very significant as I have been assigned 5 trials. While that amounts to roughly 5 weeks of court time, it has a large impact on processing my civil cases. This is unfortunate for litigants who have their hearings rescheduled to accommodate a criminal trial abruptly. I try very hard to provide parties every minute of our court business day Monday through Friday 8:30am to 4:30pm. This requires spending a lot of my own time before and after hours to process motions and write decisions. I explain this only for perspective as different court locations handle their caseloads and calendars differently. Whether due to a regular run of retirements or other staffing shortages, the Anchorage courts have been stretched very thin in the past year.

2. Please describe your participation on court/bar committees or other administrative activities during your current term of office.

I was an attorney member of the Child Support Rules Committee when appointed to the bench. I continued as a judge member and was later appointed as the committee chair in January 2025. I was elected to serve on the Alaska Commission on Judicial Conduct starting February 2024. I was appointed as chair of the Family Rules Committee in July 2025. The Anchorage court formed an Exhibits Committee in September 2025 to review all procedures concerning trial exhibits. I represent superior court judges on this committee. I have made a point to be as active as my time allows in improvement of administrative aspects of our courts. I think this is a significant need presently and one that often has the largest impact on the public's experience with the court system. I also participate in bench/bar meetings periodically to improve the handling of cases in certain subject areas, such as CINA, criminal competency, and PACE. On a couple of occasions, I have spoken at the Alaska Bar Association's Family Law Section meeting.

3. Please describe any judicial or legal education you have undertaken or provided during your current term in office.

Attended the Newer Judges Conference in January 2023, 2024, and 2025. I was a speaker at a session of this conference in 2025 and am scheduled to co-present a session on judicial disqualification in 2026. In conjunction with that conference, I also attended training on the court computer systems to improve my case management. I also toured facilities such as API, OCS, McLaughlin, and Beacon Hill to better understand aspects of my work.

Attended the Statewide Judges Conference in Sept/Oct 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025.

I attended/completed several CINA (child welfare) trainings, including:

- Alaska Judicial Academy on Reasonable Efforts
- Best Practices for Achieving Permanency for Youth 16+
- multi-topic 3-day CINA training
- Reason to Know and Active Efforts
- Best Practices for Judges Reviewing Placement of Youth in Treatment Facilities
- Understanding Pathways to Permanency for Older Youth

I completed all 17 modules of the magistrate judge training course to better understand the work that magistrates are doing, which often is delegated from the superior court cases or transfer up to superior court for the latter stages of the case.

I attended the 2-week General Jurisdiction course at the National Judicial College in April 2023.

In October 2025 I traveled to Louisville with the ACJC to attend the National Center for State Courts' Judicial Ethics College.

In October 2025 I also traveled to Florida to attend a weeklong Advanced Evidence course with the American Institute for Justice.

In April 2025 I spoke on a judges panel regarding ICWA cases at the Alaska Native Justice Center for tribal workers.

In October 2024 I co-presented a session on DV protective order cases at the Alaska Network on Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault conference.

In spring 2024 I helped plan a judicial training presentation on hearings with youth (such as CINA or juvenile justice proceedings)

In April 2024 I presented a session at the statewide magistrates conference regarding dissolution cases.

I have also sought out various topical webinars relevant to my work on areas such as probation and judicial ethics. I regularly read law review and other peer articles concerning developments in the law in Alaska or trends nationally that relate to my work.

Other CLE:

- Domestic Violence and the UCCJEA Confirmation
- Alaska Bar ethics sessions in 2023, 2024, 2025
- The Private Guardianship Sector and the Role of the Court
- Incorporating Treatment Court Principles into Traditional Courtrooms
- Sexual Abuse Cases/Advocacy/Litigation and the Prison Rape Elimination Act
- Unique Issues in Military Divorce
- Ethics for New Judges and Your Family

4. Please describe any public outreach activities.

Anchorage Youth Court - presided over induction ceremony for new members, spoke at bar association meeting, met with students at statewide youth court conference
Alaska Bar Association MLK Day legal clinics - volunteered for non-advising roles
Visited high school classes to speak on criminal law and forensics as well as legal careers
Hosted a scout troop in my courtroom to talk about citizenship
Helped coach a high school mock trial
I give my time in other non-legal settings in the community as well, which I think reflects well on the judiciary (such as food bank events, coaching a little league softball team, offering mentorship to UAA and law school students, clean-up days at our neighborhood elementary school, etc.)
I also organized an opportunity to offer many of the printed volumes of court rules and statutes that the court system replaces annually to be given to new attorneys who may want to have those in their libraries but could not afford to purchase a set (they are fairly expensive.) The court recycles them, and this seemed like something that could have a second life if someone took the time to connect interested parties.

