

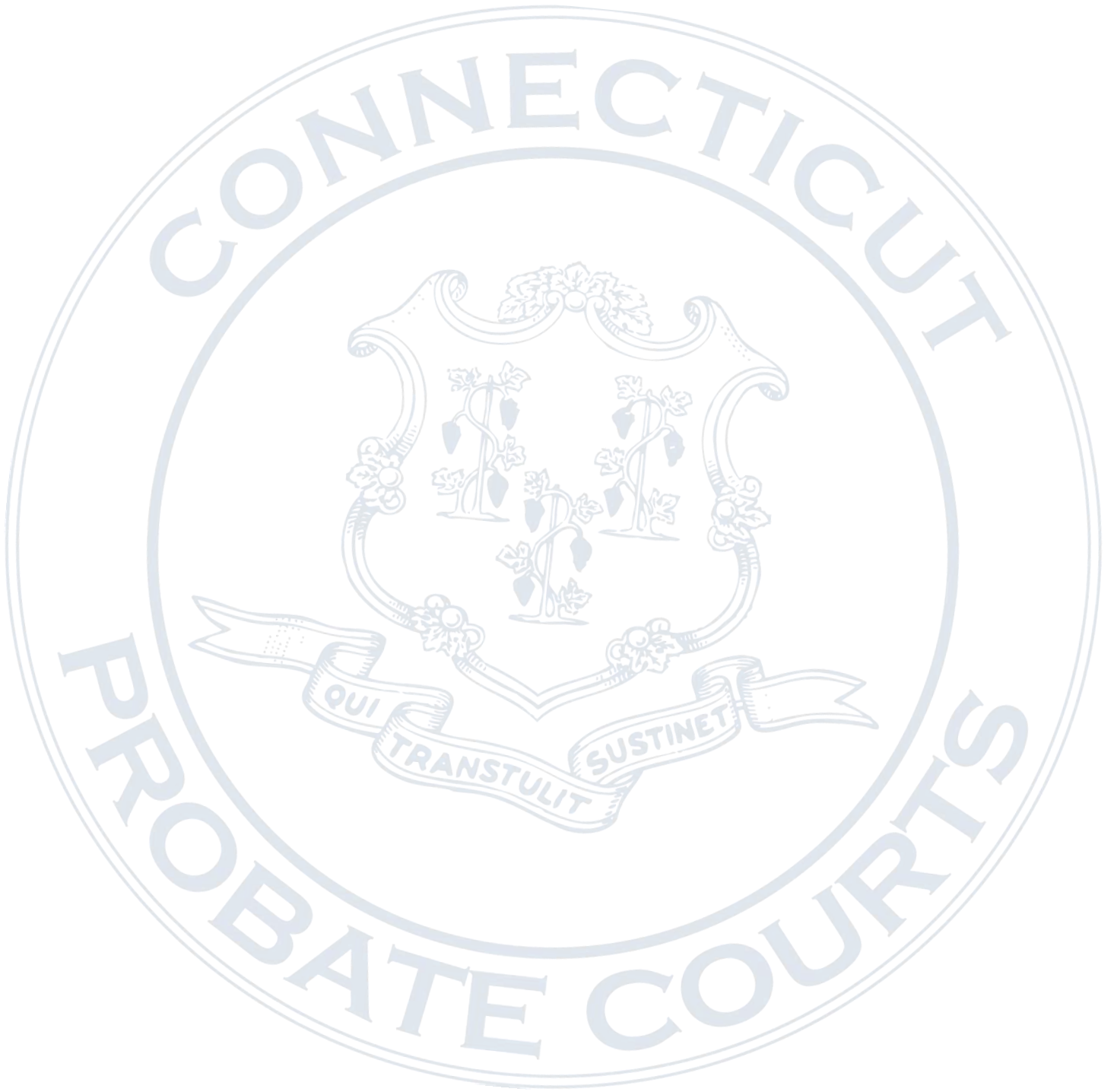


2022-2023 Biennial Report

Office of the
Probate Court Administrator

Securing futures
Strengthening families
Transforming lives







Almost as old as Connecticut itself, our **Probate Courts have been protecting the state's most vulnerable residents** for more than 300 years. Known as “the people’s courts,” Connecticut’s Probate Courts provide:

- Simple, direct access to legal proceedings
- Conveniently located regional courthouses
- An informal but professional setting
- Compassionate, approachable staff
- More affordable court filing fees
- User-friendly guides and resources



Message from the Probate Court Administrator



I am pleased to present the Connecticut Probate Courts' 2022-2023 Biennial Report, which spans the timeframe from July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2023. This report documents both the numbers and the types of matters our system addressed during fiscal years 2022 and 2023.

Those using this report to benchmark Probate's work during the biennium against previous years will see that demand for the critical functions and services we provide has never been higher.

The number of petitions filed for guardians to help individuals with intellectual disability (ID) manage assets below \$10,000, for example, was 68% higher in fiscal years 2022 and 2023 than it was in 2020 and 2021, and 183% higher than it was in fiscal years 2018 and 2019. This rise is in part due to legislation passed by the General Assembly in 2017 to allow this type of guardianship. It also can be linked to both a growing awareness about how to best support those with ID while allowing them to maintain as much independence possible, and—according to the U.S. Census—the number of individuals in Connecticut with ID is higher than the national average.

Similarly, as our population ages and the overall number of senior citizens in our state rises, so does the number of seniors who are indigent, along with the need for conservators to help supervise their daily care and finances. These statistics are part of why the total number of conserved residents being managed by Connecticut's Probate Courts reached an all-time high of 23,306 during FY23. Before that, FY22 was highest with 22,792 conserved persons.

These statistics also contribute to why the Probate Court Administration Fund paid the most ever to provide conservators for indigent individuals—a \$6.2 million average during fiscal years 2022 and 2023.

Indeed, the need has never been greater for the protection and access to justice that Probate's "people's courts" provide. Overseeing and ruling on matters that affect residents from birth to death, Connecticut's Probate Courts help children stay with family, rather than face placement in foster care; allow seniors to age at home; ensure people's constitutional rights are upheld through the appointment of court-ordered attorneys; work with partner agencies and others to help people with intellectual disability and mental illness live as



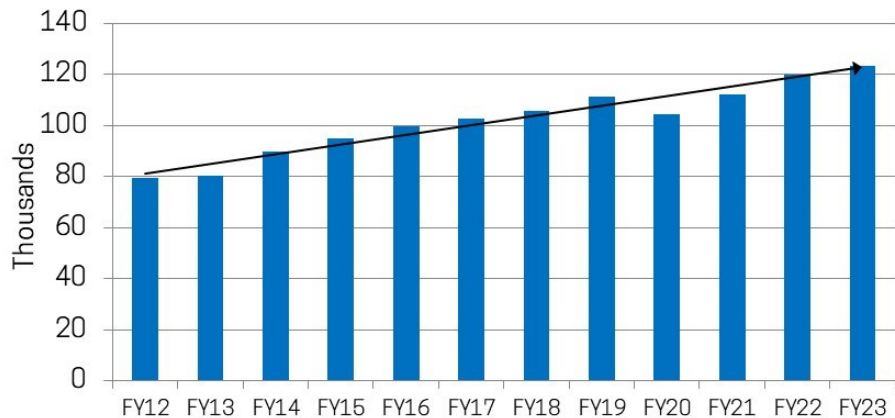
independently as possible; and—as these pages show—also do much more.

Within this report, we list many of the accomplishments we have achieved through both performing this important work, and through improving the processes, infrastructures, and technology that help us perform it in the most efficient and effective ways possible. The results of eFiling, eBilling and system-wide efforts to upgrade outdated hardware and software, as examples, can be seen not just on these pages, but in the way we interact with people every day. Also visible is the work we do with the Legislature to improve public policy, as well as through our collaborations with agencies like the Department of Children and Families, and with community organizations like Children in Placement and Melissa's Project.

What cannot be so easily seen, however, are the many other essential, but seemingly "non-newsworthy" achievements that keep our system successfully advancing—such as all the administrative work, technological improvements, educational training sessions, and day-to-



Activities in Connecticut's Probate Courts



day operational needs to keep each court running. Whether there is a public health emergency or internet outages, the Probate Courts have developed innovative measures to keep the doors open and, most importantly, that the critical probate needs of Connecticut's residents are met every day.

Our goal today is the same as when Connecticut's Probate Courts were established more than 300 years ago: to keep our courts accessible and approachable, to continually review procedures and laws to ensure improvements to enhance people's access to the courts, and to decide the highly personal and emotional cases we hear with the utmost compassion, professionalism, and knowledge.

The women and men who work in Connecticut's 54 Probate Courts and six Regional Children's Probate Courts bring professionalism and compassion to the office every day. They are there to help on a person's worst day, during tense, emotional and trying situations. For many of our Judges and staff, coming to work is more than a job. It is a commitment: a commitment to consistently provide their best. They do this by combining their probate expertise with their empathy and understanding for the difficulties families face.

As this and the following pages demonstrate, Connecticut's Probate system is unique for many reasons, not the least of which is because we are the only state system dependent on its own revenue for operations. Probate depends on court petition filing fees and decedent estate probate fees to fund at least 75% of its annual expenditures, which totaled \$48.9 million in FY22 and \$51.3 million in FY23.

In years when the Legislature provides normalized funding, the General Fund appropriation provides approximately 25% of the total budget needed to keep the Probate system whole and operational. However, that 25% doesn't

■ Critical to the state's social services safety net, Connecticut's Probate Courts oversee and make rulings on matters that affect residents from birth to death—and often are highly personal and emotional.

always happen, despite the fact that every time the Probate system takes action, it saves the state money.

By providing family- and community-centered solutions to protect children, seniors, individuals with mental health conditions and other vulnerable residents, the Probate Courts saved the state and taxpayers nearly \$2.2 billion in each year of this biennium.

That's more than value. That's invaluable.

I feel confident that after you read this report, you will feel as committed to the Probate Court system and its critical work as I do.

Beverly K. Streit-Kefalas
Probate Court Administrator

FY22, FY23 Key Probate Court Accomplishments



July 2021

- General Fund appropriation of \$13.5 million for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2022 takes effect, showing the Legislature’s support for Connecticut’s Probate Courts.

- The Central Connecticut Regional Children’s Probate Court expands to include serving children and families in Berlin and New Britain, while the Waterbury Regional Children’s Probate Court expands to include Shelton. These two courts now adjudicate cases related to children’s matters for a combined total of 41 communities, including temporary custody and guardianship, termination of parental rights, visitation, adoption, emancipation, and parentage.

- The Probate Court system expands the eFiling system it instituted in 2020 to include the Department of Children and Families, which now

has electronic access to children’s probate cases that involve the department. The eFiling system not only saves paper, postage and time, but allows for review of filings to be completed electronically, as well as for hearing notices and decrees to be transmitted immediately.



September 2021

- Probate continues its expansion of eFiling to include the Office of the Attorney of General, enhancing court operations and increasing efficiencies for the Attorney General staff, as well as making communications more efficient, effective, and convenient.

November 2021

- Probate Court eFiling access and communications with state agencies continues to grow, with the addition of the



■ **July 2021:** U.S. Senator Richard Blumenthal, second from left, and former state Treasurer Shawn Wooden, third from right, publicly thank Connecticut’s committed Probate Court Judges and staff for all they did to keep the courts open and accessible during the COVID-19 public health emergency. Also pictured are New Haven Mayor Justin Elicker, New Haven Probate Clerks Valarie Foreman and Keeley Phipps, and retired New Haven Probate Judge Clifton Graves.

Department of Developmental Services to the system.

