

A black and white photograph of a rugged coastline. In the foreground, there's a body of water with ripples. Two prominent, steep, rocky cliffs rise from the water's edge. The cliffs are covered with patches of snow or light-colored rock. Several evergreen trees are perched on the peaks and along the ridges of the cliffs. In the background, more cliffs and trees are visible, partially obscured by a mist or fog. The sky is a uniform, light gray.

*Profile of the
Alaska Court System
2025*

Alaska Court Locations, 2025



Profile of the Alaska Court System 2025



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The Alaska Court System

The government of the State of Alaska is divided into three separate but equal branches: the *executive*, the *legislative*, and the *judicial*. By providing for checks and balances, this division prevents the concentration of governmental power in one or another function. The federal government and the governments of most other states are also structured in this way.

Although the terms *judicial branch* and *court system* are often used interchangeably, in fact, the Alaska judicial branch contains three separate entities: the *Alaska Court System*, the *Alaska Judicial Council*, and the *Alaska Commission on Judicial Conduct*, each with a function established in the state constitution.

Alaska has a unified, centrally-administered court system, totally funded by the state. Municipal governments do not maintain separate court systems. There are four levels of courts in the Alaska Court System, each with different powers, duties, and responsibilities. The *Superior Court* and *District Court* are *trial courts*, which initially hear and decide court cases. The *Supreme Court* and *Court of Appeals* are *appellate courts*, which review and decide appeals from decisions made by the trial courts. Title 22 of the Alaska Statutes sets out the jurisdiction and responsibilities of each court.

The Supreme Court and the Superior Court were established in the state constitution. In 1959, the legislature created a District Court for each judicial district and granted power to the Supreme Court to increase or decrease the number of District Court judges. In 1980, the legislature created the Court of Appeals.

The Chief Justice of the Alaska Supreme Court is the administrative head of the Alaska Court System. An administrative director is appointed by the chief justice with concurrence of the Supreme Court. The director supervises the administration of all courts in the state.

The Supreme Court sets out the rules governing the administration of all courts and the rules of practice and procedure for civil and criminal cases.

What is a Court Case?

A court case is a dispute that goes to court. The court is asked to decide (1) what the facts are and (2) how the laws of Alaska apply to the facts. There are two main kinds of cases: civil cases and criminal cases.

Civil law deals with relationships between *individuals*. (A corporation is an “individual” under the law.) The word *suit* simply refers to a civil court case and *to sue* means to start a civil lawsuit. The State of Alaska, just like an individual, can bring a civil action. An example of a civil case is a suit resulting from an automobile accident. One person sues another person for damages to the car or for personal injury due to the accident. Other examples of civil cases are suits to collect money, suits for divorce, and suits to recover property.

Criminal law deals with cases brought by the federal, state, city, or borough government against a person who has done something against the interest of all people in the community. The government charges an individual with violating a criminal law and brings a court action to decide guilt and impose a punishment. Charging a person with a crime and bringing that person to trial is called a *prosecution*. The prosecution for all cases under criminal law must be brought in the name of the federal, state, city, or borough government, even though the case may be started by the complaint of a private person — called the *complainant*. Some examples of crimes are murder, assault, disorderly conduct, and driving under the influence.

An event or action can result in both criminal and civil cases. For example, a person who steals and wrecks a snowmachine could be prosecuted by the state for

the crime of theft and also sued for damages in a civil action by the owner. The criminal case might result in punishment through a fine or a term of imprisonment. The civil case might result in money being awarded to the owner as compensation for the loss of the machine.