5. Please assess, in one or two paragraphs, your judicial performance during your present term. Appropriate areas of comment could include: satisfaction with your judicial role, specific contributions to the judiciary or the field of law, increases in legal knowledge and judicial skills, or other measures of judicial abilities that you believe to be important.

I think I have done well overall, but I am always finding areas for improvement. I enjoy my work greatly, but I do not want to feel "comfortable" in my job because I do not want to be complacent. I strive every day to provide the best possible judicial service that I can to the public--meaning, the parties and witnesses or observers before me that day. Every party deserves my absolute best attention, consideration, patience, respect, legal analysis, and fairness that I can deliver. And they need that as promptly as I can provide it.

I have participated in every child welfare training, facility tour, or conference I can to improve my approach and preparedness for these cases, which are a significant portion of my docket. As listed above, I have also invested every moment I could in the past three years to take substantive legal courses to increase my knowledge and maintain the highest competency I can for my job. I began presiding over a felony probation specialty court for individuals with substance abuse issues (PACE) because I know how much this issue is affecting our communities currently. I joined the ACJC because I have seen how much judicial ethics has risen to the forefront as a concern nationally today. I care deeply about being a leader in maintaining the highest standards for our courts. I volunteer several times a year to preside over the court's Early Resolution Program to resolve family law cases in a fast-track manner. I am trying (within my limited free time) to participate in youth outreach for the legal field wherever I can. My time given to Anchorage Youth Court or visiting or hosting school groups or connecting with UAA students, etc. allows me to play a role in replenishing the legal community for our future. So many of our young people depart Alaska for school and never return. I want our youth to know there is a bright future here for them after law school. When I recruit law clerks for my chambers, I also specifically seek candidates who want to live in Alaska permanently. The year I spend mentoring them is an investment in our state's future as well.

5a. This question pertains to Superior Court judges only.

State Law requires the Council to conduct an evaluation of judges standing for retention, and to provide information to the public about the judges. Under a provision added in 2013, the information the Council provides to the public "shall include the judge's consideration of victims when imposing sentence on persons convicted of felony offenses where the offenses involve victims" (see AS 22.10.150).

Please submit a short statement about how you consider victims when imposing sentences in felony offenses.

*I have not yet had the opportunity in three years presiding over a mostly civil caseload to conduct a felony sentencing. Of my first four felony trials, 2 were acquitted, 1 pled down to a misdemeanor, and the other is set for sentencing next month. I still have two more trials calendared this year, so I do give this plenty of thought just the same. I can explain my view of it in some other contexts that I have presided over.

In criminal competency hearings, when I have had to make decisions regarding dismissal, or similar cases such as civil domestic violence matters, where there are victims, I start by ensuring above all that notice is provided. Sadly, I repeatedly see the State not providing real notice to victims of the proceeding, including when dismissal or other final outcomes are on the agenda. Leaving one voicemail the night before or the morning of a hearing is not fair notice. I will not go forward in a hearing without assurance of actual victim contact. Second, I make sure I listen fully to the victim's impact statement, and that I make them feel heard. After my decision, I make sure my reasoning is clearly explained. There are many outcomes to a court case that leave one or both sides unhappy, but if the judge explained the reasoning behind the decision, most of the time the parties will at least be able to accept the decision. I take great care to prompt all parties for any questions or clarification in my rulings. I also try to restate what I heard a victim tell me in delivering my sentence or ruling so the speaker knows that I listened and heard them.

6. During your most recent term as a judge, have you:

a) had a tax lien filed or other collection procedure instituted against you by federal, state, or local authorities?

No

b) been involved in a non-judicial capacity in any legal proceeding whether as a party or otherwise?

No

c) engaged in the practice of law (other than as a judge)?

No

d) held office in any political party?

No

e) held any other local, state or federal office?

No

f) had any complaints, charges or grievances filed against you with the Alaska Commission on Judicial Conduct, the Alaska Bar Association, or with the Alaska Court System that resulted in public proceedings or sanctions?

No

8. Please provide any other information which you believe would assist the Council in conducting its evaluations and in preparing its recommendations for the 2020 retention elections.

Serving as a trial court judge has been a great and humbling honor to me. When I applied for the bench, I committed to working as hard as I possibly could in this job for the public. Being a judge is a position of servant leadership. I believe I have kept that promise to myself and to the people of the Third Judicial District and the state. I have started my mornings at the earliest hours, I have taken work home on the evenings and weekends, and I have treated every matter that has come before me as the most important matter. I have tried to always take the bench with patience and graciousness for the people who come before me. I have continuously reminded myself that they may be in court for the most stressful or difficult moment of their lives and I treat them with dignity and kindness to allow them to present their cases without adding pressure by my demeanor or tone. I have striven to rule on every matter according to the law, without regard for public sentiment or other influence. I have sought to uphold my oath to the Constitution of the United States and the State of Alaska each day.