- Following a change in statute on how updates to the Connecticut Probate Court Rules of Procedure are made, a panel of three

Probate Judges appointed by the Probate Court Administrator conducts a public hearing at the Supreme Court. The proposed revisions are then sent to the Supreme Court for “adoption and promulgation.”

December 2021

- At the General Assembly’s invitation, Probate Court Administrator Judge Beverly K. Streit-Kefalas provides recommendations to the Legislature’s “Task Force to Study Ways to Protect Senior Citizens from Fraud.”





■ *'I could not have done the financial paperwork for my conservatorship without the help of the Bristol-Plymouth Probate Court. I appreciate all of the staff, especially during the last two years of my illness. You showed me nothing but compassion and kindness.'*
 - Conserved person from Bristol

January 2022

■ The Connecticut Parentage Act—legislation the Office of the Probate Court Administrator (PCA)



played a key role in creating, advocating for, and educating courts on how to implement—becomes law, clarifying who is a parent and how parentage is established. The act helps protect Connecticut children by ensuring that regardless of

the circumstances of their birth—or the marital status, gender, or sexual orientation of their parents—they have equal access to the security of a legal parent-child relationship.

February 2022

■ A short session of the General Assembly begins with the governor making no changes to the Probate Courts' \$13.4 million allocation for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2023.

■ Supreme Court Justices adopt revisions to Connecticut Probate Court Rules of Procedure related to remote hearings.

April 2022

■ After a two year-hiatus caused by the COVID pandemic, the Connecticut Probate Assembly returns to the Connecticut Supreme Court for its annual meeting. Farmington Regional Probate Judge Evelyn Daly is elected to serve as President-Judge. PCA and judges of the Assembly also present two awards: Douglas C. Dalena—former counsel to Governor Ned Lamont receives the Daniel F. Caruso Public Service Award, while Attorney Peter Boorman of Newington receives the 2022 Glenn E. Knierim Pro Bono Award.

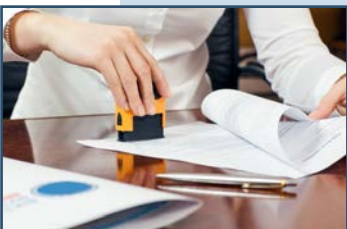
■ As part of technical improvements designed to prevent filing, billing, and communication outages, Probate upgrades

Deriving their jurisdiction and authority from the state Legislature, Connecticut's Probate Courts

originally only administered decedent estates and guardianships. Today, the

Probate Courts work with families, attorneys, professional and volunteer conservators, community partners and others to:

- **Assist low-income seniors** to age in place at home, rather than enter a long-term care facility
- **Appoint relatives or professionals** to serve as guardians or conservators to supervise the daily care and finances of minors, senior citizens, people with intellectual disability, and other



individuals who cannot care for themselves

- **Support individuals with intellectual disability or mental health conditions** to live in the community
- **Help children stay in familiar surroundings** with family and friend guardians, rather than being placed in foster care, when their parents are unable to care for them

Still responsible for administering decedent estates, Probate Court matters also include: trusts, adoptions, parentage, removal of parents as guardians and termination of parental rights, emancipation of minors, commitments of persons with psychiatric disabilities, commitments for treatment of drug/alcohol dependence, special immigrant juvenile status, and name changes.

its network infrastructure to include redundant internet connections in all courts – the state’s 54 Probate Courts and the six Regional Children’s Probate Courts.

August 2022

■ Probate partners with the state Department of Administrative Services to pilot DAS as a mandatory state agency eFiler, and to replace paper communications and notifications with electronic ones. In less than a year, this program is fully rolled out in all courts.

September/October 2022

■ While providing uninterrupted services to the communities they serve, the Naugatuck and East Haven-North Haven Probate Courts move to new locations: the Naugatuck court to across from the town green at 150 Meadow Street, and East Haven-North Haven to the rear East Haven Town Hall complex at 595 Thompson Avenue.

October 2022

■ The New London Regional Children’s Probate Court expands to include serving children and families in all eight towns served by the Norwich Probate Court. The addition means that the Probate system’s six Regional Children’s Probate Courts now serve a total of 114 of the state’s 169 municipalities.

November 2022

■ Danbury Probate Judge Dianne E. Yamin is sworn in as president of the National College of Probate Judges for a one-year term. She becomes the fourth Connecticut Probate Judge to hold this prestigious position, the others being retired Judge Richard E. Burke (1999-2000), retired Judge Joseph A. Egan, Jr. (2007-2008), and Judge Fred J. Anthony (2014-2015).



■ All Probate Courts now have the necessary Cisco Room Kit Mini remote technology and improved equipment to enhance the courts’ ability to conduct hybrid or all video hearings.

December 2022

■ PCA’s IT Department continues ongoing work to expand system-wide efforts to replace aging hardware, improve network infrastructure, and upgrade system applications. Steps are taken to ensure that information collected through the courts’ Case Management System is more efficiently and effectively organized and presented.



January 2023

■ The Connecticut Probate system welcomes 14 new judges and 40 returning ones elected in November 2022. Even with 25% of its judges new to the bench, the Probate system successfully manages this time of transition, providing quality and consistent services without interruption in all courts.

March 2023

■ Probate Court eFiling continues to undergo expansion with the successful launch of the system to non-attorney conservators. Non-attorney conservators have a tailored and more efficient access to eFiling, giving them immediate access to notifications of filings and hearings, as well as the ability to perform other online services.

April 2023

■ The Connecticut Probate Assembly holds its annual meeting at the Connecticut Supreme Court building. PCA and Assembly judges award the Daniel F. Caruso Public Service Award to Manchester-based psychiatrist Dr. Christine L. Shapter, MD, and the Glenn E. Knierim Pro Bono Award to Attorney Paul Bedard of Southington.

June 2023

■ Working with state Senators, state Representatives, and banking and other stakeholders, the Probate system supports the General Assembly’s passage of a new law to protect senior citizens from being financially exploited or coerced into making fraudulent bank transfers.



Connecticut's Probate Courts

Always here when you need us

Securing futures.
Strengthening families.
Transforming lives.

These phrases simply yet powerfully describe the critical work our state's Probate Courts do every day.

The Judge who appoints a financial conservator to assist a woman with a traumatic brain injury manage monthly bills, so critical needs like housing and utilities are paid on time, helps *secure futures*. So does the Judge who grants guardianship to the grandmother of 3- and 5-year-old brothers because one parent is incarcerated and the other has a mental illness that has rendered them unable to care for their children.

The Probate-supervised conservator who makes sure the elderly low-income widower with dementia gets the caregivers he needs to continue living at home, instead of having to go to a nursing home, helps *strengthen families*. It is the same with the Probate Judge who appoints a conservator for an adult male with schizophrenia to assist him with keeping appointments for mental health care, as well as with other necessary tasks of daily living.

How Probate Judges, clerks, attorneys, and other court employees help *transform lives* can also happen in countless ways, such as



granting guardianship to parents of an adult child with intellectual disability (ID). As guardians, these parents now can move their adult child into a community-based living program designed to provide those with ID needed support, a social network, *and* the opportunity to live independently—the latter something those parents may have believed was an unattainable dream.



Ellington Probate Judge Elisa H. Bartlett, Probate Court Administrator Beverly K. Streit-Kefalas, and North Central Connecticut Probate Judge Carolyn L. McCaffrey at a continuing education program.

For more than 300 years, Connecticut's Probate Courts have been protecting the state's most vulnerable residents, adjudicating cases that range from the rights of parents to raise their children, to the rights of senior citizens with chronic illness to decide where and

Securing futures



■ *Much of the Probate Court system's annual budget is expended on constitutional or statutory mandates to care for those most in need.*

how they want to live, to the administration of wills, trusts and estate matters after death.

Critical to the state's social services safety net, Connecticut's Probate Courts oversee and make rulings on matters that affect residents from birth to death and are often highly personal and emotional, such as commitment cases that deal with involuntary confinement and treatment, or authorizing end-of-life decisions for a terminally ill loved one.

And justice for all

Many types of Probate cases involve the fundamental constitutional rights of the parties, such as those related to

Probate Courts in Connecticut are unique, community-centric courts to address significant family issues

at times of loss, stress, and challenge.

With 54 courts throughout the state, parties come to the courts in smaller, less formal settings often located in the local town hall or town facilities. The Probate



Court Rules of Procedure are written to enhance ease of use of the court procedures and to provide straightforward and efficient legal resolutions. The eFiling system is available to all parties to a case and provides simple, round-the-clock access to quick filing and review of the parties in the court case, as well as immediate notification of hearings, decrees, and filings.



the “unalienable rights” to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” in the Declaration of Independence. Part of the courts’ role when overseeing a conservatorship is to make sure the conserved person maintains as much independence and control over their own decision making as possible—the “liberty” the Declaration’s creators promised. And there is incalculable value to an individual living with maximized independence, self-determination, and ability to control his or her environment, rather than in a restrictive institutional setting.



Housatonic Probate Judge Martin F. Landgrebe with Newington Chief Clerk Rose Anne Adamowich at an educational event.

Given the importance of the rights at stake, Probate Courts are also required by the state constitution, federal constitution, and state statute to both appoint and pay the fees of attorneys to represent indigent parties in certain matters. In children’s cases, we also appoint and pay for the services of an attorney to represent the child. During the biennium, the Probate Courts paid a total of \$3.5 million for court-appointed attorneys provided to children and indigent adults.

Known as “the people’s courts,” our Probate Courts are

charged with the dual responsibilities of safeguarding individuals’ rights while providing a core government service, and our work is cost-effective. Placing children in family guardianships, with a relative they know, costs far less than placing them in foster care. Kinship care also offers far better long term psychological and social outcomes for the child.

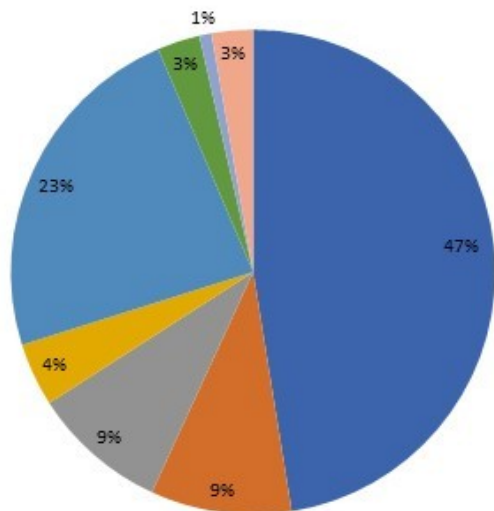
The Probate Courts also save tens of thousands of dollars each time a conservator is appointed to help a person

with mental illness, or a substance use disorder, maintain living in the community rather than face crisis intervention and restrictive psychiatric hospitalization.

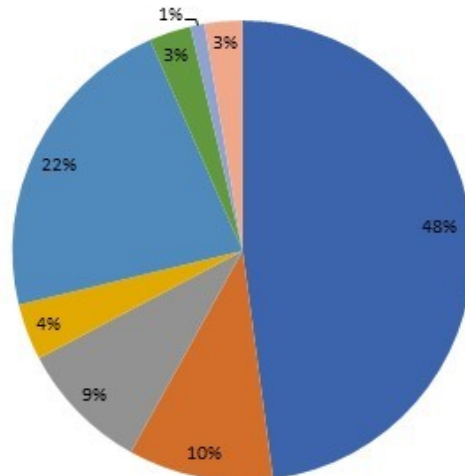
Without our work, more children would be displaced, and more individuals would be removed from their homes to go to hospitals, nursing homes or other facilities—or be unhoused altogether. Our Probate Judges are committed to resolving family and other dilemmas as equitably and beneficially as possible for all concerned.