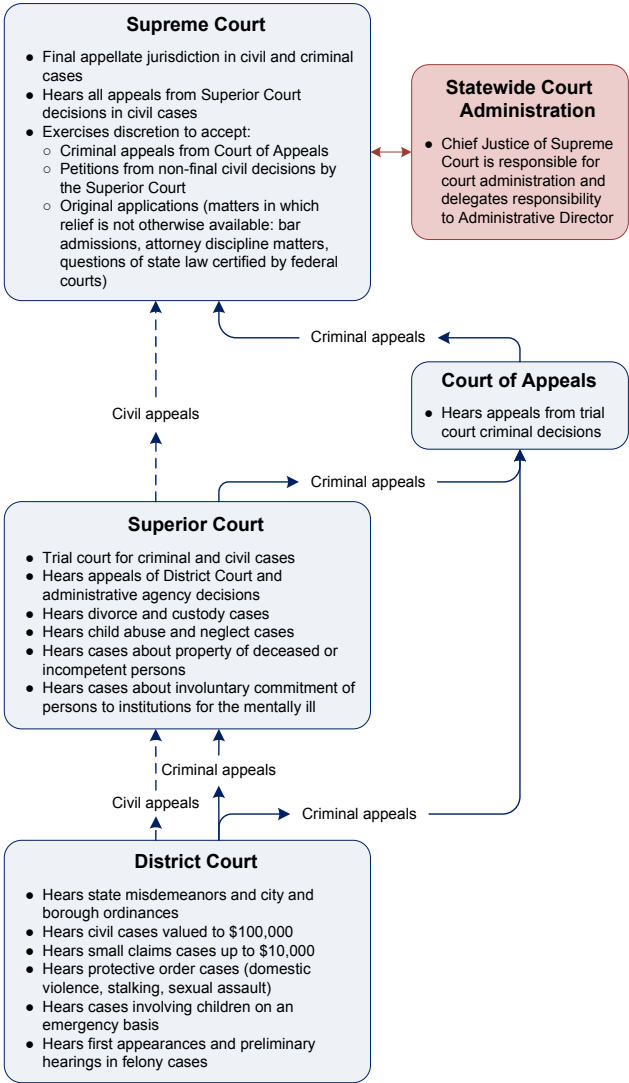
How are Judges Chosen?

The Alaska constitution provides for the selection of judges by merit; that is, judges are selected on the basis of their qualifications, rather than on their political or social connections. Alaska was one of the first states to adopt merit selection of judges. Today, over thirty other states select some or all of their judges in this way.

The Alaska Judicial Council, an independent citizens' commission, investigates and evaluates applicants for judicial positions for all courts except magistrate judge courts. The council sends the names of the most qualified applicants to the governor. The governor must make an appointment from this list. (Magistrate judges are selected according to a different process.)

After serving for a specified period of time, all justices and judges in Alaska must stand regularly for approval by voters on a non-partisan ballot in a general election. This is called retention. The Judicial Council evaluates the performance of judicial officers standing for retention election. The evaluation includes a survey of attorneys, peace and probation officers, court employees, and others regarding the conduct of individual judges. Prior to the election date, the council provides detailed information from this evaluation to the public and makes recommendations regarding the retention of individual judges.

Alaska Court System Structure



The Judiciary

Alaska Supreme Court

Chief Justice Susan M. Carney was appointed to the Alaska Supreme Court in May 2016. She was born and raised in Massachusetts and attended Harvard-Radcliffe College and Harvard Law School. After graduation from law school in 1987, she worked as a law clerk for Justice Jay Rabinowitz of the Alaska Supreme Court. At the end of her clerkship, then-Public Defender Dana Fabe hired her as an assistant public defender. Chief Justice Carney worked as an assistant



Chief Justice Susan M. Carney
Appointed 2016

public defender in Anchorage and then Fairbanks for ten years before moving to the Office of Public Advocacy. From 1998 until her appointment to the Supreme Court, she served as an assistant public advocate, based in Fairbanks and representing clients throughout the Interior and North Slope. Chief Justice Carney served on the Alaska Bar Association's Board of Governors from 2015–2016, and she was a member of the Supreme Court's Criminal Pattern Jury Instruction Committee 2006–2016. She currently chairs the Supreme Court's Child in Need of Aid Rules and the Fairness, Diversity, and Equality Committees. She serves as a presenter and mentor for the Color of Justice youth program and the We the People high school civics competition. She is married to Peter Braveman and has two grown children.

Justice Peter J. Maassen

was appointed to the Alaska Supreme Court in August 2012. He served as Chief Justice 2023–2025 and retired in January 2025. Born and raised in Michigan, Justice Maassen received a B.A. from Hope College in 1977 and a J.D. from the University of Michigan in 1980. While on the Supreme Court, he chaired committees involving issues of access to justice, court security, and judicial education. He is married to Kay Gouwens; they have a daughter, Lillian.



