

20 YEARS  
ANNIVERSARY  
SUPREME COURT



50 YEARS  
ANNIVERSARY  
SUPERIOR COURT



2025  
*Annual Report*  
OF THE U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS JUDICIARY & COURT SYSTEM



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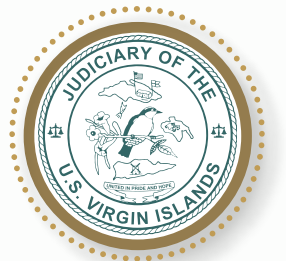


50 YEARS  
ANNIVERSARY  
SUPERIOR COURT

As we approach the 20th anniversary of the Virgin Islands Supreme Court, the 50th anniversary of the Superior Court and the 70th anniversary of the Virgin Islands Bar Association, the Judicial Branch will examine the feasibility of establishing a formal historical society for the Judicial Branch of the Virgin Islands.

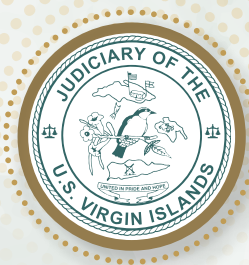
Regarding the rich history of our court system, with immense pride I awarded the 2024 Chief Justice Distinguished Service Award to Presiding Judge Emeritus Verne Hodge Sr. at the Judicial Conference. The honor was bestowed in recognition of his decades long contributions to the legal profession and the Judicial Branch.

**HON. RHYS S. HODGE, CHIEF JUSTICE**  
2024 Annual Report of the U.S. Virgin Islands Judiciary & Court System



2025  
*Annual Report*  
OF THE U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS JUDICIARY & COURT SYSTEM





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**THE JUDICIARY**  
**SUPREME COURT OF THE U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS**  
FIVE JUSTICES

|                                                 |                                                   |                                              |
|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| Hon. Maria M. Cabret<br>ASSOCIATE JUSTICE       | Hon. Rhys S. Hodge<br>CHIEF JUSTICE               | Hon. Ive Arlington Swan<br>ASSOCIATE JUSTICE |
| Hon. Harold W. L. Willocks<br>ASSOCIATE JUSTICE | Dalila Patton, Esq.<br>CLERK OF THE SUPREME COURT | Hon. Denise M. Francois<br>ASSOCIATE JUSTICE |

**SUPERIOR COURT OF THE U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS**  
TEN JUDGES

| DISTRICT OF ST. CROIX                    | DISTRICT OF ST. THOMAS AND ST. JOHN |
|------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Hon. Jessica Gallivan<br>PRESIDING JUDGE | Hon. Sigrid Tejo<br>JUDGE           |
| Hon. Alphonso J. Andrews<br>JUDGE        | Hon. Carol Thomas-Jacobs<br>JUDGE   |
| Hon. Yvette Ross-Edwards<br>JUDGE        | Hon. Melanie J. Turnbull<br>JUDGE   |
| Hon. Ernest E. Morris<br>JUDGE           | Hon. Pedro K. Williams<br>JUDGE     |
| Hon. Venetia H. Velazquez<br>JUDGE       | Hon. Renee M. Andre<br>JUDGE        |

**MAGISTRATE DIVISION**  
OF THE SUPERIOR COURT OF THE U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS  
FOUR MAGISTRATE JUDGES

|                                                 |                                                    |
|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| Hon. Yolan Brow Ross<br>MAGISTRATE JUDGE        | Hon. Simone Vanholten Turnbull<br>MAGISTRATE JUDGE |
| Hon. Christopher M. Timmons<br>MAGISTRATE JUDGE | Hon. Julie S. Todman<br>MAGISTRATE JUDGE           |
| Tamara Charles<br>CLERK OF THE SUPERIOR COURT   |                                                    |

**JUDICIAL BRANCH ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE**

|                                            |                                                      |
|--------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| Regina Petersen<br>ADMINISTRATOR OF COURTS | Miguel Tricoche<br>ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR OF COURTS |
|--------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|





## State of the Judiciary

This State of the Judiciary and accompanying Annual Report mark the close of a great chapter in the history of the Judicial Branch of the Virgin Islands. Nearly 20 years ago on October 27, 2006, the Legislature confirmed my colleagues Maria M. Cabret and Ive Arlington Swan and I as the first three Justices of the Supreme Court of the Virgin Islands. That was itself the culmination of decades of hard work to establish a Virgin Islands Supreme Court, consisting of Virgin Islands judges nominated by a locally-elected Virgin Islands Governor and confirmed by a locally-elected Virgin Islands Legislature, to serve as the court of last resort for the people of the Territory. This year marks the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the Supreme Court of the Virgin Islands.

Our swearing-in as Justices on December 18, 2006, ushered the Virgin Islands into a new era: one where the Judicial Branch functions as a

true co-equal branch of our government. The task before us was not simply to hear appeals and issue opinions: the first three Justices were tasked with building the Supreme Court both literally and figuratively. In addition to acquiring and constructing suitable facilities in both judicial districts, my colleagues and I had to build the court's procedures, traditions, and practices; set expectations; hire initial staff; and perhaps most important of all, develop the trust of the people of the Virgin Islands.

We were not given a handbook to guide us in this immense task. While we learned some lessons from other state high courts and our sister territory of Guam, and drew on the expertise of the National Center for State Courts and other consultants, the Justices and our initial staff had to figure things out as we went along. Over the years we have had to adapt to many unforeseen developments such as changes to the law, chronic funding gaps, natural disasters, and even direct attacks on the Supreme Court's authority. I do not think anyone, including me, expected the first three Justices to continuously serve together for even our initial 10-year terms, let alone 20 years. But, to the benefit of the court and territory, we did so proudly, faithfully, impartially and with fidelity.

In this, my final State of the Judiciary as Chief Justice of the Virgin Islands, I cannot find the words to describe how proud I am of the institution that has emerged from that work. The record of the past two decades demonstrates that the founding mandate has been fulfilled: the Virgin Islands now has a Supreme Court capable of serving the people of this Territory long after its first three Justices have left office. I emphasize that success of the past two decades does not belong to the first three Justices alone. The Supreme Court could not have become the mature institution it is today without the administrative personnel, court clerks, law clerks, marshals, information technology professionals, and many other employees who faithfully carry out the daily work of the Judicial Branch. Nor could it have done so without the support of the judges and magistrate judges of the Superior Court, the members of the Virgin

Islands Bar, and the elected officials and other public servants who worked with the Judicial Branch over the years. Our Supreme Court owes its success to the collective work of all who worked tirelessly to ensure that it not only achieved excellence in adjudicating appeals, but administered justice with fairness, dignity, and respect. In fact, after just five years of existence, the Third Circuit Review Committee concluded that the Supreme Court of the Virgin Islands: (1) had substantially decreased the time required for appellate review; (2) had produced a very substantial body of high-quality helpful case law; (3) heightened expectations, and by so doing, had raised the performance level of all participants in the judicial process; and most importantly "developed sufficient institutional traditions to justify direct review by the Supreme Court of United States." The Report further recommended to the relevant committees of the United States House of Representatives and Senate the elimination of further quinquennial reviews by the Judicial Council of the Third Circuit. Congress heeded that advice and enacted Public Law 112-226, which was signed into law by President Obama on December 28, 2012, providing for direct review by the United States Supreme Court of decisions of the Supreme Court of the Virgin Islands.

I would like to take this opportunity to especially highlight the contributions of those without whom the Supreme Court would not even exist today, or at least not in its current form. On behalf of the Judicial Branch, I thank the 25th Legislature, which unanimously voted to pass Bill No. 25-0213, sponsored by then-Senator Carlton "Ital" Dowe, to establish the Supreme Court. That bill was signed into law by the late Governor Charles W. Turnbull as Act No. 6687, who later nominated Justice Cabret, Justice Swan, and I, as the inaugural three Justices. Governor Turnbull had long championed the establishment of a Virgin Islands Supreme Court and other matters of territorial autonomy, not just during his tenure as Governor but as a delegate to five Constitutional Conventions. We all owe him a tremendous debt of gratitude for his perseverance over decades. I thank Presiding Judge Emeritus Verne A. Hodge, who

staunchly advocated for a locally-staffed Virgin Islands Supreme Court in his famous debates with Third Circuit Court of Appeals Judge Albert Maris, in the V.I. Bar Journal on the proper make-up of an appellate court. I also thank former Delegate to Congress Donna M. Christensen, who shepherded H.R. 6116 through the 112th Congress, which became Public Law 112-226 when signed into law by President Barack Obama on December 28, 2012. Public Law 112-226 amended the Revised Organic Act of 1954 to provide for the Virgin Islands Supreme Court to share the same relationship with the Supreme Court of the United States as the courts of the fifty states, formally divesting any lower federal court of jurisdiction to review our decisions. We likewise thank the 31st Legislature for passing Bill No. 31-0255, co-sponsored by Senator Kenneth L. Gittens and Senator Nereida "Nellie" O'Reilly, to administratively unify the courts of the U.S. Virgin Islands and expand the size of the Supreme Court from three justices to up to five justices, and former Governor Kenneth Mapp for not only signing it into law as Act No. 7888, but also for renominating the three justices for a second ten-year term.

The work of creation has now become the work of stewardship, continuity, and renewal. Our newest colleagues, Justice Harold W.L. Willocks and Justice Denise M. Francois, and those who will join them in the months and years ahead, inherit a mature institution. The Supreme Court of the Virgin Islands is no longer a new court that needs to prove itself capable of functioning as a court of last resort, and the Judicial Branch is no longer a collection of courts operating in their own silos—it is an administratively unified branch capable of speaking with one voice.

2026 also marks the 50th anniversary of the Superior Court of the Virgin Islands. In 1976, pursuant to Act No. 3876, the Municipal Court of the Virgin Islands was renamed the Territorial Court of the Virgin Islands, which in 1991 gained original jurisdiction over all civil actions under 4 V.I.C. § 76(a) and expanded jurisdiction over criminal matters under Act 5890 in 1994. In 2004, Act No. 6687 renamed the Territorial Court the Superior Court of the Virgin Islands, and



established the Supreme Court. However, prior to the creation of the Supreme Court, the highest local court in the Territory was the Superior Court. It is where the foundational jurisprudence of the local Judiciary evolved, mostly under the guidance and leadership of the Honorable Verne A. Hodge, the trailblazer of Presiding Judges and rightfully Presiding Judge Emeritus of the Superior Court of the Virgin Islands. On October 22, 2024, Bill No. 35-0286, sponsored by Senator Kenneth L. Gittens, was unanimously passed by the 35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands, commending Judge Verne Antonio Hodge for his years of dedicated service to the people of the Virgin Islands and its jurisprudence, by naming the Superior Court courthouse in the District of St. Thomas and St. John, the “Judge Verne A. Hodge Superior Courthouse.” It is indeed symbolic that a ceremony befitting such an honor, and the erection of proper signage for current and future generations to witness would open Fiscal Year 2026 and usher in the 50th anniversary of the Superior Court of the Virgin Islands.