Trial Judges: Questions 9a-9d please do not list any cases that have pending issues in your court.

9a. Please list your three most recent jury trials including case names and numbers. Please list the names, current addresses, including zip codes and suite numbers where applicable, of each attorney involved in these trials. (If there are additional pages, please email these to sdipietro@ajc.state.ak.us)

Jury Trial Cases

Case 1: State of Alaska v. Joyce Stanfill

(Case No: 3AN-24-2464CR)

Total Attorneys: 3

Atty 1: Susan Koller Nieves 900 W 5 th Ave Ste 525 Anchorage, Alaska 99501	Atty 2: Andrew Wright 310 K Street Ste 520 Anchorage, Alaska 99501	Atty 3: Julia McCartney 310 K Street Ste 520 Anchorage, Alaska 99501
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Case 2: State of Alaska v. Jesse Akpik

(Case No: 3AN-24-5271CR)

Total Attorneys: 2

Atty 1: Anna Argenti 310 K Street Ste 520 Anchorage, Alaska 99501	Atty 2: Matthew DiTullio 900 W 5 th Ave Ste 200 Anchorage, Alaska 99501
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Case 3: State of Alaska v. Ryan Langton

(Case No: 3AN-20-4271CR)

Total Attorneys: 3

Atty 1: Nolan Oliver 701 W 8 th Ave #300 Anchorage, Alaska 99501	Atty 2: Emma Timan 250 East Broad Street, Suite 1400 Columbus, Ohio 43215	Atty 3: Julia Moudy 1049 W 5 th Ave Ste 100 Anchorage, Alaska 99501
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Trial Judges: Questions 9a-9d please do not list any cases that have pending issues in your court.

9b. Please list your three most recent non-jury trials including case names and numbers. Please list the names, current addresses, including zip codes and suite numbers where applicable, of each attorney involved in these trials. (If there are additional pages, please email these to sdipietro@ajc.state.ak.us)

Non-Jury Trial Cases

Case 1: Jenelle Kaupe v. Dylan Kaupe

(Case No: 3PA-23-1278CI)

Total Attorneys: 2

Atty 1: Jon-Marc Petersen 280 North Main St Wasilla, Alaska 99654	Atty 2: Erin Welden 550 W 8 th Ave Anchorage, Alaska 99501
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Case 2: Zandra Velenti v. Joshua Erlandsen

(Case No: 3AN-24-4169CI)

Total Attorneys: 2

Atty 1: Amanda Lancaster 205 E. Benson Blvd. Suite 445 Anchorage, Alaska 99503	Atty 2: Rhonda Butterfield 1016 W 6 th Ave Ste 405 Anchorage, Alaska 99501
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Case 3: Cory Nave v. Tia Goward

(Case No: 3AN-24-6685CI)

Total Attorneys: 2

Atty 1: Robert Dwyer 471 W 36 th Ave Ste 202 Anchorage, Alaska 99503	Atty 2: Donald Towslee, Jr. 510 L St Ste 700 Anchorage, Alaska 99501
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Trial Judges: Questions 9a-9d please do not list any cases that have pending issues in your court.

9c. Please list your three most recent cases, including case names and numbers, which did not go to trial, but on which you did significant work (such as settlement conference, hearings, motion work, etc.). Please list the names, current addresses, including zip codes and suite numbers where applicable, of each attorney involved in these cases. (If there are additional pages, please email these to sdipietro@ajc.state.ak.us)

Cases that Did Not Go to Trial

Case 1: Dean Freeman v. Tiana Freeman

(Case No: 3AN-24-9315CI)

Total Attorneys: 2

Atty 1: E. Hunter England 550 W. 8th Ave Anchorage, Alaska 99501	Atty 2: Michael Gavrilis 645 G Street, Suite 100 #558 Anchorage, Alaska 99501
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Case 2: Erika Kelsey v. Mikaela Middleton

(Case No: 3AN-24-8317ci)

Total Attorneys: 2

Atty 1: Robert Sato 500 L St Ste 501 Anchorage, Alaska 99501	Atty 2: Sarah Kathryn Bryan 911 W 8th Ave Ste 205 Anchorage, Alaska 99501
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Case 3: A.B. v. S.B.

(Case No: 3AN-23-8925CI)

Total Attorneys: 2

Atty 1: Robin Taylor PO Box 91838 Anchorage, Alaska 99509	Atty 2: John Sherman 737 W. 5th Ave. Ste. 203 Anchorage, Alaska 99501
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