Probate Court Jurisdiction

FY 2022



FY 2023



- Decedents' Estates
- Children's Matters
- Intellectual Disability
- Trusts
- Conservators
- Other
- Adoptions/Terminations
- Commitments

During the 2022-2023 biennium, case types that came before Connecticut's Probate Courts included:

Children's Matters

Probate Courts hear several different types of cases involving children, including temporary custody and guardianship, termination of parental rights, visitation, adoption, emancipation and parentage. A large proportion of

the guardianship matters in Probate Courts involve parents who are unable to care for their children as a result of mental illness, substance use disorder, or incarceration. In the overwhelming majority of those cases, a family member is appointed as guardian to care for the child. Over 6,000 children are currently cared for by relatives and other familiar adults as part of this framework. The cost of this care is far less than if these children were, instead, placed into the

Connecticut's Probate Courts have a long history dating back to 1698. They were established in 1716 as offshoots of the county courts. The four counties in the state at the time were Hartford, Fairfield, New Haven and New London, and a Probate Court and Judge were placed in each one.

The first probate districts comprising less than a full county were formed in 1719, due in part to transportation challenges and a growing population. Probate districts became progressively smaller and more local in character as years passed. This trend continued until 1987, when the Legislature established the 133rd probate district. Shortly after, economic reasons caused the trend to

reverse, and a number of districts consolidated. In 2009, the General Assembly established a process to further consolidate the Probate Courts, and Public Act 09-114 restructured the number of probate districts from 117 to 54, effective January 5, 2011.

Connecticut's Probate system today consists of 54 Probate Courts, six Regional Children's Probate Courts, and the Office of the Probate Court Administrator, which was established in 1967 to provide oversight, support, uniform procedures, and more.



Northern Fairfield County Chief Clerk Jackie Buckle and Berlin Chief Clerk Susan Meagher.

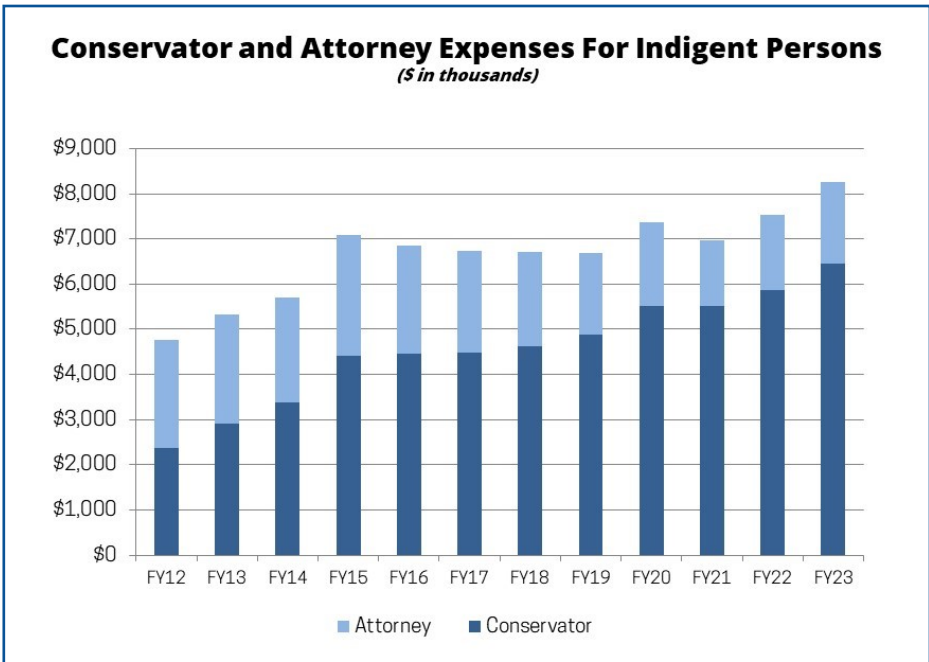
foster care system. Probate guardianships save taxpayers and the state an estimated \$64 million each year.

Grandparents and family members typically seek guardianship in the courts due to their witnessing neglect and abuse. In FY22, the Probate Courts considered 1,253 new petitions for guardianship, and 1,466 in FY23.

Another category of children’s cases involves the management of funds on behalf of minors. Connecticut law requires that when a minor is entitled to property in excess of \$10,000, the property must be managed by a guardian of the estate.

Probate Courts are responsible for the appointment and supervision of guardians for this purpose, which in many instances are a child’s parents.

The Probate Courts also have jurisdiction over petitions for minors and young adults under 21 to determine whether



they fall under the federal Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS). This status is created under federal law for foreign-born children present in the U.S. who need protection due to abuse, neglect, or abandonment. The

Throughout the 2022-2023 biennium, the Probate Court Administrator, judges and staff met both in person and virtually with stakeholders and legislative leaders to ensure support for the Probate Courts’ work and the services they provides constituents. During this biennium, there were no reductions by the legislature to the approved General Fund appropriations which were maintained at \$13.5 million for FY22 and \$13.4 million for FY23. Other legislative accomplishments during this time period include:

- Expanding jurisdiction of Regional Children’s Probate Courts to include parentage and surrogacy proceedings
- Supporting changes to protect certain buyers of real estate when needing release of the estate tax lien
- Getting parity on health insurance premium cost sharing for Probate Judges and employees the same as what state employees pay
- Affirming that state agencies are bound by Probate Court decisions



- Implementing procedures under the new Connecticut Indian Child Welfare Act for children of state-recognized Indian tribes
- Protecting senior citizens from being financially exploited or coerced into making fraudulent bank transfers
- Helping raise the minimum age to marry to 18

Probate Courts have jurisdiction to make findings necessary for the federal Immigration Court to grant this special status. For this biennium, there were petitions for SIJS affecting over 1,607 children living in Connecticut—a 153% increase over the previous biennium.

Conservatorships

Probate Courts appoint conservators to manage the care and finances of adults who are found unable to do so themselves due to conditions such as dementia, mental illness, or other impairments that adversely affect their capacity. The court determines whether a person needs a conservator, appoints one or more persons to serve in the role, and supervises conservators on an ongoing basis. The court also provides instruction to the conservator on issues

such as critical medical decisions and placement of the conserved person in a nursing home.

In FY22 and FY23, our Probate Courts spent more on conservator fees for indigent individuals than for any other essential or state-required service we provide: \$5.9 million in FY22 and \$6.5 million in FY23.

Guardianships of Adults with Intellectual Disability

Connecticut has a special type of guardianship for adults with intellectual disability. The Probate Court determines if an individual has an intellectual disability, whether a guardian is needed and, if so, who should serve as guardian.

The court must also conduct periodic reviews of a guardianship to tailor the authorities of the guardian to





Berlin Judge Walter Clebowicz with Chief Clerk Susan Meagher at his October 2021 retirement party.

maximize the independence of the adult. This adjudication is distinct from the Department of Developmental Services’ (DDS) determination of an individual’s eligibility for DDS services.

Annually, Connecticut Probate Courts receive an average of 600 new petitions for guardianship of adults with intellectual disability. In 2017, a new law was passed so that Probate Courts could authorize guardians to manage limited assets of individuals with intellectual disability as long as those assets remain below \$10,000. This limited authority makes the existing guardianship framework more flexible and removed the need for a separate and cumbersome conservatorship for a person who needs assistance with a relatively small amount of assets. With the rising number of petitions for such financial authority—as shown below—it is clear there is a need for this service.

Petitions Filed to Manage the Limited Assets of a Person With Intellectual Disability

FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23
38	122	136	133	200	253

■ *‘Thank you so much for all of your help with the adoption process. Not only did you assist with the paperwork, but you made it more personal. That means more than anything. It felt so comfortable going into court and having people who knew a little about us. We were happy to have the Probate Court part of our very important day.’*

- Adoptive Family

Commitments

Probate Courts hear several different types of cases regarding involuntary confinement for treatment of mental illness, substance use disorder, and infectious diseases. In cases involving persons with psychiatric issues, Probate Courts determine whether a person is dangerous or gravely disabled. In helping individuals with particularly complex psychiatric diagnoses, the Probate Courts may decide whether a conservator should have authority to consent to the involuntary administration of psychotropic medication or electroconvulsive therapy (ECT).

Probate jurisdiction also encompasses appeals from quarantine, isolation, and vaccination orders issued by the Department of Public Health during a public health emergency. There were no appeals filed with the Probate Courts due to isolation, quarantine, or vaccination orders during this reporting period.

Adult and child involuntary commitment cases totaled 1,403 in FY22 and 1,452 in FY23.

Connecticut's Probate Courts provide family- and community-centered solutions that **save the state nearly \$2.2 billion each year**, including:



\$526M saved helping seniors age at home instead of at long-term care facilities



\$64M saved keeping kids out of foster care through kinship guardianships



\$1.5B saved keeping individuals with mental illness in the community and out of inpatient care

Connecticut's Probate Courts provide \$100,000 in annual funding to the Naugatuck-based nonprofit Melissa's Project to provide guardian ad litem and care management for individuals with severe, persistent mental illness. All are clients of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS), though the need for these services far exceeds the availability of resources. Limiting participants to no more than 125 at a time, the program has a two- to three-month wait list. Whenever possible, Melissa's Project staff work to transition patients out of the program and into the care of a Probate-appointed conservator.

While Probate Courts possess the authority to issue commitment orders, the scarcity of available therapeutic

space throughout Connecticut for those needing even temporary mental health hospitalization hampers their ability to help. The strain on community-based services for mental and behavioral health care also continues to be a factor in preventing crisis intervention.

Decedents' Estates and Trusts

The settlement of decedents' estates is the area of jurisdiction most commonly associated with the Probate Courts. However, for the past several years, decedent estates have represented less than half of our work. The role of the courts in these estates includes determining the validity of wills, appointing and supervising executors and administrators, resolving disputes among fiduciaries, heirs,

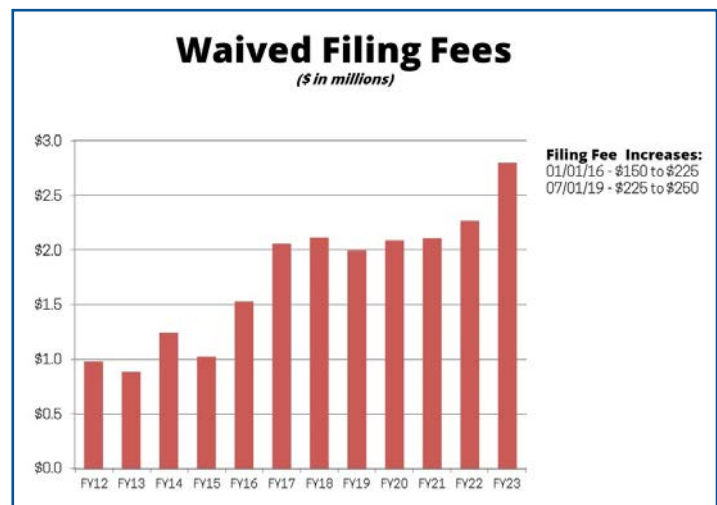
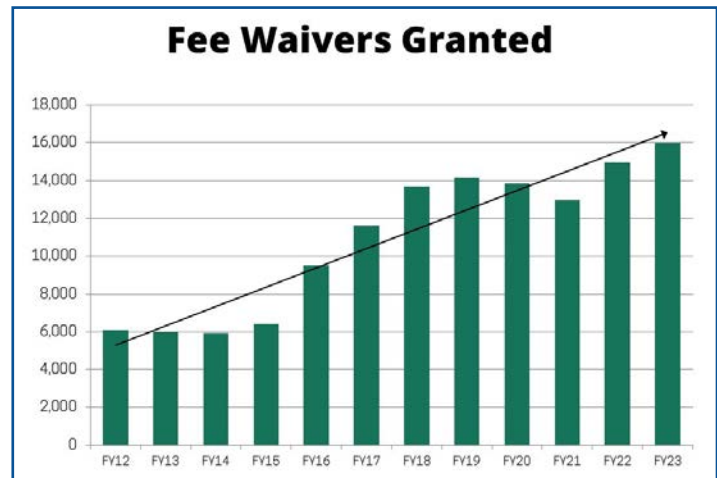


■ *Access to justice and our courts are integral components of the Probate system. We continuously work to eliminate barriers, including ensuring that fee waivers are available to those with low or limited incomes.*

beneficiaries and creditors, and ensuring proper payment of debts and distribution to heirs or beneficiaries.