As the Judiciary welcomes the next generation of Judges to the Superior Court and Justices to the Supreme Court, the State of the Judiciary is transitioning and evolving, and those who take on the mantle of leadership will face an important mandate. They must work to preserve what has been built, complete what remains unfinished, and ensure that the Judicial Branch continues to meet the needs of the people it exists to serve. The courts of the Virgin Islands must examine their own performance; measure whether justice is being delivered fairly and efficiently; and do what must be done to retain the trust and confidence of the public. They must do so while facing the same external pressures as courts throughout the United States, such as diminished and often reduced funding; the need for timely disposition of cases; challenges to judicial independence; difficulty in recruiting and retaining qualified personnel; addressing expectations created by modern technology; and of course, addressing the access to justice gap.

The Judicial Branch has already risen to the occasion to address many of these issues. While the Justices who sit on the Supreme Court this time next year may not be the same Justices who have sat for the last 20 years, the initiatives described below are not our personal commitments, but institutional priorities of our mature Judicial Branch. Some began years ago, but all will require sustained attention in the years ahead. Those who will lead and serve the courts in the years ahead will carry the mantle forward with the same commitment to fairness, independence, and public service that has guided our judiciary over the past five decades.

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The timely and legally correct resolution of cases is arguably the most important responsibility of any court system. Delayed case resolutions are not merely administrative burdens: every case affects the lives of those who come before the court to resolve it. No court can maintain public trust if litigants, attorneys, businesses, estates, victims, and others must wait years for cases to be resolved.

Reducing caseloads and improving case flow management has long been one of the central priorities of the Judicial Branch, and while it may appear simple to just blame a judge for not moving a case, the reality of delay is far more nuanced. Even the most dedicated judge cannot set a case for trial without a courtroom, a court reporter or interpreter, and a sufficient number of prospective jurors appearing for jury selection. Nor can a judge ignore attorneys who have conflicts and move to withdraw as counsel, or are not prepared to proceed and force a judge to decide between granting continuances of convenience or dismissing potentially meritorious cases. Cases become stalled if even just one part of the system becomes strained, especially if the underlying problem is chronic and not within the control of the Judicial Branch. Obviously, we cannot expect courts and judges to simply ignore these problems. A judge cannot hold a jury trial without a jury; or conduct a trial or suppression hearing without a court reporter or other way of transcribing the proceedings; or expect a new attorney, prosecutor or public

defender to conduct a first-degree murder trial with a day's preparation because he or she needs to cover cases assigned to a public defender who suddenly departed a week earlier. The ultimate responsibility of courts is not to just dispose of cases, but to dispose of them fairly, carefully, and in accordance with the law. While the public certainly should expect timely justice, the courts of the Virgin Islands must balance urgency with fairness and provide all litigants with the rights guaranteed to them by the U.S. Constitution, the Revised Organic Act, and Virgin Islands Law.

The courts of the Virgin Islands must therefore not strive to simply reduce delays but rather unnecessary delays. We would not want our courts to resolve cases by speed alone; neither the litigants nor the people of our Territory benefit from arbitrary decisions that ignore our organic documents or the law, or impair the right to be heard. The challenge for the Judicial Branch going forward is to find ways to reduce the delays that do not sacrifice the quality of justice that Virgin Islanders rightly expect from their courts. This, of course, is so much easier said than done, since the reasons for unnecessary delay are multifaceted and often not solely within the control of the Judicial Branch.

The Judicial Branch has implemented measures to address unnecessary delays caused by the structural problems facing courts nationally as well as those unique to the U.S. Virgin Islands. In fact, the Judicial Branch often acted after recognizing a potential problem but before the problem transformed into a full-blown crisis. Although getting national attention today, I first wrote of the impending court reporter shortage in the State of the Judiciary that accompanied the 2021 Annual Report, where I announced that the Judicial Branch would upgrade each courtroom with the technology needed to make a complete audio and video record, train employees who are not court reporters on how to use the equipment and become Qualified Electronic Reporters, while of course continuing to utilize our existing stenographic court reporters.

In the past fiscal year, approximately 41% of transcripts produced by the Court Reporting Division were from JAVS recordings, with the remainder transcribed by one of our stenographic court reporters. As a result of this hybrid service model that allows digital recording technology to supplement traditional stenographic reporting, I am proud to say that no case in the Superior Court of the Virgin Islands will be delayed because of an inability to transcribe a trial, hearing, or other proceeding.

The Judicial Branch also proactively responded to the shortage of jurors in both districts. The substantial loss of population in the wake of Hurricanes Irma and Maria, as well as Virgin Islanders changing their addresses after those disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic, resulted in many juror summonses being returned as undeliverable or otherwise not reaching the prospective juror. The Superior Court updated its Jury Plan to provide for a broader selection of prospective jurors, and its Jury Management Division made significant strides in updating the accuracy of our existing data. In addition, the Jury Management Division undertook a civic education program, including development of a juror handbook that explains this important civic duty and the consequences of failure to appear. Finally, as a last resort, judges have issued “show cause orders” to jurors who were summoned for jury duty but failed to appear without an approved excuse. These measures have already drawn substantial dividends. In Fiscal Year 2024, the number of qualified jurors increased by 377% as compared to Fiscal Year 2023. The Superior Court built on this success even further in Fiscal Year 2025, with an 11% increase in qualified jurors over Fiscal Year 2024—representing a 429% increase from Fiscal Year 2023.

The indigent defense system has been the subject of much controversy over the course of several decades, even before the establishment of the Supreme Court. For much of our history, the courts in our Territory would conscript random members of the Virgin Islands Bar to represent such defendants at low hourly rates, without regard to their expertise or desire for the appointment. The system did not work and



often created delays, especially when unwilling attorneys filed motions seeking relief from their appointments.

After administrative unification of the courts in 2016, the Supreme Court established private attorney panels—lists of attorneys in each district who volunteered to take such appointments. We always knew, however, that this was just an interim step, and that the true solution required establishment of a second public defenders' office, as has been successfully done in many other jurisdictions. On December 13, 2022, the Supreme Court established the framework for such an office when it entered Promulgation Order No. 2022-0002 amending Supreme Court Rule 210 to authorize the establishment of an Office of Conflict Counsel (OCC) as an independent arm of the Judicial Branch under the supervision of the Standing Committee on Indigent Appointments. After much developmental work, the Standing Committee appointed H. Hannibal O'Bryan, Esq. as the first Chief Conflict Counsel, and the OCC began accepting court-appointed matters effective June 3, 2024. In addition, the Legislature passed and the Governor signed into law Act No. 8940, which amended title 5 of the Virgin Islands Code establishing the Office of Conflict Council, acknowledging its role, and appropriate funding for its operations.

Since its establishment, the OCC has made great strides in undertaking representation of indigent defendants where the Public Defender's Office has a conflict. For instance, in Fiscal Year 2025, the Superior Court appointed counsel for an indigent defendant 793 times. Of those orders, 602 appointed the Office of the Territorial Public Defender, 134 the OCC, and only 57 appointed private counsel (a number inclusive of private counsel who volunteered to serve on private attorney panels). Moreover, the costs expended by the Judicial Branch to pay private attorneys fell by nearly half from \$541,845 in Fiscal Year 2024 to \$315,056.72 in Fiscal Year 2025. While the need for private attorneys still remains—at least for now—the hope going forward is that such appointments will be made from the members of the relevant

private attorney panels and that involuntary appointments will become rare to nonexistent. Importantly, fewer cases experienced the delays previously associated with numerous conflicts and motions to withdraw.

The Judicial Branch has also taken steps to address requests for continuances by lawyers. However, not all continuance requests are created equal. There is a staunch difference between continuances of necessity and continuances of convenience. A continuance may be necessary if, for example, an attorney is scheduled to appear in another matter and promptly notifies the court of the conflict, or if a witness has a sudden medical emergency. However, if an attorney seeks to delay a trial date because a witness who was never subpoenaed does not appear, or due to a vacation that had been known but never disclosed, the continuance is not necessary to further the administration of justice but rather to remedy the attorney's own failures. It is this latter type of continuance that contributes to unnecessary delays and courts cannot relinquish control of their docket by acquiescing, even when parties agree or there is no objection from opposing counsel.

Accordingly, the Supreme Court enacted Promulgation Order No. 2026-0002 on March 4, 2026. This order creates Supreme Court Rule 111, establishing a continuance policy for the Superior Court. For the first time, Rule 111 delineates with specificity 11 reasons that will generally not constitute good cause to grant a continuance. Importantly, the Clerk's Office will generate a report every quarter pertaining to continuances, which shall be provided to and discussed with the judicial officers of the Superior Court to ensure consistent application by all judicial officers across all cases in both districts. The continuance report will also allow Judicial Branch leadership to understand how often continuances are requested and the reasons in support of them, which will enable the Judicial Branch to identify systemic problems and work with the Virgin Islands Bar, our sister branches of government, or other justice-related agencies or stakeholders to resolve them.

Reducing delays and backlogs requires an “all-hands-on-deck” approach not just within the Judicial Branch but amongst the entire government, with all three branches working together to address the systemic problems that no one branch can resolve on its own. Importantly, these are problems that require funding and sustained commitment and will not be resolved through ordinary or aspirational legislation.

Of course, not every solution necessarily requires substantial additional funding. Some unnecessary delays stem not necessarily from a lack of resources, but from limitations on how the Judicial Branch can use those resources. To combat rising backlogs during the COVID-19 pandemic, I urged the Legislature to convert the four existing Superior Court magistrate judge positions to full judgeships, which would allow those judicial officers to assist with case backlogs outside the Magistrate Division. Despite the immense gains at little to no new expense, the Legislature has not acted on this modest proposal; nor has it provided funding for any additional Superior Court judgeships. While recent legislative changes allow for a judge to continue to serve until a successor is nominated and confirmed, it is important to note that much of case delay and growth of case backlogs over time has been directly attributed to the removal of experienced judges through non-reappointment or retirement, prior untimely nominations and confirmations of replacements, and the time it takes for a new judge to become familiar with the cases and their new role.

Delays in the Superior Court occur not just because of backlogs of existing cases, but also due to increased filings of new cases that warrant attention to avoid them becoming stale cases. For instance, in Fiscal Year 2024 there were 416 new criminal and 680 new civil cases, excluding those assigned to the Magistrate Division. Each of the eight general jurisdiction judges, therefore, became responsible for approximately 137 new cases that year. However, just one year later in Fiscal Year 2025, the Superior Court received 847 new criminal and 965 new

civil cases, or approximately 227 new cases per general jurisdiction judge—a staggering 66% increase from just the prior year. Thus, what might appear as a large case backlog is in reality a large caseload.

The same trend is present in the Magistrate Division as well. New filings in every substantive matter assigned to the Magistrate Division increased, often by large margins. Small claims filings increased by nearly 37% from 452 in Fiscal Year 2024 to 618 in Fiscal Year 2025. Eviction filings more than doubled from 301 last year to 699 this year, as did domestic violence (357 to 495), stalking/harassment (179 to 186), and criminal non-jury (117 to 157). Even the number of new probate filings nearly doubled from 293 to 479, which caused the Superior Court's probate clearance rate to fall below 100% for the first time in three years. As a result, each of the four magistrate judges became responsible for on average approximately 425 new matters in Fiscal Year 2024 to 582 new matters in Fiscal Year 2025—a 40%% increase in caseload.

The Judicial Branch is not immune to blame or criticism. We know that there are some cases in the courts that have seemingly languished while the parties wait for a ruling on a dispositive motion filed months or even years earlier. Although this type of delay may not be the norm, it remains unacceptable and is being addressed.