Justice Peter J. Maassen
Appointed 2012

Justice Dario Borghesan

was appointed to the Alaska Supreme Court in July 2020. He serves as co-chair of the Alaska Court System’s Access to Justice Committee and as chair of the Appellate Rules Committee. He began his legal career by working as a law clerk for Justice Daniel E. Winfree of the Alaska Supreme Court. He then joined the Alaska Department of Law where he worked first as a special assistant to Attorney General Daniel S. Sullivan, then as an assistant attorney general in the department’s Opinions, Appeals, and Ethics Section, and finally as the State’s Solicitor General. Justice Borghesan is married to Aesha Pallesen, and they have two young children.



Justice Dario Borghesan
Appointed 2020

Justice Jennifer S. Henderson was appointed to the Alaska Supreme Court in July 2021. She was born and raised in California and attended Claremont McKenna College and Yale Law School. After graduation from law school in 2001, she worked as a law clerk for Justice Warren Matthews of the Alaska Supreme Court and then for Judge Kim McLane Wardlaw of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. Upon her return to Alaska in 2003, Justice Henderson worked



Justice Jennifer S. Henderson
Appointed 2021

as an Assistant District Attorney in the Anchorage District Attorney's Office, until transitioning to private practice with Farley & Graves, P.C. in 2007. At Farley & Graves, Justice Henderson's practice consisted primarily of insurance defense, maritime, and education-related work. Justice Henderson was subsequently appointed to the Anchorage District Court in November 2012 and to the Anchorage Superior Court in May 2017. While serving on those trial courts, Justice Henderson participated as a presiding judge with the Anchorage Coordinated Resources Project, also known as the Mental Health Court, and presided over the Anchorage Centralized Competency Calendar from 2018 through 2021. Justice Henderson also worked as a training judge for magistrate judges during her service on the Superior Court. She currently participates as a member of the Alaska Bar Association's Pro Bono Committee and CLE Committee, and she co-chairs the Alaska Court System's Access to Justice Committee, and chairs the Civil Rules Committee, the Judicial Conference Planning Committee, the Working Group on Time Standards and Case Flow Management, and the Behavioral Health Task Force. She is married to Robert Henderson and has two young children.

Justice Jude Pate was born to Rupert and Suzanne Pate in Nuremberg, Germany where his family was stationed with the U.S. Army. His childhood years were spent primarily in Kansas, and he attended high school in the Netherlands. He earned a journalism degree from the University of Kansas and attended law school at Lewis & Clark Northwestern School of Law in Portland, Oregon. Justice Pate came to Alaska in 1993 and clerked for the Chief Judge of the Sitka Tribal Court, William Brady. He then served as legal counsel for the Sitka Tribe of Alaska, operated a private law practice, and was an assistant public defender. He was appointed to the Sitka Superior Court in 2018 by Governor Bill Walker. Governor Mike Dunleavy appointed him to the Alaska Supreme Court in 2023. He currently serves on the committees for Fairness, Diversity & Equality, Newer Judges Conference Planning, and Workplace Conduct. Justice Pate is married to Christine Pate and has two grown children.



Justice Jude Pate
Appointed 2023

Justice Aimee Oravec

was appointed to the Alaska Supreme Court in November 2024. She obtained an Associate of Art from the College of Eastern Utah and a Bachelor of History with a minor in French from Southern Utah University. She attended both institutions on speech and debate scholarships and was named to the Cross Examination Debate Association All American Debate Team. She earned her law degree from Washington University in St.



Justice Aimee Oravec
Appointed 2024

Louis, receiving Order of the Barristers at graduation. Justice Oravec and her husband relocated to Fort Wainwright in 1999. She initially worked in private practice with Winfree Law Office in Fairbanks, then relocated to Fort Richardson, where she worked as a solo practitioner and Of Counsel. Upon returning to Fairbanks, she and her husband had a small firm, where her practice areas included civil litigation and appeals, employment law, utility regulation, and business law services. For the eight years before joining the Supreme Court, she worked as General Counsel for Doyon Utilities. Justice Oravec has been an active volunteer in the legal community. She previously served as President of the Tanana Valley Bar Association, on the Alaska Judicial Council, and as a member of the Board of Governors of the Alaska Bar Association. She also is a past Board Chair for the United Way of Tanana Valley and past team manager for youth sports. She and her husband have two grown children.