One of the creditors is often the state of Connecticut. The Probate Courts oversee recovery of state assistance liens for the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) payable from decedents' estates. DAS recovered in excess of \$47 million during FY22-23, which included revenue through probate decedent estates.

The Probate Courts also have jurisdiction over matters that do not fall within the major categories outlined above, including name changes, restoration of federal firearms rights, and issues related to powers of attorney.



The state Constitution requires that Probate Judges be elected, and the term of office is four years. The mandatory retirement age for judges is 70. Since 2011, any new candidate for the office of Probate Judge must be an attorney. Probate clerks manage court files and help the public with general questions about court procedures. Family specialists with mental and behavioral health expertise provide support in matters before the Regional Children's Probate Courts.



Region #22 Probate Judge Domenick N. Calabrese with Darien-New Canaan Chief Clerk Shelagh Kuhsel.

The Code of Probate Judicial Conduct establishes ethical standards for judges, and the Council on Probate Judicial Conduct hears complaints alleging judicial misconduct. One of the Probate system's accomplishments in FY23 was to extend the amount of time Council members have to rule on cases of judicial misconduct. As part of the 2023 Probate Operations Bill that went into effect on October 1, 2023, the Council now has 30 days, rather than the previous 15, to make the most thoughtful and informed decision after the close of a public hearing on a complaint alleging a judge or judicial candidate has committed misconduct.



Transforming lives

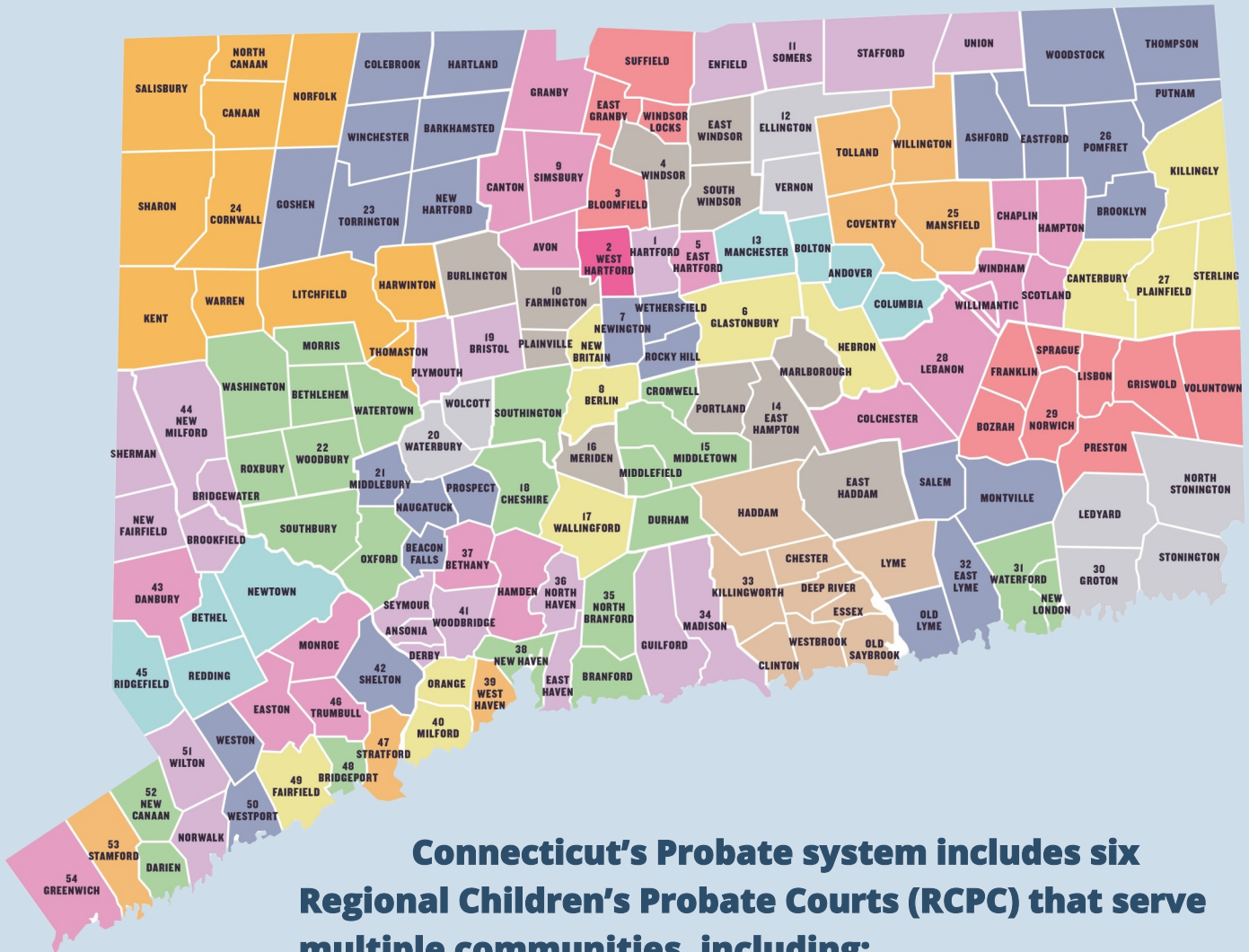
Six Regional Children’s Probate Courts provide a forum for families to arrange the care of children when parents are unable to do so. Convenient court facilities, expertise of family specialists, and experienced local Probate Judges put families at ease as they work through their problems.

A family case conference conducted by a family specialist—a court employee with advanced training in child and family dynamics—takes place before a hearing with the judge.



Two of our Regional Children’s Probate Court administrative judges, Judge Evelyn M. Daly and Judge Michael R. Brandt.

The conference brings the family together with representatives from the Department of Children and Families and court-appointed attorneys to assess a beneficial plan for the child’s or children’s care. This allows all interested parties and the Department of Children and Families to discuss cases in a collaborative manner, focusing on the family’s strengths and what is in the best interests of the child. The goal is to keep children in the care of family members in a safe and familiar home environment when possible.



Connecticut's Probate system includes six Regional Children's Probate Courts (RCPC) that serve multiple communities, including:

■ **New Haven RCPC, established in 2004:** Bethany, Branford, East Haven, Hamden, Milford, New Haven, North Branford, North Haven, Orange, and West Haven.

■ **Central CT RCPC, established in 2005:** Berlin, Cheshire, Chester, Clinton, Cromwell, Deep River, Durham, East Haddam, East Hampton, Essex, Haddam, Killingworth, Lyme, Marlborough, Meriden, Middlefield, Middletown, New Britain, Old Saybrook, Portland, Southington, Wallingford, and Westbrook.

■ **New London RCPC, established in 2006:** East Lyme, Groton, Ledyard, Montville, New London, North Stonington, Norwich, Old Lyme, Salem, Stonington, and Waterford.

■ **Northeast RCPC, established in 2007:** Ashford, Brooklyn, Canterbury, Chaplin, Colchester, Coventry, Eastford,

Hampton, Killingly, Lebanon, Mansfield, Plainfield, Pomfret, Putnam, Scotland, Sterling, Thompson, Tolland, Willington, Windham, and Woodstock.

■ **Waterbury RCPC, established in 2007:** Ansonia, Beacon Falls, Bethlehem, Derby, Middlebury, Naugatuck, Oxford, Prospect, Roxbury, Seymour, Shelton, Southbury, Waterbury, Watertown, Washington, Wolcott, Woodbridge, and Woodbury.

■ **Hartford RCPC, established in 2012:** Andover, Avon, Bloomfield, Bolton, Burlington, Canton, Columbia, East Granby, East Hartford, East Windsor, Enfield, Farmington, Glastonbury, Granby, Hartford, Hebron, Manchester, Newington, Plainville, Rocky Hill, Simsbury, Somers, South Windsor, Stafford, Suffield, Union, West Hartford, Wethersfield, Windsor, and Windsor Locks.

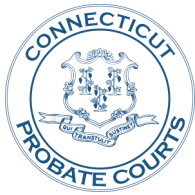


FY22, FY23 Probate Court Matters

	FY22	FY23
Decedents		
4a-16 Petition	2,267	1,570
Administration Intestate	3,411	3,585
Admit Will	8,548	8,647
Approval/Instruction re: Action by Fiduciary	720	714
Affidavit Estate	6,079	6,446
Allowance for Spouse or Family	68	62
Allowance of Account	10,638	11,503
Compromise of Claim	512	561
Custody of Remains	676	590
Hearing Management/Status Conferences	1,439	1,715
Insolvent Estate	462	390
Sale or Mortgage of Real Estate	1,793	1,859
TPO Estate	4,202	4,258
Will Contest	61	66
Decedent Other	8,927	9,469
Trusts		
Approval/Instruction re: Action by Fiduciary	167	163
Trust Accounts	2,625	2,451
Appointment of Testamentary Trustee	361	399
Compel Account for Inter Vivos Trust	24	21
Hearing Management/Status Conferences	255	207
Termination of Charitable Trust	11	8
Trust Other	993	1,004
Conservators		
Approval/Instruction re: Fiduciary	580	531
Allowance of Accounting	4,384	3,941
Appointment of Conservator of the Person and Estate — Involuntary	2,235	2,211
Appointment of Conservator of the Person and Estate — Voluntary	755	758
Appointment of Conservator of the Estate — Involuntary	194	191
Appointment of Conservator of the Estate — Voluntary	296	272
Appointment of Conservator of the Person — Involuntary	226	191
Appointment of Conservator of the Person — Voluntary	89	108
Appointment of Temporary Conservator	242	243
Authority to Consent to Psychiatric Medication Treatment C.G.S. § 17a-543(e)	400	399
Hearing Management/Status Conferences	916	969
Orders Concerning Life Support Systems	11	13
Sale or Mortgage of Real Estate	371	363
Conservatorship Reviews	1,613	1,478
Conservatorship Other	12,288	12,153