On March 4, 2026, the Supreme Court enacted Promulgation Order No. 2026-0001 to adopt Supreme Court Rule 110. This Rule, titled “Superior Court Case Management,” will go into effect on July 1, 2026, requiring amongst other things that motions under advisement must be decided within 90 days. Compliance with this standard will be tracked through regularly scheduled reporting to the Presiding Judge for review and action as part of the Presiding Judge's case management oversight responsibilities in accordance with Supreme Court Rule 108.

Supreme Court Rule 110 allows Judicial Branch leadership to obtain the data needed to understand how many and which cases are delayed, as well as *why* they are delayed.



Identifying and understanding the root causes of delay in the life cycle of any case provides extraordinarily important data to allow the Judicial Branch to address them internally or with other stakeholders. It also allows the Judicial Branch to hold judges accountable in the hopefully rare instances where it is the judge that is the source of the delay, and especially in the even rarer situations where a judge may fail to take the necessary steps to move a case forward after being repeatedly directed to do so.

The Judicial Branch will also continue to provide educational programming and other training to its judicial officers and employees on case management and other topics. This will include training and encouragement to conduct proceedings remotely whenever possible. Virtual court proceedings not only eliminate the need to use a physical courtroom, but provide much greater convenience to attorneys and especially *pro se* litigants. In this regard, with appropriate funding and resources, the Judiciary remains committed to exploring how it might incorporate Online Dispute Resolution as part of a broader case management strategy.

Many factors contribute to the access to justice gap and require the support of all stakeholders in the justice system to truly resolve. There are great limits to what a court system can do on its own. After all, courts do not, and should not, set overall economic or social welfare policy. Nor can judges help or favor a party that has appeared without an attorney—that would also undermine the adversarial system by turning the judge from an impartial decision-maker to an advocate.

What the Virgin Islands Judiciary can do, however, is eliminate unnecessary barriers—such as those rules that may serve little or no purpose, or policies or constructions of rules which are not readily available. Rule 1 of the Virgin Islands Rules of Civil Procedure provides that court rules “should be construed, administered, and employed by the court and the parties to secure the just, speedy, and inexpensive determination of every action and proceeding.” Judges and court staff cannot forget that the ultimate

purpose of court rules and procedures is to provide an orderly way to get to the substance of the parties’ claims.

Over the last decade, the Virgin Islands Supreme Court comprehensively reformed the rules of practice and procedure by ending uncritical reliance on federal rules and simply setting forth what rules govern each proceeding. However, the work of meeting the ideals of Civil Rule 1 is never done—we must constantly study the rules, and in the event a rule does not operate as desired or is the subject of differing interpretations by Superior Court judges, we should amend or repeal the rule directly rather than allow the uncertainty to fester.

Access to justice, however, is not only a question of access to courts and legal materials. It is also a question of access to qualified legal assistance. Courts may simplify procedures and make the law easier to find, but the adversarial system still depends heavily on trained advocates who can advise clients, identify legal issues, present evidence, and assist the courts in reaching correct results. For that reason, the goal of furthering access to justice is intertwined with the Supreme Court’s responsibility for admissions to the Virgin Islands Bar and regulation of the legal profession.

The authority to admit and regulate attorneys who wish to practice law in the U.S. Virgin Islands is one of the Supreme Court’s paramount responsibilities. Since its establishment, the Court and its Committee of Bar Examiners have worked tirelessly to ensure that those who seek the privilege of practicing law in this Territory possess the requisite character, fitness, and technical competence necessary to serve clients and the courts. The process to become a full-fledged regular member of the Virgin Islands Bar is not necessarily easy, but the admissions process has long since been streamlined to eliminate unnecessary barriers. In fact, to this day the U.S. Virgin Islands remains the first and only territory to allow admission on motion for experienced lawyers from reciprocal jurisdictions as well as admission based on Uniform Bar Exam score transfer for lawyers who recently sat for a bar exam elsewhere.

Our responsibility has taken on renewed importance as the legal profession enters a period of significant change. Beginning with its July 2026 administration, the U.S. Virgin Islands will administer the NextGen Uniform Bar Exam (NextGen UBE) as the Virgin Islands Bar Examination—one of only 11 initial jurisdictions to do so. The NextGen UBE is a fundamental change in how we evaluate the minimum competency of prospective lawyers. Rather than focus on rote-memorization of legal rules, the NextGen UBE tests foundational lawyering skills that greatly resemble the work one expects attorneys to perform on a day-to-day basis, such as legal research and writing; investigation and evaluation; client counseling and advising; negotiation and dispute resolution; and client relationship and management. These changes, which borrow best practices from the exams used for medicine, dentistry, accounting, and other licensed professions, are designed to ensure that newly admitted lawyers are “practice-ready” and possess the skills needed to best assist their clients after admission. By 2028, most United States jurisdictions will likely transition to the NextGen UBE as well. Of course, applicants will still need to pass the Virgin Islands Law Component—a multiple-choice test focused on U.S. Virgin Islands Law—and establish their character and fitness to the satisfaction of the Committee of Bar Examiners and the Supreme Court.

However, the court’s responsibility and oversight does not end when an applicant is admitted to the Bar. While the bar admissions process protects the public at the front door of the profession by ensuring minimum competence and character and fitness, the attorney discipline process protects the public after admission by ensuring that attorneys continue to honor the obligations that accompany that privilege. It is for this purpose that the Supreme Court established the Office of Disciplinary Counsel (ODC) as an independent arm of the court and vested adjudicatory authority with a court-created volunteer Board of Professional Responsibility. Despite growing public perception of a slow and ineffective discipline process, I must note that in the past 10 years,

474 discipline complaints have been filed and 439 have been resolved for a 93% case clearance rate on the work of the ODC and the Board of Professional Responsibility. It is unquestioned that there remains a considerable amount of work to be done regarding older disciplinary cases pending resolution, which are under review and in varying stages of investigation and prosecution. The Supreme Court is examining the steps necessary to reduce the time it takes to resolve attorney discipline cases, including amending the rules to achieve the anticipatory goal or terminating most attorney discipline cases within 1 year of filing of the complaint.. Nevertheless, we highlight the admirable work that has been done by the ODC and the Boards to keep pace with the filings and dispositions of complaints.

The Office of Disciplinary Counsel and the Chairpersons of the Boards of Professional Responsibility and the Unauthorized Practice of Law take their roles in the discipline system seriously, and each independently and collectively strive to prioritize cases, especially those that have been pending over a decade, distinguishing between unavoidable delay versus neglect; misconduct versus poor communication; and serious violations versus matters better addressed through guidance, education, corrective action, or the normal court process. The Supreme Court will continue to work with the ODC and the Chairpersons of the Boards of Professional Responsibility and the Unauthorized Practice of Law to examine the process to make improvements where applicable, and provide any additional necessary resources as our appropriations allow.

Additional areas identified for reform include merging our Pre-Trial and Probation Divisions and the creation of a Judicial and Courthouse Threat Assessment Center (TAC). National studies have repeatedly argued and demonstrated how inadequately staffed and resourced pre-trial justice services increase incarceration rates. The Territory of the Virgin Islands is not exempt from that trend. Recent discussions with the Bureau of Corrections highlighted nearly 36 non-violent criminal offenders on pre-trial detention and



amongst the Virgin Islands’ prison population where the average cost of incarceration per inmate is \$350 per day, \$10,646 per month, or \$127,750 per year, a cost of nearly \$4.6 million per year to the Territory for these non-violent offenders. In addition to expanded pre-trial intervention services, many of these non-violent offenders may benefit from a therapeutic or problem-solving court model designed to address underlying issues contributing to criminal behavior. For efficiency of operations and combined resources, over the past year and under the leadership of Associate Justice Harold W. L. Willocks, the Judiciary has been diligently working on a plan to consolidate our Pre-Trial and Probation Divisions and exploring implementation of specialized dockets aimed at reducing both incarceration and recidivism.

With regard to judicial and court security, enhancing the security of buildings and the protection of judicial officers, court staff, jurors, litigants and bystanders has been a core focus of the Conference of Chief Justices (CCJ) and the Conference of State Court Administrators (COSCA) with national summits convened on this issue for decades. In recent years, there has been an unprecedented increase in threats of violence against judges, judicial staff, and incidents in and around courthouses. Consequently, courts are urged to continuously evaluate security protocols, pursue and institute additional protections of personal identification information (PII) of key staff, dedicate personnel to active security monitoring across various

social and other media platforms, and establish standards for documenting threats and conducting threat assessments. As the former chair of the CCJ/COSCA Joint Committee on Court Security and Emergency Preparedness, I have led the charge to establish a task force to focus on these key areas to prepare the Judicial Branch for compliance with and participation in national programs, and funding, training, and technical assistance opportunities for new and evolving standards in judicial and courthouse security.

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As this State of the Judiciary and the accompanying Annual Report demonstrate, the work of the Judicial Branch remains ongoing and never ends. Cases must be resolved. Rules must be studied and improved. Technology must be modernized. Attorneys must be admitted, supported, and, when necessary, disciplined, as well as the conduct of judges reviewed by the Commission of Judicial Conduct when warranted. Facilities must be maintained. Employees must be recruited, trained, competitively compensated and retained. Public confidence must be earned again and again. These responsibilities do not end with any one term of service, and they do not belong to any one chief justice, judge, magistrate judge, or court employee. They belong to the Judicial Branch as an institution.

As I prepare to conclude my service as Chief Justice, I do so with gratitude. I am grateful to my colleagues, Justice Maria M. Cabret and Justice

Ive Arlington Swan, whose service from the beginning helped establish the Supreme Court as a true court of last resort for the people of the Virgin Islands. I am grateful to Justice Harold W.L. Willocks and our newest colleague, Justice Denise M. Francois, who will share the responsibility of guiding the Supreme Court into its next era. I am grateful to the judges and magistrate judges of the Superior Court and every employee, past and present, whose work allowed the Judicial Branch to succeed in its mandate. I especially wish to recognize our recently-retired Superior Court judges—immediate past Presiding Judge Debra Watlington, Judge Kathleen Mackay, and Magistrate Judge Paula Norkaitis of the District of St. Thomas and St. John, and Judge Douglas A. Brady of the District of St. Croix—as well as thank and welcome the newest judicial officers: Judge Melanie L. Turnbull, Judge Pedro K. Williams, Judge Renee Andre, and Magistrate Judge Julie Smith Todman of the District of St. Thomas and St. John, and Magistrate Judge Christopher Timmons of the District of St. Croix. I also wish to congratulate Judge Venetia H. Velazquez on her elevation from Magistrate Judge to Judge in the District of St. Croix.

Nearly twenty years ago, the first three Justices of the Supreme Court were entrusted with the responsibility of helping to build an institution. The success of the past two decades will not be measured only by the opinions issued, the cases resolved, or the buildings acquired and constructed, but by whether the Judiciary

endures as a fair, independent, accessible, and trusted branch of government.

I leave the office of Chief Justice with confidence primarily because the Judicial Branch of the Virgin Islands has strong institutional traditions grounded in the protection of the rule of law and sustained by the dedication of those who steadfastly serve it. The work will continue under new leadership, carried forward by those who understand that courts exist not for themselves, but for the people they serve.