Court of Appeals



Chief Judge Marjorie K. Allard
Appointed 2012



Judge Tracey Wollenberg
Appointed 2017



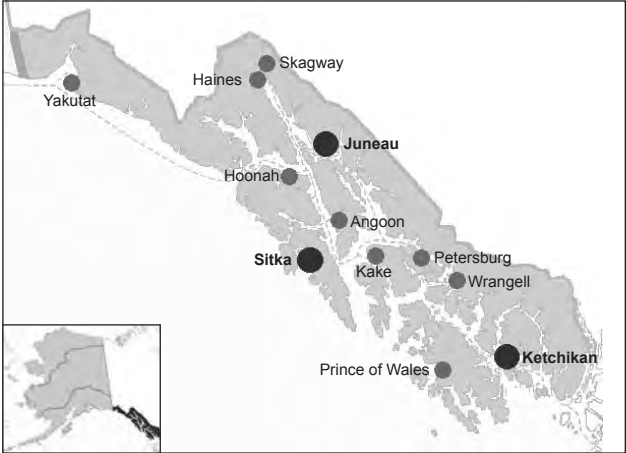
Judge Bethany Harbison
Appointed 2018



Judge Timothy W. Terrell
Appointed 2020

Trial Courts

First Judicial District



Superior Court, First Judicial District



**Presiding Judge
Amy G. Mead**
Juneau Superior Court
Appointed 2018



Judge Amanda L. Browning
Sitka Superior Court
Appointed 2024

*Superior Court, First Judicial District
(continued)*



Judge Marianna Carpeneti
Juneau Superior Court
Appointed 2021



Judge Daniel E. Doty
Ketchikan Superior Court
Appointed 2022



Judge Katherine H. Lybrand
Ketchikan Superior Court
Appointed 2022



Judge Larry R. Woolford
Juneau Superior Court
Appointed 2024

District Court, First Judicial District



Judge Kristian B. Pickrell
Ketchikan District Court
Appointed 2022



Judge Kirsten L. Swanson
Juneau District Court
Appointed 2016

Magistrate Judges, First Judicial District



**Magistrate Judge
Paul Korchin**
Haines / Yakutat / Hoonah / Skagway
Appointed 2021



**Magistrate Judge
Peggy McCoy**
Juneau
Appointed 2023

*Magistrate Judges, First Judicial District
(continued)*



**Magistrate Judge
Rachel Newport**
Petersburg / Wrangell / Kake
Appointed 2020



**Magistrate Judge
Kimberly Rice**
Prince of Wales
Appointed 2022



**Magistrate Judge
Amanda Schulz**
Ketchikan
Appointed 2010



**Magistrate Judge
Pamela Stahla-Kernin**
Sitka / Angoon
Appointed 2020

Second Judicial District



Superior Court, Second Judicial District



**Presiding Judge
Judge Paul A. Roetman**
Kotzebue Superior Court
Appointed 2010



Judge Romano D. DiBenedetto
Nome Superior Court
Appointed 2017

*Superior Court, Second Judicial District
(continued)*



Judge David Roghair
Utqiagvik Superior Court
Appointed 2021

Magistrate Judges, Second Judicial District



**Magistrate Judge
Colleen Baxter**
Kotzebue
Appointed 2022



**Magistrate Judge
Nicholas Defreitas**
Utqiagvik
Appointed 2023



**Magistrate Judge
Heidi Ivanoff**
Unalakleet
Appointed 1998



**Magistrate Judge
Pamela Smith**
Nome
Appointed 2019

Third Judicial District



Superior Court, Third Judicial District



**Presiding Judge
Thomas A. Matthews**
Anchorage Superior Court
Appointed 2018



Judge Rachel Ahrens
Valdez Superior Court
Appointed 2019

*Superior Court, Third Judicial District
(continued)*



Judge John C. Cagle
Palmer Superior Court
Appointed 2019



Judge Dani Crosby
Anchorage Superior Court
Appointed 2015



Judge Catherine M. Easter
Anchorage Superior Court
Appointed 2012



Judge Una S. Gandbhir
Anchorage Superior Court
Appointed 2018

*Superior Court, Third Judicial District
(continued)*



Judge Josie Garton
Anchorage Superior Court
Appointed 2018



Judge Jason Gist
Kenai Superior Court
Appointed 2018



Judge Andrew Guidi
Anchorage Superior Court
Appointed 2010



Judge Laura Hartz
Anchorage Superior Court
Appointed 2023

*Superior Court, Third Judicial District
(continued)*



Judge Tom V. Jamgochian
Palmer Superior Court
Appointed 2024



Judge Lance E. Joanis
Kenai Superior Court