	FY22	FY23
Children's Matters		
Approval/Instruction re: Action by Fiduciary	13	16
Appointment of Co-Guardian of a Minor	66	94
Continuation of DCF Care or Placement — Voluntary	0	0
Review of DCF Plan	0	0
Emancipation of Minor	11	21
Hearing Management/Status Conferences	82	121
Immediate Temporary Custody	119	95
Parentage (formerly Paternity) Claim	98	118
Reinstatement of Parent as Guardian	121	101
Removal of Guardian of the Person	803	1,050
Temporary Custody	511	500
Temporary Guardian	384	322
Transfer to Superior Court	2	0
Children's Matters Other	4,670	5,392
Guardian of Minor Estates		
Approval/Instruction re: Action by Fiduciary	59	44
Allowance of Account	1,091	979
Appointment of Guardian of the Estate	658	726
Compromise of Claim	408	483
Hearing Management/Status Conferences	107	122
Guardian of Minor Estates Other	667	766
Guardian of Person with Intellectual Disability		
Approval/Instruction re: Action by Fiduciary	44	40
Appointment of Guardian of Person with Intellectual Disability	634	605
Hearing Management/Status Conferences	184	198
Placement of Person with Intellectual Disability with DDS	20	10
Sterilization	1	3
Temporary Limited Guardian of Person with Intellectual Disability	0	0
Guardianship Reviews	2,102	2,007
Guardian of Person with Intellectual Disability Other	6,518	7,015
Adoptions and Termination of Parental Rights		
Approval/Instruction re: Action by Fiduciary	0	2
Approval of Adoption — Co-Parent or Step-Parent	156	234
Approval of Adoption — Relative	18	21
Approval of Adoption — Statutory Parent (DCF Identified)	1	0
Approval of Adoption — Statutory Parent (DCF Non-identified)	1	0
Approval of Adoption — Statutory Parent (Private Agency Identified)	4	11
Approval of Adoption — Statutory Parent (Private Agency Non-identified)	3	6
Approval of Adult Adoption	126	132
Hearing Management/Status Conferences	16	12
Termination of Parental Rights	285	353
Transfer to Superior Court	5	3
Adoption and Termination of Parental Rights Other	244	284



FY22, FY23 Probate Court Matters

	FY22	FY23
Adult Commitment		
Annual Review	159	149
Biennial Review Hearing	0	5
Commitment of Adult — Involuntary	1,397	1,447
Hearing Management/Status Conferences	74	102
Permission for Shock Therapy	203	195
Probable Cause Hearing — Adult Commitment	980	900
Release from Confinement	19	22
Warrant for Examination by Court	4	3
Adult Commitment Other	5	3
Child Commitment		
Commitment of Child — Involuntary	6	5
Child Commitment Other	4	6
Drug and Alcohol Commitment		
Drug and Alcohol Dependency Commitment	38	20
Drug and Alcohol Dependency Commitment Other	3	2
Other Matters		
Change of Name Petitions	2,787	2,961
Compel Power of Attorney Accounting	48	53
Compel UTMA Accounting	2	0
Hearing Management/Status Conferences	31	52
Marriage: Request for Permission for a Minor	8	5
Restore Right to Purchase, Possess or Transport a Firearm	4	4
Other Petitions or Motions	105	87
Fee Waivers	14,938	15,977
Passports	35	62
Total	119,921	123,455



Uniquely Funded, Uniquely Able to Serve

Saving the state billions, while caring for those most in need

One of the many things that makes Connecticut’s Probate Court system unique is that it is the only state system dependent on its own revenue for operations.



Meriden Probate Judge Ariana F. Ceneviva and Wallingford Probate Judge Patrick M. Birney.

Probate depends on court petition filing fees and decedent estate probate fees to fund at least 75% of its annual expenditures, which totaled of \$48.9 million in FY22 and \$51.3 million in FY23.

By statute, towns are required to provide their designated Probate Court with municipal or commercial office space, furnishings, equipment, basic supplies, telephone service, internet access, and liability insurance. Legislation passed in FY23 updated the statute to ensure modern network cables,

■ *In years with Legislative approval of normalized funding, the General Fund appropriation constitutes 25% of the total budget needed to keep the Probate system whole and operational, with funds from probate fee revenue making up the remaining 75%.*

electrical wires, high-speed internet, and computer equipment are provided to Probate Courts to continue to modernize technology needs, including the expansion of eFiling, eBilling and other e-systems consistent with state efforts to streamline and improve the accessibility of government services.

However, all other expenses related to keeping the Probate Court system functioning are paid from the Probate Court

How Probate Funds State Partner Organizations to Protect At-Risk Children and Families

Per state statute, the Probate Court Administration Fund provides funding to the following partner organizations and programs to protect indigent and vulnerable children and families.

FY22	FY23	
\$44,000	\$44,000	<i>Children in Placement</i> A Connecticut-based non-profit that provides court-appointed guardian ad litem to represent and protect the best interests of minor children involved in Probate Court cases.
\$2 million	\$2 million	<i>Kinship and Grandparents and Relatives Respite Grant Programs</i> Facilitated by the Regional Children’s Probate Courts and one local court to serve all other Probate Courts, these two grants provide funds to court-appointed guardians with low incomes caring for minor children. Unlike DCF foster parents, guardians appointed by Probate are not eligible for monthly stipends. These grants seek to fill that gap by providing financial assistance for basic needs and other expenses, including child care, rent, food, transportation, eyeglasses, school clothes, and enrichment activities like summer camp and afterschool programs.
\$88,800	\$88,800	<i>Extended Family Guardianship and Assisted Care Program</i> For New Haven-area children cared for by guardians, the program provides grants of up to \$1,000 annually for medical or dental care, nutritional counseling, psychological counseling, school vacation camp, tutoring or mentoring programs, and for other critical services and enrichment programs.
\$100,000	\$100,000	<i>Melissa’s Project</i> A Connecticut-based non-profit that provides case coordination for individuals with severe and persistent mental illness who are also Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services clients, conserved by the Probate Courts, and living in DMHAS Regions 2 or 5. The care provided by Melissa’s Project has been shown to be effective in helping reduce arrests, incarcerations, and hospitalizations for this vulnerable population. Limited to 125 people, the program regularly has a wait list.
\$2.2 million	\$2.2 million	Total

Administration Fund (PCAF), which most years is funded through both:

- A General Fund allocation from the Legislature
- Probate fee revenue

Unfortunately, both revenue sources are historically unpredictable. While in recent years decedent estate probate fees—which are tied to asset values—have trended higher than forecasted, most estate assets are tied to the stock market, real estate values and other fluctuating valuations—which means those valued high today may be significantly lower tomorrow.

Similarly, looking back at General Fund appropriations received over the past decade, the only pattern is one of uncertainty. The Probate

system received a General Fund appropriation of \$13.5 million in FY22 and \$13.4 million in FY23.

However, as recently as FY16, the Probate Courts’ appropriation was \$0.

Similarly low state funding levels were received in fiscal years 2018 and 2020.



The Probate Court system’s General Fund allocation has varied from \$5.4 million in fiscal year 2017, to \$4.3 million in fiscal year 2019, to \$12.5 million in fiscal year 2021. A lack of consistent, normalized funding makes it difficult to make long-range plans or be certain that continued daily operations may not be jeopardized in some way.

Without consistent and strong funding levels, the Probate system could also find itself unable to pay for the constitutionally- and statutorily-mandated services it performs to help protect and support some of Connecticut’s most vulnerable residents, including children, the elderly, those who are indigent, people with intellectual disability, and those with chronic health challenges like mental illness.

Approximately 20% of the Probate Court system’s annual budget is expended on constitutional or statutory mandates to protect the rights and needs of indigent parties. These critical individual and family services include:

- The right to court-appointed attorneys for respondents in certain proceedings, including children’s matters, conservatorships, guardianships of adults with intellectual disability, and psychiatric commitments
- Waiver of court filing fees to those who meet income requirements to ensure access to the courts
- Conservators for indigent senior citizens, those with mental illness, and others
- Attorneys to represent the interests of minors in guardianship proceedings

The cost of marshal service, physicians, and the publication



of legal notices are also among the costs paid by the Probate Court Administration Fund in cases involving indigent persons. Through partnerships and by statute, Probate additionally provides funding for the following programs to protect indigent and vulnerable individuals and

Without normalized funding, the Probate system could find itself unable to pay for the constitutionally- and statutorily-mandated services it performs to help protect and support some of Connecticut’s most vulnerable residents, including children, the elderly, those who are indigent, people with intellectual disability, and those experiencing chronic health challenges like mental illness.

families, as shown in the chart on page 22.

The combined totals for these critical family and mandated indigent expenses were \$9.7 million for FY22 and a record-high \$10.4 million for FY23.

The Legislature’s support through reliable, consistent levels of General Fund appropriations that represent 25% of Probate’s annual expenditures is needed to offset these critical services and mandates that care for individuals and families most in need.

By statute, any balance in the PCAF in excess of 15% of the system’s next-year budgeted expenditures automatically sweeps into the General Fund at the fiscal year’s end.

Since 2013, the sweep of the PCAF has given \$42.9 million to the General Fund.

At times, the Legislature has suspended the automatic sweep from the PCAF. However, like the probate fee revenue, the uncertainties with the amounts, if any, of General Fund appropriations and whether or not the sweep may be suspended challenges the Probate system’s budget.

Although the 2023 legislative session resulted in a needed suspension of the PCAF sweep, the filing fee for all name change petitions in only the Probate Courts was eliminated as part of the omnibus budget bill.

Efforts to reverse this detrimental policy decision and revenue loss, as well as to prevent new ones, began immediately and marked the close of FY23, with continuing efforts to educate legislators about the unique and essential role of Connecticut’s Probate Courts a priority as we move ahead.

From how it is funded to who it serves, the Probate Court system is an essential part of state government and the



East Hartford Probate Judge Richard P. Gentile at the Probate Assembly’s 2023 Annual Meeting.

■ *The Probate Courts administered and distributed Kinship and Respite Grants to meet the needs of 2,742 children and 1,992 families in FY22, and 2,444 children and 1,807 families in FY23.*

judicial system. As the graphic on page 14 shows, every dollar invested in the Probate system also saves the state and its taxpayers money. By helping families help themselves, and by reducing the need for far more intensive and expensive state services, Connecticut’s Probate Courts provide family- and community-centered solutions that save Connecticut and taxpayers more than \$2.2 billion a year.



At a workshop for probate clerks.

*Securing futures.
Strengthening families.
Transforming lives.*

With a lean and efficient annual budget, Connecticut’s Probate Courts strive each day to ensure that everyone has access to the Probate Courts with family-focused resolutions, regardless of the family challenges they may be facing.



Conservators Help the Probate Courts Care for Those Who Can't Care for Themselves

Payment of conservators caring for indigent individuals with dementia, mental illness, substance use disorder, or other conditions continues to be the fastest-growing expense in the Probate Court system budget.

The Probate Courts, in fact, saw a 49% increase in the number of indigent conserved individuals with mental illness between FY18 and FY23. This is a low estimate, as this figure includes only those with a paid conservator, not a volunteer or family member serving in that role.

The total number of conserved residents being managed by Connecticut's Probate Courts jumped to an all-time high of 23,306 during FY23. Before that, 22,792 conserved persons was the highest number, logged in FY22.

Of those conserved individuals during this biennium, 42% were indigent and unable to pay for their conservator: 9,607 individuals in FY22 and 9,940 in FY23. Annual costs for managing indigent conserved individuals averaged \$6.2M during FY22-23.

What is a conservator?

Conservatorship is a legal framework to manage the care and finances of adults unable to do so for themselves. A Probate Court Judge makes the determination whether a person is incapable and appoints one or more persons to serve as conservator. A conservator may also be appointed for someone who voluntarily requests assistance.

The conservator helps the conserved person make

decisions about housing, finances, medical care and other basic needs, while encouraging the conserved person to participate in the decision-making process and following the conserved person's preferences.

Many conservators are family members who volunteer to take on the responsibility without pay. However, often a person does not have a relative who is willing or able to take on this role. They are dependent on the resources of the state Probate Court system and professionals such as attorneys and social workers to take on this responsibility for little or no pay.