It has been the honor of my professional life to serve as Chief Justice of the Virgin Islands. I close this final State of the Judiciary with gratitude for the past, confidence in the future, and my abiding and unwavering faith in the rule of law, the independence of the courts, and the endurance of the people of the Virgin Islands.

Sincerely



Hon. Rhys S. Hodge  
Chief Justice







# History of the Judiciary

The Virgin Islands Judiciary evolved from three (3) police courts which existed pursuant to the 1921 Codes of St. Thomas, St. John and St. Croix. On July 22, 1954, the United States Congress approved The Revised Organic Act of the Virgin Islands, and section 21 vested the judicial power in a court of record to be designated the “District Court of the Virgin Islands.” Thereafter, the three (3) police courts were abolished, and two (2) municipal courts were established: the municipal Court of St. Thomas and St. John, and the Municipal Court of St. Croix.

After a decade of this judicial structure, the composition of the local judiciary changed again in 1965. Legislative enactments, which became effective on March 1, 1965, consolidated the two (2) municipal courts into a unified court designated as the Municipal Court of the Virgin Islands. By further enactments of the Virgin Islands Legislature, on September 9, 1976, pursuant to Act No. 3876, Section 5, Sess. L. 1976, p. 17, the Municipal Court of the Virgin Islands’ name was changed to the Territorial Court of the Virgin Islands, the antecedent to the current Superior Court of the Virgin Islands. Almost three (3) decades later, authorized by the 1984 amendments to the Revised Organic Act of 1954, and pursuant to enactments in Title 4 V.I. Code Ann. Section 76(a), effective October 1, 1991, the Territorial Court obtained original jurisdiction over all local civil actions. Effective January 1, 1994, pursuant to Act No. 5890, the Virgin Islands Legislature granted expanded jurisdiction in criminal matters to the Territorial Court.

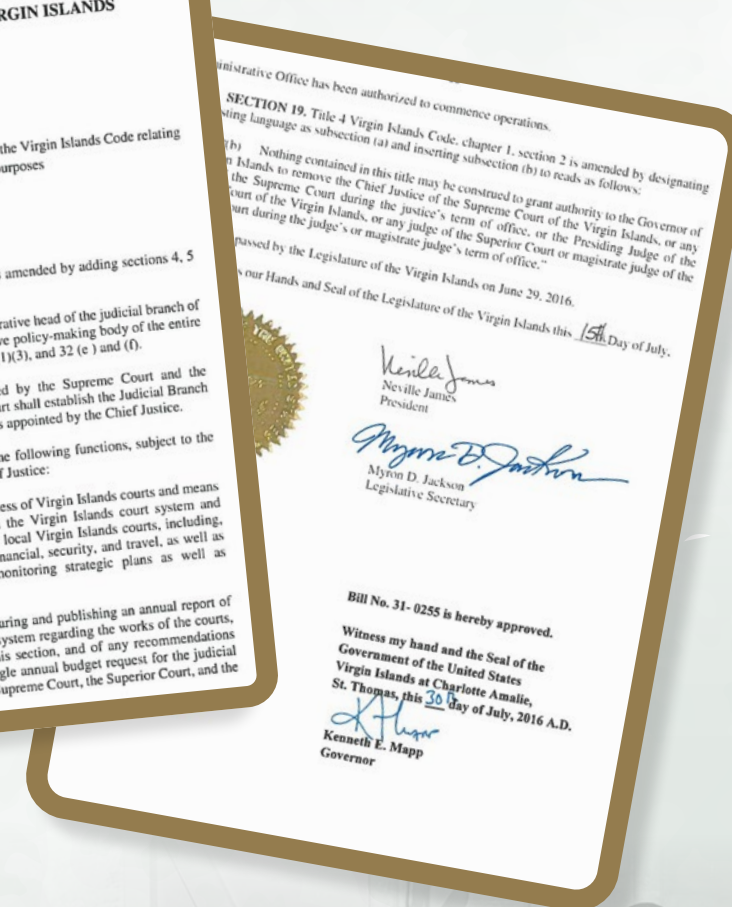
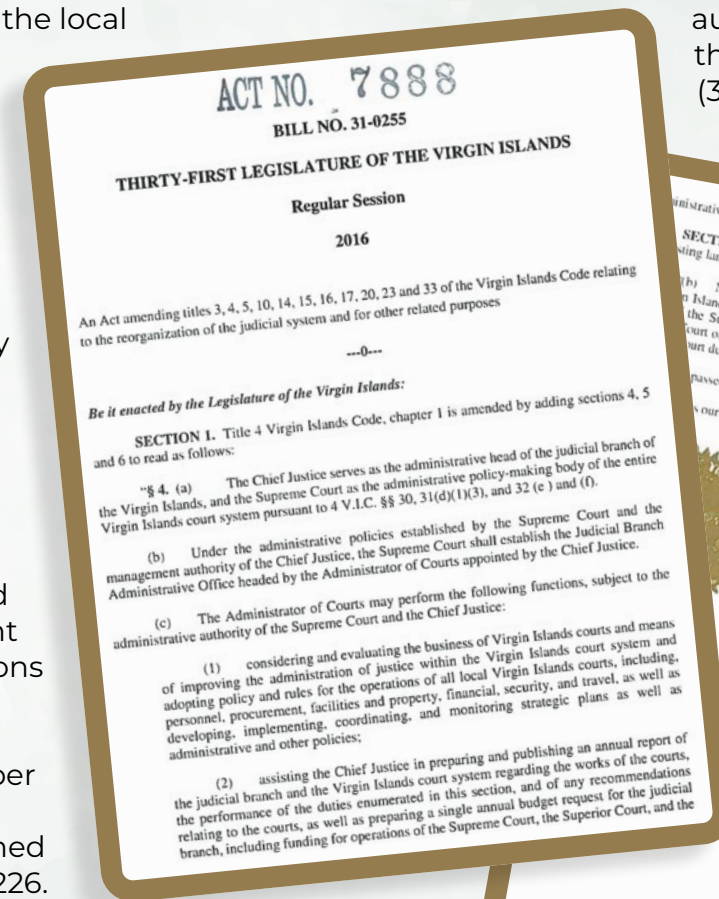
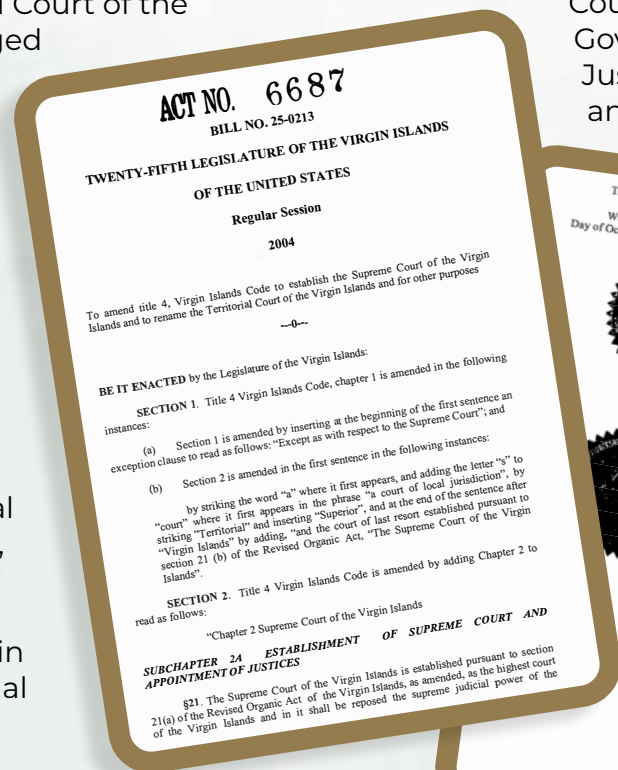
In 1984, the United States’ Congress amended the Revised Organic Act of 1954 to permit the Virgin Islands Legislature to create a local appellate court whose justices could be nominated by the Governor of the Virgin Islands, subject to confirmation by the Virgin Islands Legislature. However, since the Legislature did not immediately create the local appellate court authorized by the 1984 amendments to the Revised Organic Act, two federal courts—the District Court of the Virgin Islands, and the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit—continued to review all judgments issued by the then Territorial Court. On September 30, 2004, Bill 25-0213, which was sponsored by then senator Carlton “Ital” Dowe to establish the Supreme Court of the Virgin Islands, was adopted by a unanimous vote of the members of the 26th Legislature, and signed into law by then Governor, Charles W. Turnbull, on October 29, 2004. This pivotal Legislation also changed the name of the Territorial Court of the Virgin Islands to the Superior Court of the Virgin Islands. On October 27, 2006, the first three Justices of the Supreme Court were appointed by Governor Turnbull—Chief Justice Rhys S. Hodge, and Associate Justices Maria M. Cabret

and Ive Arlington Swan—and confirmed by the Legislature and sworn into office on December 18, 2006. On January 29, 2007, the Supreme Court officially accepted appellate and other jurisdictions, thereby divesting the federal District Court of its historic role of overseeing the Superior Court.

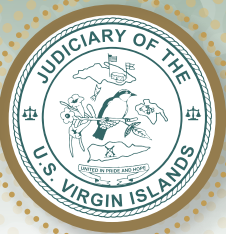
Prior to January 29, 2007, all appeals were heard by the Appellate Division of the United States District Court and the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit. The 1984 amendments to the Revised Organic Act by Congress also provided that the Third Circuit review decisions of the local appellate court for the first fifteen (15) years of its existence and directed that a comprehensive evaluation of the Court’s operations be conducted every five (5) years. The Third Circuit issued its first five-year review report on June 9, 2012, which concluded that the Supreme Court had developed sufficient institutional traditions to end the fifteen (15) year oversight period. On December 28, 2012, President Barack Obama signed Public Law No. 112-226. This bill, sponsored by Delegate to Congress Donna M. Christensen, amended the Revised Organic Act to eliminate the remaining oversight period. With the elimination of the oversight period, the Supreme Court of the Virgin Islands achieved parity with the highest courts of the several states and its decision are now subject to direct review by the Supreme Court of the United States, as do the highest courts of several states. The Virgin Islands now joins the other states and territories of the United States in

establishing a progressive, 21st century, local court system.