Appointed 2018



Judge Yvonne Lamoureux
Anchorage Superior Court
Appointed 2017



Judge Kelly J. Lawson
Kenai Superior Court
Appointed 2023

*Superior Court, Third Judicial District
(continued)*



Judge Jack R. McKenna
Anchorage Superior Court
Appointed 2021



Judge David A. Nesbett
Anchorage Superior Court
Appointed 2023



Judge Andrew Peterson
Anchorage Superior Court
Appointed 2018



Judge Peter Ramgren
Anchorage Superior Court
Appointed 2019

*Superior Court, Third Judicial District
(continued)*



Judge Christina Rankin
Anchorage Superior Court
Appointed 2023



Judge Christina Reigh
Dillingham Superior Court
Appointed 2017



Judge Kevin M. Saxby
Anchorage Superior Court
Appointed 2012



Judge Bride Seifert
Homer Superior Court
Appointed 2019

*Superior Court, Third Judicial District
(continued)*



Judge Kristen C. Stohler
Palmer Superior Court
Appointed 2019



Judge Herman G. Walker
Anchorage Superior Court
Appointed 2015



Judge Stephen B. Wallace
Kodiak Superior Court
Appointed 2019



Judge Ian Wheelles
Anchorage Superior Court
Appointed 2022

*Superior Court, Third Judicial District
(continued)*



Judge Jonathan A. Woodman
Palmer Superior Court
Appointed 2016



Judge Adolf Zeman
Anchorage Superior Court
Appointed 2020

District Court, Third Judicial District



Judge Jo-Ann M. Chung
Anchorage District Court
Appointed 2011



Judge Brian K. Clark
Anchorage District Court
Appointed 2003



Judge J. Christopher Darnall
Anchorage District Court
Appointed 2024



Judge Leslie Dickinson
Anchorage District Court
Appointed 2012

*District Court, Third Judicial District
(continued)*



Judge Martin C. Fallon
Kenai District Court
Appointed 2019



Judge Michael J. Franciosi
Anchorage District Court
Appointed 2017



Judge J. Patrick Hanley
Anchorage District Court
Appointed 2005



Judge Michael B. Logue
Anchorage District Court
Appointed 2018

*District Court, Third Judicial District
(continued)*



Judge Kari McCrea
Anchorage District Court
Appointed 2017



Judge Shawn Traini
Palmer District Court
Appointed 2019

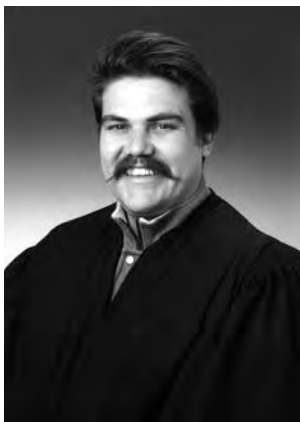


Judge David R. Wallace
Anchorage District Court
Appointed 2009



Judge Pamela S. Washington
Anchorage District Court
Appointed 2010

Magistrate Judges, Third Judicial District



**Magistrate Judge
Judson Adams**
Glennallen / Valdez
Appointed 2018



**Magistrate Judge
Michael Aiello**
Dillingham / Naknek / Unalaska
Appointed 2019



**Magistrate Judge
Marika Athens**
Anchorage
Appointed 2021



**Magistrate Judge
David Bauer**
Anchorage
Appointed 2011

*Magistrate Judges, Third Judicial District
(continued)*



**Magistrate Judge
Sidney Billingslea**
Anchorage
Appointed 2013



**Magistrate Judge
Katherine Chung**
Anchorage
Appointed 2021



**Magistrate Judge
Monica Elkinton**
Anchorage
Appointed 2023



**Magistrate Judge
Michelle Higuchi**
Kenai
Appointed 2021

*Magistrate Judges, Third Judicial District
(continued)*



**Magistrate Judge
Lorren Hildebrandt**
Anchorage
Appointed 2023



**Magistrate Judge
Derek Koehler**
Palmer
Appointed 2023



**Magistrate Judge
Elisia Kupris**