Some professional conservators work pro bono as a community service. However, most charge a fee. Probate



regulations allow the system to be invoiced \$52 an hour for conservator services and \$26 an hour for work performed by their staff. When a person is indigent and unable to pay, the Probate system assumes the costs.

These indigent people are also unable to pay for an

attorney needed to represent their interests during hearings, so the Probate system bears those costs, too.

There is no doubt that shouldering these responsibilities is the right thing to do. But as the total number of conserved persons and the total number of conserved persons who are indigent both quickly and steeply rise, so do the costs of assisting them.

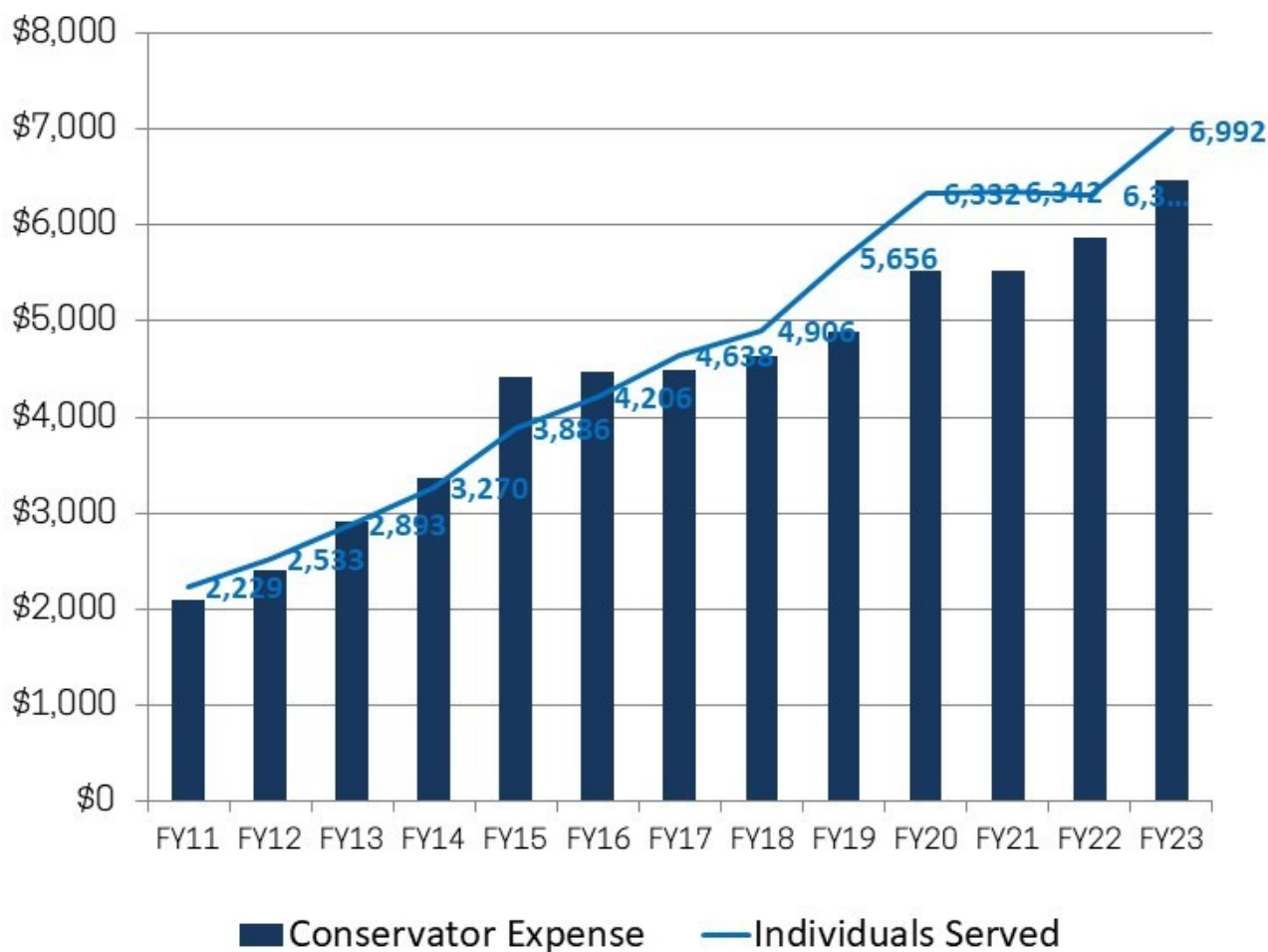


In FY23, the Probate Court system paid 122% more for conservators for indigent individuals than it did in FY13. Many of these conservators were the difference between a person with mental illness living on the streets and having a safe apartment; between a senior with dementia being placed in a nursing home or staying at home in familiar surroundings.

While most believe that the majority of conserved individuals are senior citizens, the truth is something else: During the most recent fiscal year, 10,763 conserved individuals in Connecticut were under age 65, while 5,370 were 45 or younger.

Challenged with chronic mental illness or living with conditions such as chronic substance use disorder, many are likely to remain dependent on the support of conservators—and the need for the financial resources of the Probate system—for many years. Connecticut's aging population coupled with societal recognition of the value of

Conservator Expenses For Indigent Conserved Persons (\$ in thousands)



aging in place will only increase the strain on these services and the need for Probate Court revenue.

Recruiting attorneys and conservators to represent both the growing number of indigent cases and the increasing complexity of these cases has also become a challenge. There just are not enough professionals willing to perform such a big job for so little pay.

Without being able to rely on consistent state funding, the ability to continue to meet people’s needs may be jeopardized.

In addition to paying conservator fees for indigent residents, Connecticut’s Probate Courts supervise all conserved individuals on an ongoing basis. A judge regularly reviews the individual’s capacity to determine whether any modifications, or even the termination of the conservatorship, are needed.

The court also periodically conducts hearings on financial reports to ensure proper management of the conserved person’s finances. It additionally instructs the conservator on issues related to medical treatment, place of residence, and end-of-life care.



Probate Court Administration Fund Activity

	FY22	FY23
Fund Balance at Beginning of Year	8,196,024	8,391,872
Revenue		
Probate Court fees	53,585,512	57,977,156
General Fund Appropriation	13,544,771	13,359,024
Pass-Through Funding	133,220	133,220
Interest	355,619	423,431
Investment Income	64,417	779,353
Probate Court Miscellaneous Funds	828	1,577
Total revenue	67,684,367	72,673,761
Expenses		
PCA - Personnel Expenses		
Salaries and Wages	2,211,576	2,231,660
Fringe Benefits	2,050,370	2,183,178
PCA - Other Expenses		
Computer Equipment and Services	253,223	292,220
Building Repairs, Maintenance and Utilities	90,497	89,780
Office Expenses	62,779	47,356
Training and Education for Judges, Clerks and PCA Staff	14,211	5,319
Professional Services	16,789	5,672
Conservator Audits	7,025	5,663
Dues and Subscriptions	16,440	16,264
Other	27,532	19,633
Court - Personnel Expenses		
Salaries and Wages	22,673,680	22,672,140
Retirement Plan Funding	3,011,297	2,292,187
Fringe Benefits	6,414,993	6,573,734
Retirement Administration	73,736	142,489
Court - Other Expenses		
Computer Equipment and Services	1,284,395	2,489,777
Court Office Expenses	474,133	508,137
Outside Services	71,589	69,993
Council on Probate Judicial Conduct	160,175	150,389
Mileage, Parking and Tolls	12,639	30,475
Rental of Records Storage Space	25,336	26,260
Other	69,651	183,681



	FY22	FY23
Indigency Expenses		
Conservators	5,872,844	6,460,434
Court-Appointed Counsel	1,654,772	1,808,772
Marshals, Ads, Newspapers, Physicians	144,471	155,350
Pass-Through Funding		
Kinship and Respite Care	2,000,000	2,000,000
Guardianship Project	88,812	88,812
Melissa's Project	100,000	100,000
Children in Placement	44,406	44,406
Total Expenses	48,927,371	51,330,781
Transfer to General Fund	(18,561,148)	--
Fund Balance at End of Year	8,391,872	29,734,852

Probate Judge and Employee Retirement Fund

	FY22	FY23
Benefits Paid to Retired Judges and Employees	6,382,423	6,975,816
Professional Expenses	22,000	10,000
Refunds Upon Death or Termination	248,922	54,491
Interest Paid on Refunds	1,304	675
Total Expenses	6,654,649	7,040,983

Leadership: Judges and Clerks

Serving our Courts, Communities and Connecticut

Adopted in 1988, Article V of the Connecticut Probate Assembly Bylaws asks Probate Judges to serve outside their courts by participating as members of standing and special committees designed to advance and enhance probate practices. Active committees and their chairs during FY22 and FY23 were:

Continuing Education Committee

Judge Cynthia C. Becker, Chair until January 2023

Judge Jeannine Lewis, Chair since January 2023

The committee collaborates with the Office of the Probate



Judge Becker

Court Administrator to develop educational programs on matters of probate law and related topics. The committee ensures judges and court staff fulfill mandatory annual continuing education credits.

In FY22, a virtual platform was utilized to ensure the ability to

provide ongoing continuing education during the COVID 19 pandemic and the need to social distance. By the end of the biennium, trainings were back to primarily in person, including the extensive training and programming provided on topics such as the ethical pitfalls of social media, implicit bias, and gender/identity issues for the class of new Probate Judges sworn into office in FY23.

Ethics Committee

Judge Michael F. Magistrali, Chair until April 2023

Judge Michael R. Brandt, Chair since April 2023

Responsible for periodic reviews of the Code of Probate Judicial Conduct, the committee also assists with educational programs on ethics for judges.

Executive Committee

Guiding the work of the Probate Assembly, committee

membership is comprised of current assembly officers, the immediate past president, chairs of the standing committees and nine voting members elected on a rotating basis (three per year) to represent all of Connecticut's counties.

Legislative Committee

Judge Gerald M. Fox III, Co-Chair

Judge T.R. Rowe, Co-Chair

Developing and reviewing legislative proposals that affect the Probate Courts, committee members work closely with the Probate Court Administrator to update statutes and affirm the state's commitment to Probate Courts through General Fund appropriations.

Nominating Committee

Judge Joseph D. Marino, Chair

Prepares the slate of candidates for Probate Assembly offices, as well as the slate of members for the Executive Committee, Budget Committee and Council on Probate Judicial Conduct. Elections are conducted every year at the Probate Assembly's annual meeting.



Judge Marino

Planning Committee

Judge Fred J. Anthony, Chair

Charged with the study of the role and structure of the Probate Courts, the committee plans for changes that affect the Probate Court system, as well as performs other duties as assigned by the Executive Committee or President-Judge.

Procedures Review Committee

Judge Jennifer L. Berkenstock, Chair

The committee works to develop and revise court forms for

compliance with legal requirements and to increase ease of use for court participants. Members also develop forms for new legislation and respond to suggestions from judges, court personnel and court users.

Public Information Committee

Judge Lisa K. Wexler, Chair
 Endeavoring to enhance public understanding of what the Probate Courts do, the committee assists with periodic press releases, documents and other materials that inform the general public about the services the Probate Courts provide.



Judge Wexler

Ad Hoc Court Security Committee

Judge Domenick N. Calabrese, Chair
 Created in 2013 to strengthen safety and security in the Probate Courts, the committee works to help courts enact the security and emergency preparedness policies that all courts are advised to follow. At the committee's recommendation, all court employees also periodically participate in training programs on how to handle workplace emergencies.