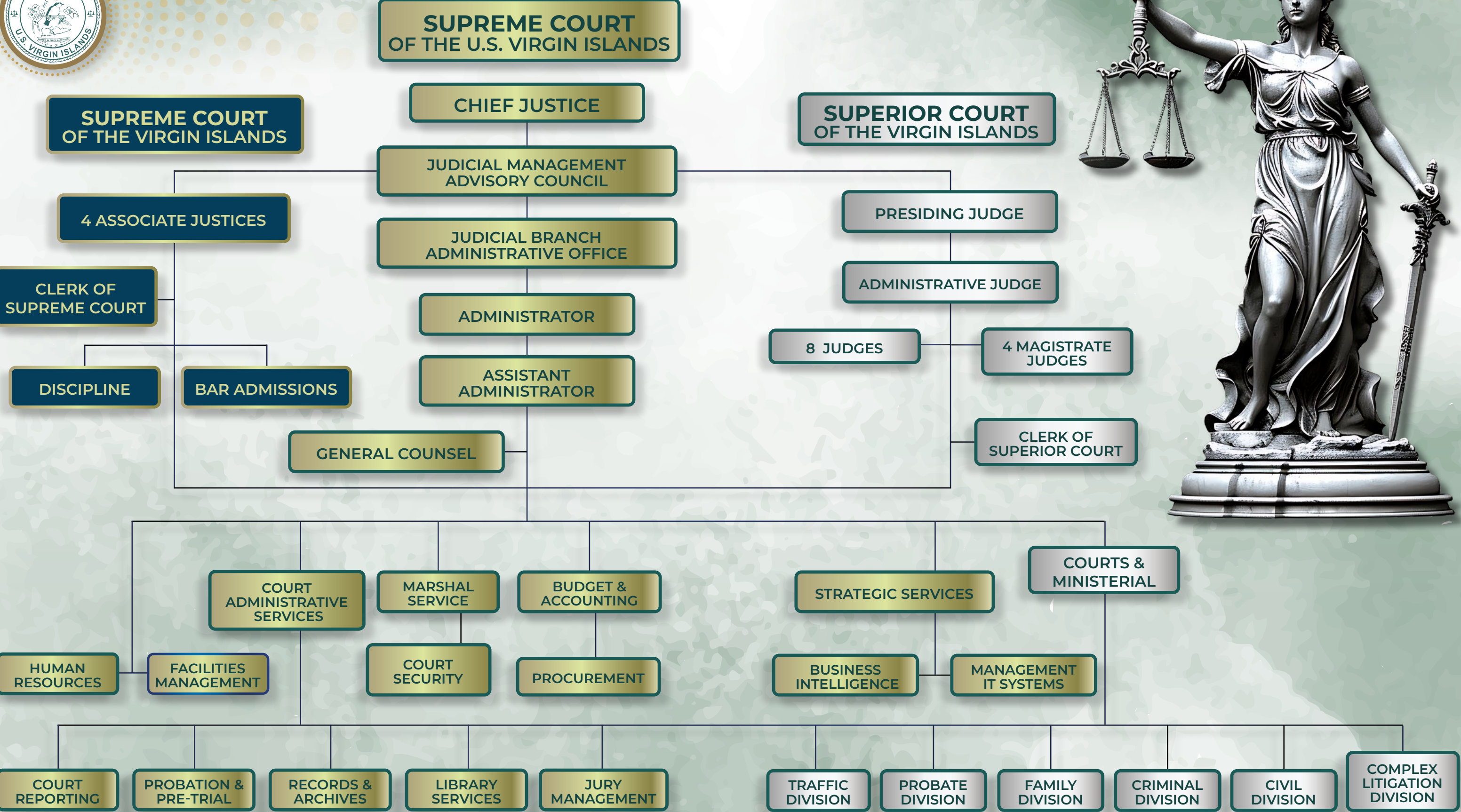
On August 29, 2016, consistent with the organizational structure of a majority of the jurisdictions under the United States Flag, the local judiciary took another leap forward when Bill No. 31-2055, Act No. 7888, was signed into law by Governor Kenneth E. Mapp, unifying the administrations of the Supreme Court of the Virgin Islands and the Superior Court of the Virgin Islands. This legislation, sponsored by then Senator Kenneth L. Gittens and Senator Nereida “Nellie” O’Reilly, also authorized the expansion of the appellate bench from three (3) to five (5) justices.







THE JUDICIAL BRANCH







# Organization and Governance

The Supreme Court of the Virgin Islands is the highest local court and supreme judicial authority of the Virgin Islands. Pursuant to Title 4, section 32(a) of the Virgin Islands Code, the Supreme Court of the Virgin Islands has appellate jurisdiction to review the final judgments rendered by the Superior Court, as well as a limited number of specified interlocutory orders. The Supreme Court also has original jurisdiction over mandamus and habeas corpus, regulation of the Virgin Islands Bar Association, and general supervision over the entire court system.

Pursuant to the authority granted in Act No. 7888, the Supreme Court of the Virgin Islands established the Judicial Management Advisory Council (JMAC) to provide guidance and advice to the Chief Justice and the Supreme Court of the Virgin Islands, the Presiding Judge and the Superior Court of the Virgin Islands, and the Administrator of Courts and the Judicial Branch Administrative Office on the operations and business of the judiciary.

JMAC is a six-member council consisting of the Chief Justice, two Associate Justices, the Presiding Judge, a judge of the Superior Court and a magistrate judge of the Superior Court. The Chief Justice chairs the council, and the Administrator of Courts serves as the council's secretary. All judicial officers are ex-officio members of the council. By the close of FY 2025, the serving members of the council were as follows:

- **Hon. Rhys S. Hodge, Chief Justice**
- **Hon. Maria M. Cabret, Associate Justice**
- **Hon. Ive Arlington Swan, Associate Justice**
- **Hon. Jessica Gallivan, Presiding Judge**
- **Hon. Denise M. Francois, Administrative Judge**
- **Hon. Yolán Brow-Ross, Magistrate Judge**

JMAC also approves the establishment of various ad hoc committees to assist with the improvement of the administration of justice in the Territory. Specifically, the Advisory Committee on Rules—composed of judges and members of the Virgin Islands Bar Association—meets regularly to discuss the rules governing the practice of law and proposes amendments. During FY 2025, the Judicial Management Advisory Council acted on several recommendations to the Supreme Court as follows:

**Promulgation Order No. 2025-0001.** Adoption of the Next Gen Bar Exam as the Virgin Islands Bar Examination.

**Promulgation Order No. 2025-0002.** Supreme Court Rule 108 was entered on March 5, 2025, to specifically delineate and institutionalize the selection process and administrative responsibility of the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court.

**Promulgation Order No. 2025-0003.** On review of the Report of the Advisory Committee on Rules, the Supreme Court promulgated amendments to the Virgin Islands Rules of Civil

Procedure, Virgin Islands Rules of Criminal Procedure, Virgin Islands Rules of Evidence, The Virgin Islands Rules of Appellate Procedure, and the Virgin Islands Electronic Filing Rules.

**Promulgation Order No. 2025-0004.** Amendment to Rule 5-1 of the Virgin Islands Rules of Criminal Procedure to authorize court-ordered payment of all or a portion of the costs of electronic location monitoring for defendants placed on pre-trial home supervision with electronic monitoring.

**Promulgation Order No. 2025-0005.** Amendment to Supreme Court Rule 104 to add a section to allow for appointment of retired justices to Senior Justices of the Supreme Court for 2-year terms with consent of the majority of the active members of the Supreme Court. Appointments are for 2 years and may be renewed by order of the Chief Justice.

**Promulgation Order No. 2025-0006.** Amendment to Supreme Court Rule 104 to remove any per diem or other salary requirement for a Senior Justice who retires on a judicial annuity.

**Promulgation Order No. 2025-0007.** The Supreme Court amended Rule 204(i) regarding Virgin Islands Law Component (VILC) of the Virgin Islands Bar Exam.

**Administrative Order No. 2025-0001. Appointment of Dalila Patton Esq., as acting Clerk of the Supreme Court.** Long-time Staff Attorney to the Supreme Court temporarily assumed the role of Clerk of Court during an extended absence of long-serving Clerk of Court Veronica J. Handy, Esq.

**Administrative Order No. 2025-0002. Adoption of Policy for the use of portable electronic devices in the Virgin Islands Courthouses and Courtrooms.** Branchwide Portable Electronic Device (PED) policy adopted with the implementation of increased security screening, to include use of RFID signal blocking pouches to address increasing use and interception of smart watches, portable listening devices and recording glasses.

**Administrative Order No. 2025-0003. Order Appointing Dalila Patton, Esq. Clerk of the Supreme Court.** Following the official retirement of Veronica J. Handy as Clerk of the Supreme Court, and a competitive hiring process, Attorney Dalila Patton, Esq. was appointed Clerk of the Supreme Court effective January 9, 2026.

Promulgation and Administrative Orders are published and available for viewing at [https://supreme.vicourts.org/offices\\_of\\_the\\_court/office\\_of\\_the\\_clerk](https://supreme.vicourts.org/offices_of_the_court/office_of_the_clerk)

## JUDICIAL RETIREMENTS

During calendar year 2025, the Judiciary experienced unprecedented turnover on the bench as well as senior management with the following retirements:

### DISTRICT OF ST. THOMAS AND ST. JOHN

- |                                                                  |             |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| • The Honorable Judge Debra S. Watlington, Retired Judge         | 2012 - 2025 |
| • The Honorable Kathleen Y. Mackay, Retired Judge                | 2009 - 2025 |
| • The Honorable Paula J. Norkaitis, Retired Magistrate Judge     | 2021 - 2025 |
| • Veronica J. Handy, Esquire, Retired Clerk of the Supreme Court | 2008 - 2025 |
| • Andrew Ayala, Retired Assistant Marshal                        | 2019 - 2025 |

### DISTRICT OF ST. CROIX

- |                                                 |             |
|-------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| • The Honorable Douglas A. Brady, Retired Judge | 2012 - 2025 |
| • Ann Marie Wong, Retired Assistant Marshal     | 2018 - 2025 |



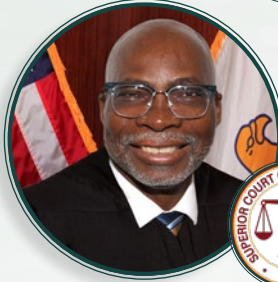
JUDICIAL BRANCH APPOINTMENTS & REAPPOINTMENTS



**Judge Venetia H. Velazquez** was unanimously confirmed by the 36th Legislature of the Virgin Islands to serve a 6-year term as Judge of the Superior Court of the Virgin Islands in the District of St. Croix on November 19, 2025. She previously served as Magistrate Judge in the District of St. Croix from 2024, preceded by a distinguished 23-year legal career in the Territory.



**Judge Melanie L. Turnbull** was unanimously confirmed to serve a 6-year term as Judge of the Superior Court of the Virgin Islands in the St. Thomas-St. John Family Division on November 19, 2025, by the 36th Legislature of the Virgin Islands. She joins the bench after a 10-year career in indigent defense, serving in both the local and federal judiciary.



**Judge Pedro K. Williams** was unanimously confirmed to serve a 6-year term as Judge of the Superior Court of the Virgin Islands in the St. Thomas-St. John District on January 12, 2026, by the 36th Legislature of the Virgin Islands. He joins the bench after 40 years of legal practice in the Territory.



**Magistrate Judge Julie Smith Todman** was appointed to serve as a Magistrate Judge in the St. Thomas-St. John District on December 15, 2025. She joined the judiciary following 24 years of continuous service with the Office of the Territorial Public Defender, where she served as the Chief Public Defender from July 12, 2023, until her appointment as Magistrate Judge.



**Attorney Dalila Patton** was appointed Acting Clerk of Court of the Supreme Court of the Virgin Islands in August of 2025. A veteran staff attorney with 15 years of experience in the Supreme Court's Clerk Office, she was appointed Clerk of Court effective January 1, 2026. She replaces long-term Clerk of Court, Attorney Veronica J. Handy, who retired December 31, 2025.



**Magistrate Judge Christopher M. Timmons** was appointed to serve a 4-year term as Magistrate Judge in the District of the St. Croix on February 22, 2026. He joined the Judiciary following a nearly 30-year career of combined private and public legal practice, as well as his most recent service with the Virgin Islands Department of Justice as Chief of the Civil Division.