Anchorage
Appointed 2023



**Magistrate Judge
Jennifer Manculich**
Anchorage
Appointed 2018

*Magistrate Judges, Third Judicial District
(continued)*



**Magistrate Judge
Heather O'Brien**
Anchorage
Appointed 2018



**Magistrate Judge
Robert Polley**
Anchorage
Appointed 2017



**Magistrate Judge
Michael Smith**
Anchorage
Appointed 2015



**Magistrate Judge
Hannah Steketee**
Palmer
Appointed 2023

*Magistrate Judges, Third Judicial District
(continued)*



**Magistrate Judge
Jonathan Stinson**
Anchorage
Appointed 2023



**Magistrate Judge
Jenna Kulbersh Strohmeier**
Palmer
Appointed 2023

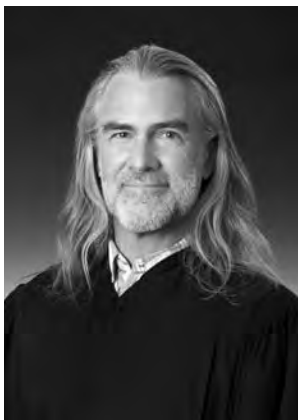


**Magistrate Judge
Kimberley Sweet**
Kenai
Appointed 2018



**Magistrate Judge
Christina Teaford**
Seward
Appointed 2008

*Magistrate Judges, Third Judicial District
(continued)*



**Magistrate Judge
Dawson Williams**
Kodiak
Appointed 2007

Fourth Judicial District



Superior Court, Fourth Judicial District



**Presiding Judge
Brent E. Bennett**
Fairbanks Superior Court
Appointed 2019



Judge Patricia L. Haines
Fairbanks Superior Court
Appointed 2021

*Superior Court, Fourth Judicial District
(continued)*



Judge William T. Montgomery
Bethel Superior Court
Appointed 2024



Judge Nathaniel Peters
Bethel Superior Court
Appointed 2017



Judge Earl A. Peterson
Fairbanks Superior Court
Appointed 2019



Judge Kirk Schwalm
Fairbanks Superior Court
Appointed 2022

*Superior Court, Fourth Judicial District
(continued)*



Judge Thomas I. Temple
Fairbanks Superior Court
Appointed 2018



Judge Amy K. Welch
Fairbanks Superior Court
Appointed 2023

District Court, Fourth Judicial District



Judge Maria Bahr
Fairbanks District Court
Appointed 2021



Judge Matthew Christian
Fairbanks District Court
Appointed 2013



Judge Benjamin A. Seekins
Fairbanks District Court
Appointed 2012

Magistrate Judges, Fourth Judicial District



**Magistrate Judge
Natalie Alexie**
Bethel
Appointed 2023



**Magistrate Judge
Raechyl Huisingh**
Nenana / Galena / Fort Yukon
Appointed 2023



**Magistrate Judge
Darlene Johnson-Edwards**
Emmonak
Appointed 2000



**Magistrate Judge
Risa C. Leonard**
Fairbanks
Appointed 2021

*Magistrate Judges, Fourth Judicial District
(continued)*



**Magistrate Judge
Andrew Ramsey**
Aniak / Hooper Bay
Appointed 2024



**Magistrate Judge
Spenser J. Ruppert**
Fairbanks
Appointed 2021



**Magistrate Judge
Yvette Young**
Delta Junction / Tok
Appointed 2018

Active Pro Tem Judges

Eric A. Aarseth

Gregory A. Miller

Joel H. Bolger

Anna M. Moran

William B. Carey

William F. Morse

Robert L. Eastaugh

Nancy J. Nolan

Dana A. Fabe

Philip M. Pallenberg

Natalie K. Finn

Eric B. Smith

Gregory L. Heath

Michael R. Spaan

Michael A. MacDonald

Trevor N. Stephens

David Mannheimer

Nelson Traverso

Warren W. Matthews

Daniel E. Winfree

Michael P. McConahy

Michael L. Wolverton

Patrick J. McKay

Mark I. Wood

Glossary of Common Terms Used in Court

Affidavit — A written statement that is signed under the penalty of perjury and sworn to before a person who is officially permitted by law to administer an oath.