Connecticut Association of Probate Clerks

Idaliz Gomez, Co-President
Nanci Howard, Co-President
 More than 200 court clerks, staff, staff attorneys, family specialists and retirees are members of the Connecticut Association of Probate Clerks, a professional group founded in 1983. The group seeks to "promote the interests of all clerks and assistant clerks of the Probate Courts throughout the state by the exchange of ideas and information." Each year, the association holds four meetings that usually have an educational component.



Advisory Committee on the Probate Court Rules of Procedure

Probate Court Administrator Judge Beverly K. Streit-Kefalas, Chair
Judges Peter C. Barrett, Kathleen N. Maxham, and Robert A. Randich, Subcommittee Chairs
 A group comprised of judges, attorneys, court staff, and court users appointed by the Probate Court Administrator, the Advisory Committee on the Probate Court Rules of Procedure convenes on at least a two-year cycle to review and propose revisions to the Connecticut Probate Court Rules of Procedure. Revisions typically address changes in statutory provisions and recommended court procedures. The rules establish uniform procedures for probate matters. They provide guidance in all areas of probate jurisdiction and are written in plain language to assist both self-represented individuals and attorneys. During the FY22-23 biennium, the committee proposed revisions related to fiduciary accounting, guardian ad litem fees, participation in hearings by electronic means, and property valuation for nontaxable estates.

Continuing Education

Keeping our courts in sync with changing laws, best practices



Former Trumbull Clerk Michelle Rivera (who now works at the Bridgeport court) with Trumbull Judge T.R. Rowe at the Probate Assembly's June 2023 Meeting and Seminar.

Continuing education is a foundation for promoting best practices and uniformity within Connecticut's Probate Courts. It is also one of the most important resources the Office of the Probate Court Administrator and the Probate Assembly provide.

PCA staff and members of the Connecticut Probate Assembly's Continuing Education Committee work together—as well as with partners like the Connecticut Bar Association—to ensure that judges and court staff are educated and up-to-date on new state and federal laws, timely issues, and other essential topics related to probate and those we serve.

Probate Judges are required by regulation to complete at least 15 hours of continuing education each calendar year, and court staff must complete six hours. New Probate Judges must also complete a minimum of 40 hours of training, as well as work with a qualified mentor.

During fiscal years 2022 and 2023, continuing education opportunities included:

2021 | SEPTEMBER

Webinar for all judges and court staff, 9/14

- *Marriage of a Minor and Emancipation Matters*: Hon. Michael R. Brandt, East Haven-North Haven Probate Court; Tara Courtmanche, Chief Clerk, New Haven Regional Children's Probate Court; Mary Jo Ross, Lead Family Specialist, New Haven Regional Children's Probate Court; Stephanie Janes, Program Manager for Mental Health and Family Programs, Office of the Probate Court Administrator
- *Did You Know?:* Amy L. Benjamin, Manager of Staff Training and Support, Office of the Probate Court Administrator
- *Connecticut Parentage Act*: Douglas NeJaime, Anne Urowsky Professor of Law, Yale Law School

During FY22 and FY23, the Connecticut Probate Assembly and PCA provided **69 programs** that offered **82 credit hours** of continuing education to judges, attorneys, clerks, and other court staff.

- *Ethics of Ex Parte Communications*: Hon. Michael R. Brandt, East Haven-North Haven Probate Court; Tara Courtmanche, Chief Clerk, New Haven Regional Children’s Probate Court; Mary Jo Ross, Lead Family Specialist, New Haven Regional Children’s Probate Court



Quinnipiac School of Law Professor Jeffrey A. Cooper at the March 2022 Judges Institute.

North Branford Probate Court

- *Ethics: Citations, Recusal, and Disqualification*: Hon. Dianne Yamin, Danbury Probate Court
- *Wills — Proving Validity*: Hon. Elizabeth L. Leamon, Southeastern CT Regional Probate Court

2021 | NOVEMBER

Joint Probate Assembly/Connecticut Bar Association Seminar, 11/16

- *Connecticut Parentage Act*: Heather J. Lange, Attorney, Brody Wilkinson, PC; Douglas NeJaime, Anne Urowsky Professor of Law, Yale Law School



Probate Clerks Yadira Ortiz from the Central Connecticut Regional Children’s Court, Dalianice DelValle from the Middletown Probate Court, and Amanda Johnson from the Bristol-Plymouth Probate Court.

2021 | OCTOBER

Judges Institute Webinar, 10/26

- *Will Contests: Undue Influence*: Hon. Frank J. Forgione, Branford-

North Branford Probate Court

- *Connecticut Conservatorship Potpourri*: Hon. Jeannine Lewis, Saybrook Probate Court; Julia M. Brown, Attorney, Julia M. Brown, LLC; Brian S. Cantor, Attorney
- *CUTC (Connecticut Uniform Trust Code)—A Year in Review*: Hon. Domenick N. Calabrese, Region #22 Probate Court; Kelley Galica Peck, Attorney, Cummings & Lockwood, LLC
- *Ethical Considerations Concerning Hearings*: Hon. Judge Fred J. Anthony, Shelton Probate Court; Christopher J. Hug, Attorney, Robinson & Cole

2021 | DECEMBER

Connecticut Bar Foundation Webinar, 12/9

- *Exploring Conservatorship in Connecticut*: Jasmine E. Harris, Professor, University of Pennsylvania Carey School of Law; Thomas E. Gaffey, retired Chief Counsel, Office of the Probate Court Administrator



The March 2023 Judges Institute held at Quinnipiac University School of Law.



Danbury Probate Court Clerks Melanne Torres and Gladys Torres at the September 2022 Probate Assembly meeting.

Yamin, Danbury Probate Court

- **Conservatorship Decrees.** Heather L. Dostaler, Chief Counsel, Office of the Probate Court Administrator
- **Understanding Mental Health.** Hon. Joseph D. Marino,

2022 | JANUARY

Judges Institute, 1/26

- **Code of Probate Judicial Conduct, Campaign Ethics.**

Hon. Beverly K. Streit-Kefalas, Probate Court Administrator; Hon. Peter C. Barrett, Madison-Guilford Probate Court; Hon. Paul J. Ganim, Bridgeport Probate Court; Hon. Mathew H. Greene, New London Probate Court; Hon. William A. Hamzy, Bristol-Plymouth Probate Court (formerly Region #19); Hon. Dianne E.

Middletown Probate Court; Christine L. Shapter, MD, PC, Associate Medical Director of Perception Programs, Willimantic; Kirk W. Lowry, Attorney, Connecticut Legal Rights Project Inc., Legal Director

2022 | MARCH

Judges Institute, 3/16

- **Annual Case Law Review.** Jeffrey A. Cooper, Professor and Associate Dean of Research & Development, Quinnipiac University School of Law; John R. Ivimey, Attorney, Reid and Reige, PC
- **Probate Court Mediation Program.** Evan C. Brunetti, Attorney, Office of the Probate Court Administrator
- **Mediation Essentials.** Brendan Holt, Visiting Clinical Professor, Quinnipiac University School of Law; Charles A. Pillsbury, Distinguished Practitioner in Residence in Dispute Resolution, Quinnipiac University School of Law; Hon. Angela Robinson, retired Superior Court Judge and current Visiting Associate Professor, Quinnipiac University School of Law; Hon. Lisa K. Wexler, Westport Probate Court

2022 | JUNE

Webinar for all judges and court staff, 6/9

- *Connecticut Parentage Act*: Heather L. Dostaler, Chief Counsel, Office of the Probate Court Administrator; Amy L. Benjamin, Manager of Staff Training and Support, Office of the Probate Court Administrator

CT Probate Assembly, 6/22

- *Update on DAS Liens & Recovery*: Heather L. Dostaler, Chief Counsel, Office of the Probate Court Administrator

- *Medications and Treatment of Psychiatric Disabilities*: Naila Azhar, MD, MPH, Director of Inpatient Psychiatry Services, UConn Health, John Dempsey Hospital

- *Firearms Laws 101*: Brianna Maurice, Sergeant, Department of Emergency Services & Public Protection's Connecticut State Police Special Licensing and Firearms Unit

- *DRS and Estate Tax Returns*: John Biello, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Revenue Services; Louis Bucari, Attorney and General Counsel, Department of Revenue Services

- *Fiduciary Recordkeeping—Developments*: Stephen Pedneault, CPA, CFF, CFE Forensic Accounting Services

Webinar, 6/29

- *CMS Fundamentals Training*: Amy L. Benjamin, Manager of Staff Training and Support, Office of the Probate Court Administrator



Saybrook Probate Judge Jeannine Lewis.

2022 | SEPTEMBER

CT Probate Assembly, 9/21

- *Words Matter*: Hon. Beverly K. Streit-Kefalas, Probate Court Administrator; Margaret Castinado, Attorney and Senior Assistant Public Defender, Connecticut Office of the Public Defender; Dean Karen DeMeola, Assistant Dean for Finance, Administration and Enrollment, University of Connecticut School of Law; Kathy Flaherty, Attorney and Executive Director, Connecticut Legal Rights Project, Inc.; Joy Gary, Attorney and Deputy Assistant State's Attorney, Connecticut Division of Criminal Justice; Sheila Hayre, Associate Professor of Law, Quinnipiac University School of Law

Advancing the Expertise of Judges and Court Staff Through Effective Collaborations

To provide Judges and staff with additional educational opportunities, the Office of the Probate Court Administrator partnered with several organizations in FY22 and FY23, including Connecticut's Coalition for Elder Justice and the Elder Law Section of the Connecticut Bar Association to present a monthly series of "Lunch and Learn" virtual informational sessions for attorneys that represent or serve as conservators for nursing home facility residents. The Connecticut Bar Foundation and Connecticut Bar Association Estates and Probate Section were also among collaborators.

■ *DCF Program Update*: Tina Jefferson, LMSW, Bureau Chief of Child Welfare, Department of Children and Families; Sharon Davis, MSW, DSW, Director of Community and Family Services, Department of Children and Families; Vincent Russo, Legislative Program Director, Department of Children and Families

■ *Did You Know?*: Amy L. Benjamin, Manager of Staff Training and Support, Office of the Probate Court Administrator

■ *Minor Name Changes*: Hon. Ariana F. Ceneviva, Meriden Probate Court; Laura Chomentowski, Family Specialist, Central Connecticut Regional Children’s Probate Court; Stephanie Janes, Mental Health and Family Program Manager, Office of the Probate Court Administrator

■ *Parentage Claims*: Evan Brunetti, Attorney, Office of the Probate Court Administrator

2022 | OCTOBER

Judges Institute, 10/26

■ *2022 New Legislation & Rules of Procedure*: Hon. Beverly K. Streit-Kefalas, Probate Court Administrator; Heather L. Dostaler, Chief Counsel, Office of the Probate Court Administrator

2022 | NOVEMBER

CT Probate Assembly, 11/30

■ *Constitutional Law —Due Process & Equal Protection*: Timothy Fisher, Dean Emeritus and Professor of Law, University of Connecticut School of Law

■ *Diseases and Disorders Affecting Judgment*: David Pepper, MD, Medical Director of Emergency Psychiatric Services and Behavioral Health Network Care Logistic



At the March 2022 Judges Institute.

Center, Hartford HealthCare

■ *Anatomy of Wills and Trusts*: Jeffrey A. Cooper, Professor and Associate Dean of Research & Development, Quinnipiac University School of Law; Robert B. Fawber, Attorney, Cummings & Lockwood, LLC

■ *Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers*: David Williams, Attorney and Executive Director, Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers CT

2022 | DECEMBER

Judges Institute, 12/19

■ *Primer on Evidence*: Christopher J. Hug, Kathleen E. Dion, and Edward J. Heath, Attorneys, Robinson & Cole

2023 | JANUARY

Judges Institute, 1/26

■ *Department of Developmental Services*: Marjorie Wakeman, Director of Legal and Governmental Affairs, Department of Developmental Services; Katie Rock-Burns, Chief Operating Officer, Department of Developmental Services; Kathleen Murphy, PhD, Eligibility Unit Director, Department of Developmental Services; Wayne Seidel, Director of Case Management, Department of Developmental Services

Connecticut Probate Court judges, attorneys, clerks and other staff logged a total of **7,201** hours of continuing education in FY22 and FY23, far exceeding regulatory requirements.