**Magistrate Judge Simone VanHolten-Turnbull** was initially appointed on January 20, 2022, by Presiding Judge Harold W. L. Willocks to serve a 4-year term as Magistrate Judge in Superior Court of the Virgin Islands' St. Thomas and St. John District. On February 16, 2026, Magistrate Simone VanHolten-Turnbull was appointed to serve a second 4-year term by Presiding Judge Jessica Gallivan.



**Magistrate Yolán Brow Ross** was initially appointed on January 20, 2022, by Presiding Judge Harold W. L. Willocks to serve a 4-year term as Magistrate Judge in Superior Court of the Virgin Islands' District of St. Croix. On February 16, 2026, Magistrate Yolán Brow Ross was appointed to serve a second 4-year term by Presiding Judge Jessica Gallivan.



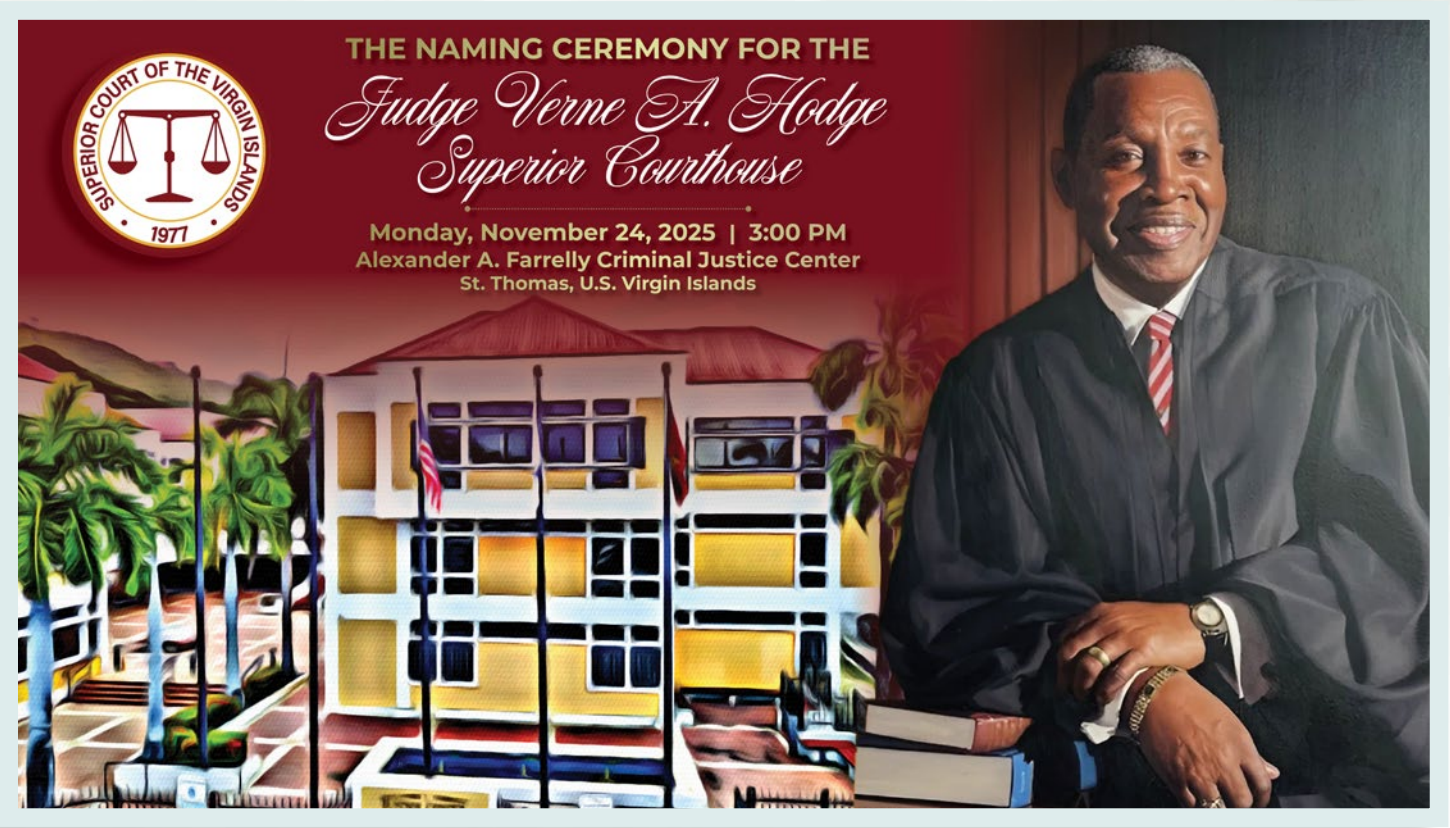
**Judge Renee M. Andre** was unanimously confirmed by the 36th Legislature of the Virgin Islands to serve a 6-year term as Judge of the Superior Court of the Virgin Islands in the District of St. Thomas-St. John on May 28, 2026. She joins the Judiciary following a distinguished 18-year legal career in private practice with the Law Offices of Marjorie Rawls Roberts, PC, where she also became a partner, representing individuals, families, and businesses across a broad spectrum of legal matters.



**Justice Denise M. Francois** was unanimously confirmed by the 36th Legislature of the Virgin Islands to a 10-year term as Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the Virgin Islands on May 28, 2026. Prior to her elevation to the highest local court, she served two consecutive 6-year terms as Judge of the Superior Court of the Virgin Islands. She was first nominated by Governor John P. de Jongh, Jr. to serve a 6-year term as Judge of the Superior Court in 2013, confirmed by the 30th Legislature of the Virgin Islands and then nominated in 2020 by Governor Albert A. Bryan Jr. to serve a second 6-year term as Judge of the Superior Court of the Virgin Islands. Judge Francois' confirmation to fill the 5th and final vacancy on the Supreme Court of the Virgin Islands is a significant milestone. As the Supreme Court approaches its 20th year in existence, her confirmation marks the first time since the expansion of the court from 3 to 5 justices in 2016 that the appellate court will have a full complement of Justices.



COLLABORATIONS AND SPECIAL EVENTS



Pursuant to Act No. 8927, Bill No. 35-0286, sponsored by Senator Kenneth L. Gittens, the Superior Court of the Virgin Islands in the St. Thomas-St. John District was named the “Judge Verne A. Hodge Superior Courthouse.” Following a year of planning including facility repairs and commissioning of signage, the official naming ceremony was held on November 24, 2025, and attended by nearly 200 guests, including government officials, dignitaries, family and friends. The Honoree, Presiding Judge Emeritus Verne A. Hodge served as the Presiding Judge of the former Territorial Court—now Superior Court—of the Virgin Islands from 1976 to 1999, and is credited with not only the creation of the Territorial Court (now Superior Court) Rising Stars Youth Steel Orchestra, but for his visionary and strong leadership during the financing and construction of the courthouse which now bears his name.

COURT IMPROVEMENT PROJECT (CIP)  
Attorney Academy for Quality Representation

The Judiciary of the U.S. Virgin Islands received the first Federal CIP grant award in 2017 and has utilized the funding to facilitate collaboration and training initiatives across the territory’s child welfare continuum. The primary objectives in the cross-agency collaboration have been to identify and address barriers in child abuse and neglect cases in order to achieve safety, permanency, as well as child and family well-being within a reasonable timeframe. The inaugural U.S. Virgin Islands Attorney Academy on Reasonable Efforts was held November 18–19, 2024, at the University of the Virgin Islands 13D Innovation Center on St. Thomas. The Academy, which was developed in collaboration with the Capacity Building

Center for Courts which supplied the participant guidebooks and technical resources, combined lectures, case studies, and interactive sessions to deepen understanding of reasonable efforts and promote consistency in practice across the Territory. Participants included Assistant Attorney Generals, Hospital Counsel, Assistant Public Defenders, judges, and private counsel who represent children and families. The event strengthened collaboration among attorneys, agencies, and the judiciary, and established a foundation for continued annual professional development focused on improving the quality of legal representation in child welfare matters.

During FY 2025, the Court Improvement Project demonstrated significant progress in advancing the quality, coordination, and effectiveness of the child welfare system across the Virgin Islands. Key achievements included the successful implementation of the Five-Year Strategic Plan, the launch of the Attorney Academy for Quality Legal Representation in November 2024, and the delivery of targeted national and local training initiatives throughout 2025. CIP also expanded its community engagement efforts through youth-focused programs highlighted later in this report







# Jurisdiction and Court Data

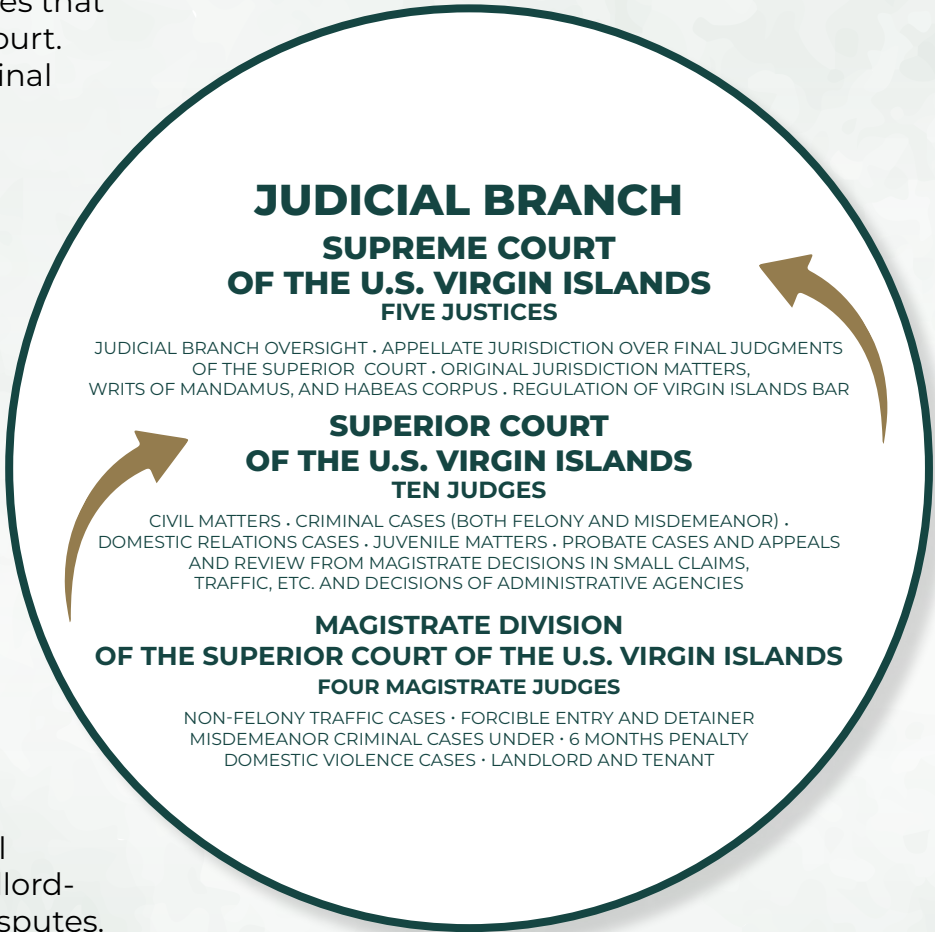
The Supreme Court reviews the factual determinations of the Superior Court for clear error while exercising plenary review over the trial court’s legal conclusions. The Supreme Court also hears cases that do not originate in the Superior Court. These cases are referred to as original jurisdiction matters and include proceedings for civil or criminal contempt, applications for writs of mandamus, writs of habeas corpus, attorney discipline, and certified question requests from federal courts and the highest courts of other jurisdictions for the Supreme Court to answer an unresolved question of Virgin Islands law.