Appeal — a legal proceeding by which a case is brought before a higher court to review the decision of a lower court or administrative agency to determine if any mistakes of law happened and if the mistakes are significant enough to reverse or send the decision back to the lower court for further consideration.

Bail — Guarantee of money necessary to release a person under arrest from jail or prison until a trial is held.

Civil case — A legal case involving disputes between people or organizations using civil law. These cases may involve one party who wants to: get property back, force someone to complete a contract, end a marriage, get child custody, get money for damage done to their property or for an injury, protect their civil rights, among other issues. It does not involve the government charging someone with a crime; that is called a criminal case.

Child in need of aid (CINA) — A person under 18 years of age whom the court finds needs the help of the State of Alaska because the child is not receiving proper care or is in an unsafe situation.

Criminal case — A case dealing with a violation of Alaska's criminal laws.

Custody — The rights and responsibilities between parents for their children. There are two aspects of custody: Legal custody covers the right and obligation to make major life decisions such as where the child goes to school, which doctors he or she sees, and how money relating to the child is handled; and physical custody refers to the right to have the children actually live with a parent.

Decree — A court decision, usually at the end of a case when all issues are decided.

Defendant — In a civil case, the person or company being sued. In a criminal or traffic case, the person accused of the crime.

Domestic relations — A civil case type that includes divorce, child custody, child support, legal separation, and paternity cases.

FED (forcible entry and detainer) — Ordinarily refers to a summary proceeding for restoring possession of land to one who has been wrongfully deprived of possession. Commonly called an eviction.

Felony — A serious crime that can be punished by more than one year in prison.

Hearing — A court proceeding at which *parties*, and perhaps *witnesses*, come to the court to speak. A hearing is different from a *trial* in a number of ways, including that it is typically shorter and sometimes less formal than a trial and usually deals with fewer issues.

Judgment — A final ruling in a *civil* or *criminal* case that can be appealed to the *appellate* courts. A judgment resolves the key questions in a lawsuit and determines the rights and obligations of the opposing parties.

Jurisdiction — The area and types of cases which a court has authority to hear and to decide.

Misdemeanor — A minor crime punishable by a fine or short-term imprisonment.

Motion — The name of the paper you must file to ask a judge to make a ruling or take some other action. A motion is the first step in the three-step process called *motion practice*, which is controlled by Civil Rule 77.

Order — A command or direction given by a judge orally or in writing.

Parole — Supervised release of a prisoner that allows the person to serve the rest of the sentence out of prison if all conditions of release are met.

Petition to revoke probation (PTRP) — Petition to the court asking that an offender be returned to prison due to a

violation of the conditions of probation.

Petitioner — The person who starts the type of case that begins with a petition rather than a complaint. The terms *petitioner* and *respondent* are used in domestic violence cases and in dissolutions.

Plaintiff — A person who brings a civil suit in a court of law.

Post-conviction relief (PCR) — A procedure by which a convicted defendant challenges the conviction and/or sentence on the basis of some alleged violation or error.

Probate — The judicial process to determine if a will of a dead person is genuine or not; lawful distribution of a decedent's estate.

Probation — A sentencing alternative to imprisonment in which the court releases a convicted defendant under supervision of a probation officer who makes certain that the defendant follows certain rules — for example, getting a job or getting drug counseling.

Prosecutor — Lawyer who asserts the interests and rights of the people of the state or a city against the defendant in a criminal trial.

Respondent — The person who responds to the *petitioner*. If you did not file the petition initiating a court case, and you are named in the case, you are the *respondent*. The terms *petitioner* and *respondent* are used in domestic violence cases and in dissolutions.

Small claims — A court that handles civil claims for \$10,000 or less. People often represent themselves rather than hire an attorney in small claims disputes.

Trial — Formal court proceeding at which evidence is heard and the case is decided.



Office of the Administrative Director
Alaska Court System
303 K Street
Anchorage, Alaska 99501
(907) 264-0548