Connecticut Chief Justice Richard A. Robinson at the 2022 Annual Meeting.

- *Gender & Probate*: Robin McHaelen, MSW, McHaelen Consulting Services, LLC
- *Cases from Hades*: Hon. Domenick N. Calabrese, Region #22 Probate Court; Hon. Mark J. DeGennaro, West Haven Probate Court; Hon. Frank J. Forgione, retired, Branford-North Branford Probate Court; Hon. Matthew J. Jalowiec, Cheshire-Southington Probate Court; Hon. Barbara Gardner Riordan, Tolland-Mansfield Probate Court

2023 | MARCH

Judges Institute, 3/15

- *Annual Case Law Review*: Jeffrey A. Copper, Professor and former Associate Dean for Research & Faculty Development, Quinnipiac University School of Law; John Ivimey, Attorney, Reid and Riege, PC



Forensic accountant Stephen Pedneault in June 2022.

- *Enforcement of Probate Court Orders*: Hon. Fred J. Anthony, Shelton Probate Court; Hon. John J. McGrath Jr., Windham-Colchester Probate Court; Hon. Lisa K. Wexler, Westport Probate Court
- *Fastcase—Legal Research*: Alex Shaffer, Attorney and Legal Research and Analytics Trainer, Fastcase
- *Probate Research*: Jordan A. Jefferson, Professor and former

During FY22 and FY23,
87% of probate judges exceeded the 15 hours of continuing education that regulations require.

Associate Dean for Research & Faculty Development, Quinnipiac University School of Law; Evan Brunetti, Attorney, Office of the Probate Court Administrator

- *Quinnipiac University Probate Law Journal*: George J. Tzimirangas, Editor-in-Chief, Quinnipiac Probate Law Journal; Marjorie A. Richardson, former Editor-in-Chief, Quinnipiac Probate Law Journal
- *Don't Be "Socially" Unacceptable—Social Media Ethical Pitfalls for Probate Judges*: Hon. John G. Browning, retired Texas Fifth District Court of Appeals Justice and current Visiting Associate Professor, Faulkner University School of Law

2023 | JUNE

CT Probate Assembly, 6/21

- *Council on Probate Judicial Conduct*: Hon. Joseph P. Flynn, Judge Trial Referee and Chair, Council on Probate Judicial Conduct; Hon. Elisa H. Bartlett, Ellington Probate Court and Council of Probate Judicial Conduct; James A. Connelly, Council on Probate Judicial Conduct
- *Fee Waivers and Compensation Issues*: Evan C. Brunetti and Eric H. Rothausser, Attorneys, Office of the Probate Court Administrator
- *Long Term Care Ombudsman Program*: Mairead Painter, Long Term Care Ombudsman, Connecticut Department of Aging and Disability Services
- *Office of the Attorney General and the Public Charities Unit*: Gary Hawes, Caitlin Calder, Rebekah Burgio, and Cheryl Turner, Office of the Attorney General, Public Charities Unit
- *Court Security and Emergency Preparedness*: Hon. Domenick N. Calabrese, Region #22 Probate Court; Christopher Grillo, Sergeant, Southbury Police Department

Probate Judges Who Served in FY22, FY23

■ **Fred J. Anthony**
Shelton Probate Court
Waterbury Regional Children’s PC*

■ **David A. Baram** (Retired)
Tobacco Valley Probate Court

■ **Peter C. Barrett**
Madison-Guilford Probate Court

■ **Elisa H. Bartlett**
Ellington Probate Court

■ **Cynthia C. Becker** (Retired)
Simsbury Regional Probate Court

■ **Jennifer L. Berkenstock**
Region #14 Probate Court

■ **Patrick M. Birney**
Wallingford Probate Court

■ **Diane S. Blick** (Retired)
Litchfield Hills Probate Court

■ **Michael R. Brandt**
East Haven-North Haven Probate Court
New Haven Regional Children’s PC*

■ **Edward C. Burt, Jr.**
Hamden-Bethany Probate Court

■ **Domenick N. Calabrese**
Region #22 Probate Court

■ **Americo R. Carchia**
New Haven Probate Court

■ **Michael A. Carrier** (Retired)
Berlin Probate Court

■ **Ariana F. Ceneviva**
Meriden Probate Court

■ **Scott R. Chadwick** (Retired)
East Hartford Probate Court

■ **Evelyn M. Daly**
Farmington Regional Probate Court
Hartford Regional Children’s PC*



Judge Foye A. Smith and retired Judge Clifton E. Graves, Jr. at the Probate Assembly’s 2023 Annual Meeting.

■ **Michael M. Darby**
Greater Manchester Probate Court

■ **Joseph DaSilva, Jr.**
Danbury Probate Court

■ **Mark J. DeGennaro**
West Haven Probate Court

■ **Steven B. DeMoura**
Northern Fairfield County Probate Court

■ **Mary C. Deneen**
Greater Windsor Probate Court

■ **Owen P. Eagan**
West Hartford Probate Court

■ **Frank J. Forgione** (Retired)
Branford-North Branford Probate Court
New Haven Regional Children’s PC*

■ **Gerald M. Fox, III**
Stamford Probate Court

■ **Paul J. Ganim**
Bridgeport Probate Court

■ **Richard P. Gentile**
East Hartford Probate Court



Judge Gerald M. Fox and Judge Kathleen N. Maxham at the Probate Assembly’s June 2023 quarterly meeting.

■ **Ben Gettinger**
Milford-Orange Probate Court

■ **Clifton E. Graves, Jr.** (Retired)
New Haven Probate Court

■ **Mathew H. Greene**
New London Probate Court

■ **William A. Hamzy**
Bristol-Plymouth (formerly Region #19) Probate Court

- **David W. Hopper**
Greenwich Probate Court
- **Clifford P. Hoyle**
Derby Probate Court
- **Matthew J. Jalowiec**
Cheshire-Southington Probate Court
- **Gabrielle Labonte**
Northeast Probate Court
- **Martin F. Landgrebe**
Housatonic Probate Court
- **Marianne Lassman Fisher** (Retired)
Greater Windsor Probate Court
- **Elizabeth L. Leamon**
Southeast CT Regional Probate Court
- **Jeannine Lewis**
Saybrook Probate Court
- **Michael F. Magistrali** (Retired)
Torrington Area Probate Court
- **Peter E. Mariano** (Retired)
Naugatuck Probate Court
- **Joseph D. Marino**
Middletown Probate Court
Central CT Regional Children’s PC*
- **Daniel N. Mara**
Tobacco Valley Probate Court
- **Kathleen N. Maxham**
Fairfield Probate Court
- **Carolyn L. McCaffrey**
North Central CT Probate Court
- **John J. McGrath, Jr.**
Windham-Colchester Probate Court
Northeast Regional Children’s PC*
- **Jeffrey A. McNamara**
Niantic Regional Probate Court
New London Regional Children’s PC*

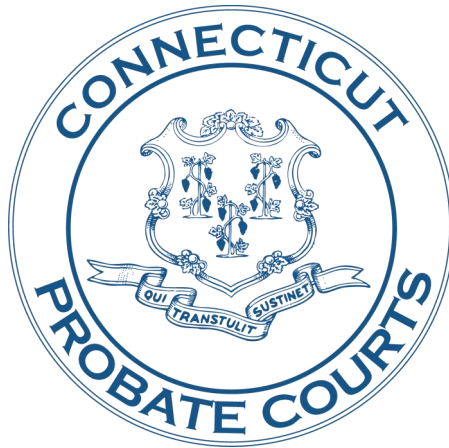
- **Charles K. Norris**
Norwich Probate Court
- **Daniel W. O’Grady** (Deceased)
Northern Fairfield County Probate Court
- **William P. Osterndorf**
Darien-New Canaan Probate Court
- **Sean Michael Peoples**
Glastonbury-Hebron Probate Court
- **Robert A. Randich**
Newington Probate Court
- **Rosa C. Rebimbas**
Naugatuck Probate Court
- **Jordan M. Richards**
Litchfield Hills Probate Court
- **Barbara Gardner Riordan**
Tolland-Mansfield Probate Court
- **William C. Rivera**
Berlin Probate Court
- **Max L. Rosenberg**
Stratford Probate Court
- **Carolanne Rowe**
Plainfield-Killingly Regional
Probate Court
- **T.R. Rowe**
Trumbull Probate Court
- **Leah Pollard Schad** (Retired)
Northeast Probate Court
- **David C. Shepard**
Simsbury Regional Probate Court
- **Foye A. Smith**
Hartford Probate Court
- **James P. Steck**
Torrington Area Probate Court



Judge Evelyn M. Daly, seated, and Judge Barbara Gardner Riordan, standing, at the Probate Assembly’s 2022 Annual Meeting.

- **Douglas N. Stern**
Norwalk-Wilton Probate Court
- **Charles E. Tiernan, III**
Branford-North Branford Probate Court
- **Matthew P. Vaccarelli**
Waterbury Probate Court
- **Lisa K. Wexler**
Westport Probate Court
- **Philip A. Wright, Jr.** (Retired)
Wallingford Probate Court
Central CT Regional Children’s PC*
- **Dianne E. Yamin** (Retired)
Danbury Probate Court

* Administrative Judge



Office of the Probate Court Administrator

186 Newington Road, West Hartford, CT 06110 ■ (860) 231-2442 ■ ctprobate.gov

Hon. Beverly K. Streit-Kefalas
Probate Court Administrator

Heather L. Dostaler
Chief Counsel

George Fernandes
Manager of Information Technology

Lisa L. Hansen
Director of Financial Services

Cynthia Wolfe Boynton
Manager of Communications
and Intergovernmental Relations

Amy L. Benjamin
Manager of Staff Training and Support

Jeannette Brodeur
Communications Assistant

Evan C. Brunetti
Attorney

Kia Bryan
Accountant I

Joanne Descoteaux
Accountant II

Michelle DiDonato
Administrative Services Coordinator I

Stephanie M. Duncan
Help Desk Analyst

Glendy Escarria
Administrative Clerk II

Willette Y. Frank
Administrative Clerk II

Evelyn Gonzalez
Executive Assistant

Melissa Gordon
Executive Legal Assistant

Tim Helmecki
IT Analyst I

Stephanie A. Janes
Program Manager for Mental Health
and Family Programs

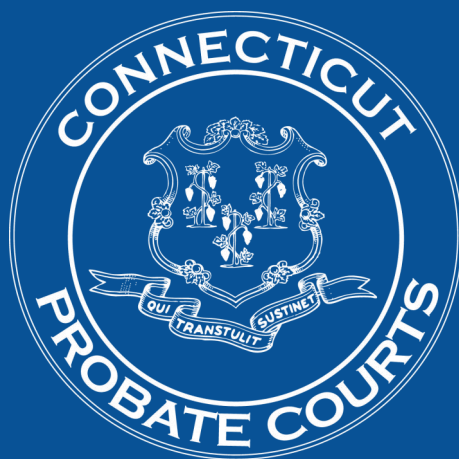
Magdalena Maslak
Administrative Clerk II

Dana M. Masullo
IT Analyst I

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