The Superior Court is the court of first impression in the Virgin Islands Judiciary. As the trial court, it has broad jurisdiction in addressing the legal needs of the Virgin Islands community and has original jurisdiction to preside over all local civil, criminal, family, probate, landlord-tenant, small claims, and traffic disputes. It also reviews decisions of the Magistrate Division and of all governmental officers and agencies.

The Magistrate Division of the Superior Court hears non-felony traffic cases, forcible entry and detainer cases, misdemeanor criminal cases under one year, domestic violence cases, landlord-tenant actions, small claims, probate, and litter cases.

## APPELLATE COURT DATA

In FY 2025, the Supreme Court convened seven sessions and heard 17 cases by Oral Argument. Four cases were considered without Oral Argument. The court issued 28 opinions, all of which were published opinions. The court entertained 356 motions and entered 863 orders during the fiscal year. All opinions issued by the Supreme Court are available for review on the Judiciary’s website at [www.vicourts.org](http://www.vicourts.org).



| SUPREME COURT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS                              |                |             |                           |          |                    |                               |                |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-------------|---------------------------|----------|--------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|
| APPELLATE COURT CASE ACTIVITY REPORT FOR FY 2025 AS OF 9/30/2025 |                |             |                           |          |                    |                               |                |
| Office of the Clerk of Court                                     | PENDING OCT. 1 | New Filings | Available for Disposition | Disposed | Pending as of 9/30 | % Change in Pending 2024-2025 | Clearance Rate |
| Civil Appeals                                                    | 100            | 185         | 285                       | 34       | 251                | 151%                          | 18%            |
| Criminal Appeals                                                 | 36             | 7           | 43                        | 7        | 36                 | 0%                            | 100%           |
| Original Proceedings                                             | 34             | 30          | 64                        | 48       | 16                 | -53%                          | 160%           |

The Supreme Court began FY 2025 with 170 matters pending. 222 new matters were filed during the fiscal year for a total pending caseload of 392 cases. By September 30, 2025, the Court had disposed of 89 matters including 34 civil appeals, 7 criminal appeals and 48 matters proceeding under the Court’s original jurisdiction. By the end of the reporting period, 322 matters remained pending before the Supreme Court of the Virgin Islands. This approximate 150% caseload increase was due to complex litigation appeals filed in consolidated mass tort and toxic tort cases in the third quarter of FY 2025.

By the close of the fiscal year, 173 recusals were entered, and 169 designations were made. The following were designated to serve as Justices *Pro Tem* in 2025:

- The Honorable Curtis V. Gomez, Retired District Court Judge
- The Honorable Ernest E. Morris, Judge of the Superior Court
- The Honorable Carol Thomas-Jacobs, Judge of the Superior Court

## ARMS OF THE SUPREME COURT

### Office of Bar Admissions

The Office of Bar Admissions and the Committee of Bar Examiners assist the Supreme Court in its oversight responsibility for the admission to the practice of law in the Virgin Islands. The Office of Bar Admissions coordinates and supervises the administration of the Bar Exam twice per year, coordinates character and fitness interviews and admissions ceremonies, and handles intake of all applications for admission, while the Committee of Bar Examiners ascertains qualifications for admissions, conducts character and fitness examinations, and oversees scoring exam questions.

In FY 2025, The Office of Bar Admissions administered the bar exam twice to a total of 12 examinees. Four examinees sat for the February 25-26, 2025 exam, and eight were examined at the July 29-30, 2025 bar exam. Ten of those examined took the bar for the first time. Of those first-time takers, eight passed. The overall passage rate in 2025 was 65%.

The Virgin Islands Law Component (VILC) of the bar exam was also administered four times during the fiscal year on December 5, 2024, March 6, 2025, June 5, 2025, and September 4, 2025, with a total of 27 applicants sitting for the VILC during the fiscal year.



There are three classes of admissions to the Virgin Islands Bar: regular admission, special admission, and *pro hac vice*, which are governed by Supreme Court Rules 201, 202 and 204. During FY 2025, the Office of Bar Admissions evaluated 149 newly filed applications for admission and concluded 151 admissions cases including applications pending from the previous year. Two in-person bar admission ceremonies were held on November 19, 2024, and March 21, 2025, in which 18 attorneys were admitted to the practice of law in the Virgin Islands. By the close of FY 2025, 91 admissions cases remained pending.

BAR ADMISSIONS

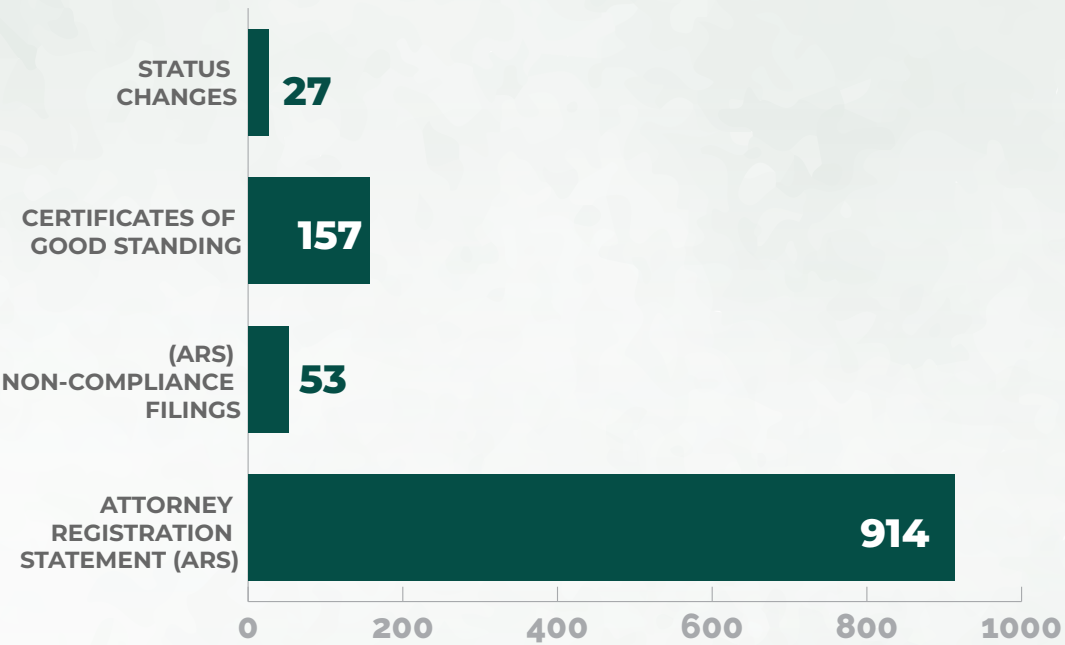


|                        | BEGIN PENDING | FILED | TERMINATED | PENDING |
|------------------------|---------------|-------|------------|---------|
| REGULAR ADMISSION      | 53            | 39    | 35         | 57      |
| SPECIAL ADMISSION      | 8             | 8     | 8          | 9       |
| PRO HAC VICE ADMISSION | 27            | 100   | 102        | 25      |
| TOTAL                  | 88            | 147   | 145        | 91      |

**Status Changes.** Regular members of the Virgin Islands Bar Association may petition the Supreme Court to be either “active” or “inactive” and the Supreme Court may grant an attorney permission to resign or resume his or her VI Bar membership. During FY 2025, the Office of Bar Admissions received 29 petitions from members electing to change their membership status. 17 members requested inactive status, 3 petitioned for resumption of active practice of law and 9 members filed petitions to voluntarily resign from the Virgin Islands Bar Association.

**Certificates of Good Standing.** Certificates of Good Standing are issued by the Clerk of the Supreme Court and indicate that an attorney has complied with all membership requirements of the Virgin Islands Bar. Members may require a Certificate of Good Standing to support applications for admission to the bar of another jurisdiction. Eligibility to receive a Certificate of Good Standing requires that the attorney be current with all membership dues, have satisfied all continuing legal education requirements, and be presently authorized to practice law in the Virgin Islands. During FY 2025, 157 requests for issuance of certificates of good standing were processed and 1 request was denied.

OTHER FILINGS AND SERVICES



**Attorney Registration.** In accordance with Rule 203, effective January 1, 2018, the VISCR 203 requires all active members of the Virgin Islands Bar to file an Annual Registration Statement with the Office of Disciplinary Counsel along with a \$50 registration fee. 914 registration statements were filed during FY 2025, and the Office of Bar Admissions certified

to the Office of Disciplinary Counsel that 53 members had not filed an Attorney Registration Statement in FY 2025.

Office of Disciplinary Counsel

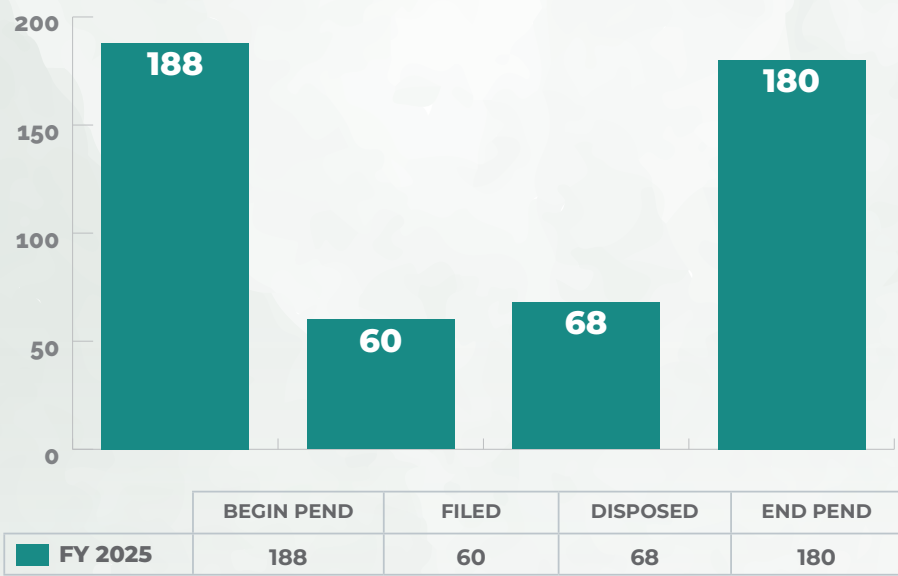
The Office of Disciplinary Counsel (ODC) exists to investigate and prosecute allegations of misconduct against judges and attorneys. In keeping with its responsibility to assist the Supreme Court in preserving trust and confidence in the judicial system, the Disciplinary Counsel tracks data for Judicial Discipline, Judicial Disability, Attorney Discipline, Attorney Disability, and Receiverships, and also works with the IOLTA Board under the revised Trust Account Rules in Rules 211.

Pursuant to VISCR 209, Disciplinary Counsel investigates complaints under the direction of a three-member investigative panel. Upon completion of an investigation, the panel determines whether formal charges are warranted, and if so, Disciplinary Counsel prosecutes the complaint before a hearing panel.

