

MONTANA SUPREME COURT PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, May 14, 1:00 p.m.

Joseph P. Mazurek Justice Building
Supreme Court Courtroom, 4th floor
215 North Sanders, Helena, Montana

Chief Justice McGrath called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. In attendance were Chief Justice McGrath, Justices Baker, McKinnon, Shea, and Rice. Justices Sandefur and Gustafson attended via Zoom. Also present were Bowen Greenwood, Clerk of the Montana Supreme Court; Beth McLaughlin, Court Administrator; Rob Bird, Judicial Branch Human Resources Director; Cathy Pennie, Judicial Branch Financial Services Director; Kevin Cook, Electronic Services Coordinator; Jeanine Blaner, Supreme Court Staff Attorney; and Jackson Maynard and Gina Antonioli, Law Clerks of the Montana Supreme Court.

Item 1: Approval of Minutes from February 20, 2024, Public Meeting

- The Justices unanimously approved the minutes from the last public meeting.

Item 2: Budget Proposals

- Chief Justice McGrath introduced the matter and turned the discussion over to Court Administrator Beth McLaughlin.
- McLaughlin discussed a proposed pay increase for Judicial Branch employees.
 - McLaughlin and Financial Services Director Cathy Pennie explained the logistics of the pay increase, the source of the funds, and the importance of enacting the increase immediately.
 - Justice Baker moved to accept the recommendation of the Court Administrator, Justice Rice seconded the motion, and the Justices unanimously approved pay increases of \$3/hour for those employed by the Judicial Branch as of May 3, 2024, and \$2/hour for new employees.
- McLaughlin next discussed the Judicial Branch budget proposals for the 2027 biennium, each of which has been approved by either the District Court Council or the Commission on Technology, as appropriate. The proposals include:
 - The addition of three judges to the Thirteenth Judicial District Court, and associated staff;
 - McLaughlin noted the district needs as many as five additional judges to manage the caseload.
 - Contracted services support to the Judicial Standards Commission;

- Creating an additional law clerk position for the Fourth Judicial District Court, which shows a need for two additional judges;
 - Continuation of funding for the family law mediation program to continue the program after ARPA funds expire in December 2026;
 - Funding the Water Court Case Files Digitization Project;
 - Rent increases for two buildings rented by the Judicial Branch;
 - Moving drug court funding for eight courts from opioid settlement dollars to the general fund;
 - Increasing spending authority for drug court fines and fees;
 - The pretrial release program;
 - Maintenance contract increases for software vendors including FullCourt, C-Track, and e-filing;
 - Purchasing a new jury management system;
 - Replacing the current e-filing system.
- Justice Baker moved for approval of the proposals, Justice McKinnon seconded the motion, and the Justices unanimously approved the budget proposals.

Item 3: FY 2025 Drug Court Funding Distributions

- Chief Justice McGrath introduced the matter and passed the discussion to McLaughlin.
- McLaughlin explained the changes to the allocation and expenditures of funds appropriated by the Legislature.
- The Justices unanimously approved the FY 2025 Drug Court Funding Distributions.

Item 4: AF 07-300 Appointment to the Board of Bar Examiners

- Chief Justice McGrath noted Board member Jacqueline Lenmark is resigning from her position on the Board and thanked her for her service.
- Chief Justice McGrath noted the recommendation of the Board that Michael Green be appointed to Lenmark's seat on the Board.
- Justice McKinnon moved to approve the appointment, Justice Shea seconded the motion, and the Justices unanimously approved the appointment of Michael Green to the Board of Bar Examiners.

Item 5: AF 06-0112 Appointment to the Criminal Jury Instructions Commission

- Chief Justice McGrath introduced the matter, noting the expiration of Commission member Ann DeWolf's term, as well as DeWolf's willingness to be reappointed.
- Justice McKinnon moved to reappoint DeWolf, Justice Shea seconded the motion, and the Justices unanimously approved the reappointment of Ann DeWolf to the Commission.

Item 6: AF 13-0276 Appointment to the Commission on Character and Fitness

- Chief Justice McGrath introduced the matter and turned the discussion over to Justice Baker.
- Justice Baker noted the resignation of Commission member Michael Tolstedt.
- Justice Baker recommended the appointment of Evan Thompson to fill the seat vacated by Tolstedt.
- Justice Baker moved for the appointment, Justice Shea seconded the motion, and the Justices unanimously approved the appointment of Evan Thompson to the Commission on Character and Fitness.

Public Comment:

- None.

Chief Justice McGrath adjourned the meeting at 1:30 p.m.

Submitted by: Jackson Maynard