



alaska judicial council

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Press Release

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For immediate release
October 30, 2026

Announcing Applicants

Anchorage Superior (2 seats), Fairbanks Superior, Palmer Superior, and Kotzebue & Nome Superior Courts (Re-Announcements)

Five attorneys have applied to the Alaska Judicial Council for two vacancies on the Anchorage Superior Court, five attorneys have applied for a position on the Fairbanks Superior Court, six attorneys have applied for a new position on the Palmer Superior Court, two attorneys have applied to the vacancy on the Kotzebue Superior Court, and two attorneys have applied to the Nome Superior Court. The Anchorage vacancies are due to the forthcoming retirements of Judge Una Gandbhir and Judge Herman G. Walker. The Nome and Kotzebue seats are vacant due to the retirements of Judge Romano DiBenedetto and Judge Paul A. Roetman. The Palmer Superior court vacancy is a new position authorized in 2026 by the Alaska Legislature. The Fairbanks Superior Court vacancy is due to the appointment of Judge Patrica Haines to the Court of Appeals.

Applicants for the judgeships will be evaluated by the Council's seven members (the chief justice, three non-attorney members, and three attorney members). Comprehensive background investigations, a survey of Alaska Bar members, and personal interviews with the applicants are all part of the evaluation,

according to the Council's Executive Director, Susanne DiPietro. Interviews with applicants and public hearings will be held in February 2027. The Council will nominate two or more applicants for each vacancy to send to the governor, after which the governor will have 45 days to make appointments from the Council's lists of nominees.

The applicants for the Anchorage Superior Court (2) are:

Seth Beausang: Mr. Beausang has been an Alaska resident for 15½ years and has practiced law for 25 years. He graduated from University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School in 2001 and is currently an Assistant United States Attorney in Anchorage.

Ryan Bravo: Mr. Bravo has been an Alaska resident for 11 years and has practiced law for 11 years. He graduated from University of Minnesota Law School in 2015 and is currently a Supervising Attorney at the Public Defender Agency in Anchorage.

Mark Clark: Mr. Clark has been an Alaska resident for 9 years and has practiced law for 10 years. He graduated from Northern Kentucky University, Salmon P. Chase College of Law in 2016 and is currently the District Attorney for the Department of Law in Bethel.

Ben Muse: Mr. Muse has been an Alaska resident for 44 years and has practiced law for 15 years. He graduated from the Gonzaga University School of Law in 2010 and is currently an Assistant Federal Defender in Anchorage.

Sam Laffey: Mr. Laffey has been an Alaska resident for 5 years and has practiced law for 6 years. He graduated from University of Wyoming in 2020 and currently serves as an Assistant Public Advocate for the Office of Public Advocacy in Anchorage.

The applicants for the Palmer Superior Court are:

Seth Beausang: Mr. Beausang has been an Alaska resident for 15½ years and has practiced law for 25 years. He graduated from University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School in 2001 and is currently an Assistant United States Attorney in Anchorage.

Mark Clark: Mr. Clark has been an Alaska resident for 9 years and has practiced law for 10 years. He graduated from Northern Kentucky University, Salmon P. Chase College of Law in 2016 and is currently the District Attorney for the Department of Law in Bethel.

Windy Hannaman: Ms. Hannaman has been an Alaska resident for 43½ years and has practiced law for 27 years. She graduated from Temple University Beasley School of Law in 1999 and currently works in private practice in Palmer.

Judge Patrick McKay, Jr.: Judge McKay, Jr. has been an Alaska resident for 35 years and has practiced law for 15 years. He graduated from Western State University College of Law in 2011 and currently serves as a District Court Judge in Palmer.

Sam Laffey: Mr. Laffey has been an Alaska resident for 5 years and has practiced law for 6 years. He graduated from University of Wyoming in 2020 and currently serves as an Assistant Public Advocate for the Office of Public Advocacy in Anchorage.

Brittany Occhipinti: Ms. Occhipinti has been an Alaska resident for 30 years and has practiced law for 9 years. She graduated from Willamette University College of Law in 2016 and currently serves as a Senior Assistant Attorney General with the Civil Division at the Department of Law in Anchorage.

The applicants for the Fairbanks Superior Court are:

Heather M. Brown: Ms. Brown has been an Alaska resident for 36½ years and has practiced law for 12½ years. She graduated from Faulkner University, Thomas Goode Jones School of Law in 2013 and currently works in private practice in Fairbanks.

Jennifer Page Hite: Ms. Hite has been an Alaska resident for 25 years and has practiced law for 31 years. She graduated from University of Akron School of Law in 1995 and currently serves as an Assistant Public Advocate for the Office of Public Advocacy in Fairbanks.

Risa Leonard: Magistrate Judge Leonard has been an Alaska resident for 37 years and has practiced law for 16 years. She graduated from Syracuse University College of Law in 2008 and currently serves as a Magistrate Judge in Fairbanks.

Anna Elizabeth Ralph: Ms. Ralph has been an Alaska resident for 12½ years and has practiced law for 9½ years. She graduated from Duke University School of Law in 2012 and currently serves as an Assistant District Attorney with the Criminal Division at the Department of Law in Fairbanks.

Spenser Ruppert: Magistrate Judge Ruppert has been an Alaska resident for 39 years and has practiced law for 11 years. He graduated from Seattle University School of Law in 2015 and currently serves as a Magistrate Judge in Fairbanks.

The applicants for the Kotzebue Superior Court are:

Daniel DalleMolle: Mr. DalleMolle has been an Alaska resident for 42 years and has practiced law for 13½ years. He graduated from Arizona State University – Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law in 2013 and is currently the Supervising Attorney for the Alaska Public Defender Agency in Kotzebue.

Liz Mering: Ms. Mering has been an Alaska resident for 9½ years and has practiced law for 9½ years. She graduated from Lewis & Clark Law School in 2016 and currently serves as an Assistant Public Advocate for the Office of Public Advocacy in Anchorage.

The applicants for the Nome Superior Court are:

Molly Banas: Ms. Banas has been an Alaska resident for 7 years and has practiced law for 7 years. She graduated from Regent University Law School in 2019 and currently serves as an Assistant Public Defender in Nome.

Liz Mering: Ms. Mering has been an Alaska resident for 9½ years and has practiced law for 9½ years. She graduated from Lewis & Clark Law School in 2016 and currently serves as an Assistant Public Advocate for the Office of Public Advocacy in Anchorage.

PUBLIC COMMENT ON THE QUALIFICATIONS OF THESE APPLICANTS IS ENCOURAGED DURING THE EVALUATION PHASE OF THE COUNCIL'S WORK. TO COMMENT, OR FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, CONTACT SUSANNE DIPIETRO, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ALASKA JUDICIAL COUNCIL, 510 L STREET, SUITE 450, ANCHORAGE, ALASKA 99501-1295, (907) 279-2526.

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