In FY 2025, 54 attorney misconduct grievances were filed, 1 new case alleging unauthorized practice was filed, and 4 complaints regarding judicial conduct were received. The Office of Disciplinary Counsel disposed of 68 misconduct cases, 61 related to attorney misconduct, and 2 cases involving the Unauthorized Practice of Law (UPL). By the close of the fiscal year, 20 cases were pending review before the Board on Professional Responsibility, and 5 discipline cases were pending review before the Supreme Court.



DISCIPLINE CASELOAD



**Discipline History Requests and Notices of Non-Compliance.** The Office of Disciplinary Counsel is also responsible for responding to requests for discipline histories for Virgin Islands attorneys seeking admission to the bars of other states or employment in the federal judiciary. In FY 2025, the Office of Disciplinary Council issued 62 discipline histories.

**Receiverships.** Pursuant to Rule 207.24, Disciplinary Counsel also has the power to act as or retain the

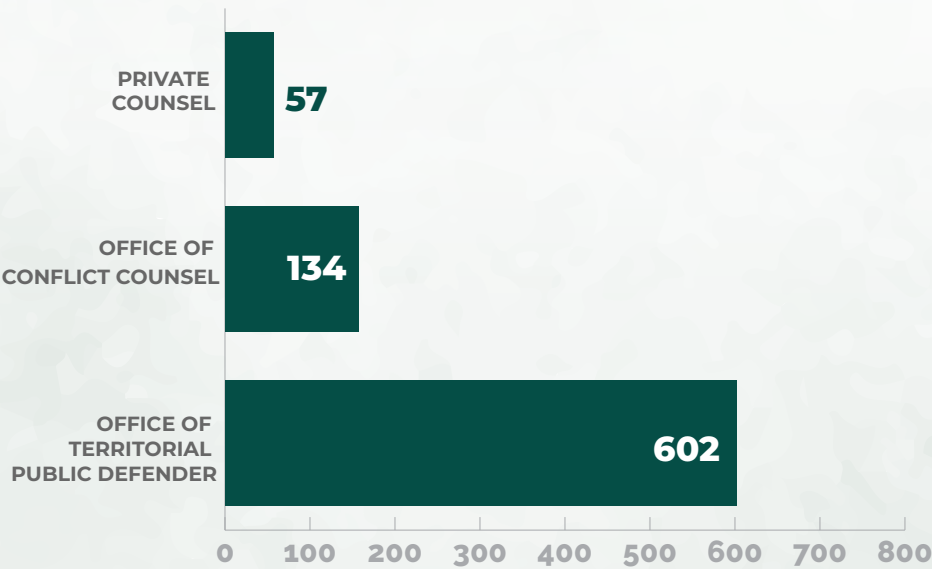
services of an outside lawyer to act as a receiver in cases of death, disability, abandonment, suspension, or disbarment for active attorneys. One new receivership was opened in FY 2024 and the Office of Disciplinary Counsel continued to serve as the receiver in two cases during FY 2025.

Indigent Appointments and Conflict Counsel

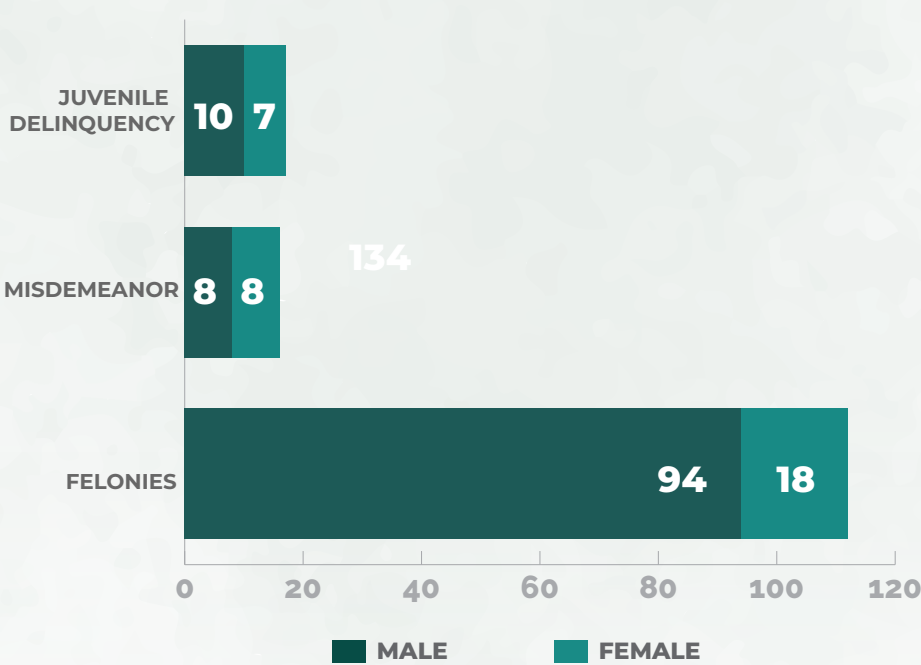
Supreme Court Rule 210 governs the indigent appointment process and was amended in FY 2023 to establish the Office of Conflict Counsel (OCC) for automatic appointment in all cases where the Office of the Territorial Public Defender has a conflict with indigent representation. The OCC was established by law on December 31, 2024, by Act No. 8960. As an independent arm of the Judiciary, the Office of Conflict Counsel operates under the supervision of the Standing Committee of Indigent Appointments and manages the appointment process once a conflict with the Office of the Territorial Public Defender is established. Nonetheless, private attorneys may be appointed as counsel in the rare instance that the Office of the Public Defender, the Office of Conflict Counsel, and all of the attorneys on the indigent defense panel are unable to represent a particular defendant.

During FY 2025, clerks of court entered 793 orders issued by judges regarding the appointment of counsel. By the close of FY 2025, the Office of Conflict Counsel had been appointed in 134 cases, 78 in the District of St. Thomas-St. John and 56 in the District of

APPOINTED COUNSEL CASES



OCC CASE DEMOGRAPHICS



St. Croix. Of the 134 cases assigned to OCC, 112 involved major felonies, 8 of which involved murder charges. By the close of fiscal year 2025, the OCC had resolved 118 cases by agreement and won a murder case that went to trial in which the jury determined that the defendant was not guilty. The OCC also served as appointed counsel in 17 juvenile delinquency cases.

While the Office of Conflict Counsel continues to fill a critical representation gap to ensure the timely disposition of cases, the sheer volume of appointed cases nonetheless required 57 appointments of private attorneys to represent indigent clients during the fiscal year. Accordingly, and in addition to providing administrative and funding support for the operations of the Office of Conflict Counsel, the Judiciary still expended \$315,056.72 to compensate private attorneys for indigent representation in FY 2025, 57% reduction in these expenses when compared to previous year.

SUPERIOR COURT CASE STATISTICS

The Superior Court of the Virgin Islands consists of ten judges and four magistrate judges, divided equally between the two judicial districts of St. Thomas-St. John and St. Croix. The Judges are appointed by the Governor to serve six-year terms with the advice and consent of the Legislature. The four Magistrate Judges are appointed by the Presiding Judge with the approval of a majority of the other judges of the Superior Court for terms of four years.



Hon. Jessica Gallivan  
Presiding Judge



Hon. Denise Francois  
Administrative Judge

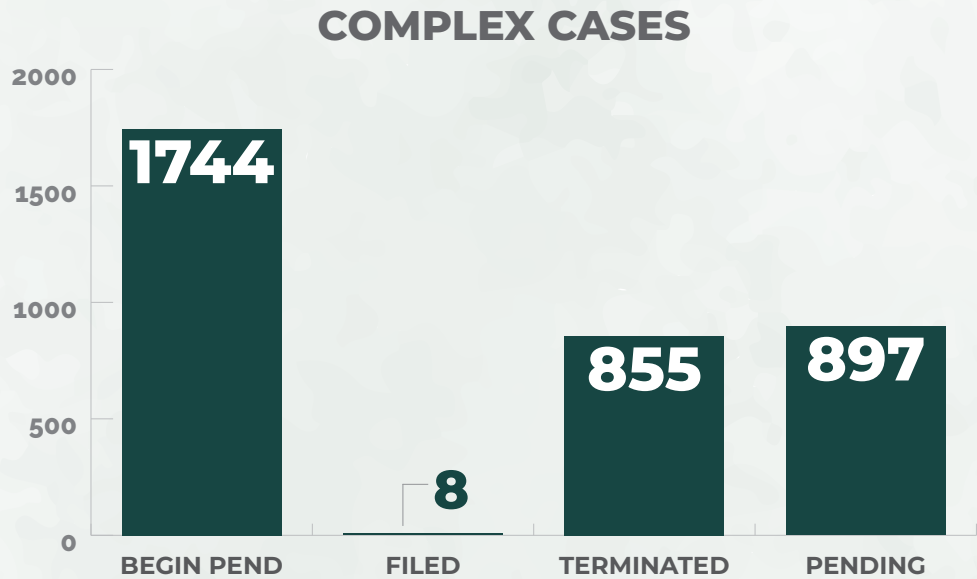
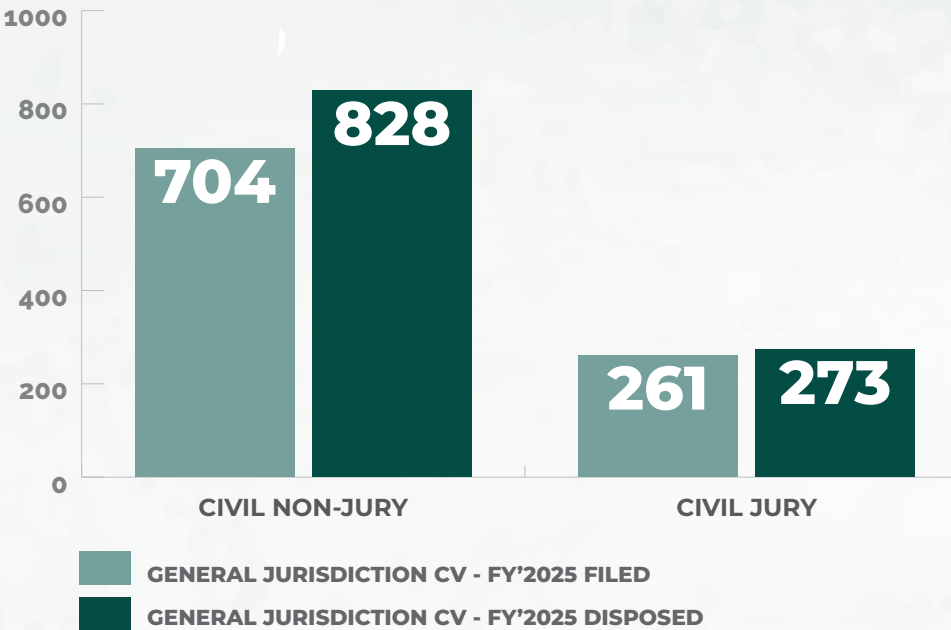
The Presiding Judge of the Superior Court alternates between the Judicial Districts every three years, and effective August 1, 2025, the Honorable Jessica Gallivan began her three-year term as Presiding Judge of the Superior Court of the Virgin Islands. The Presiding Judge is responsible for the judicial operations of the Superior Court, appoints the Clerk of the



Superior Court and oversees the operations of the Superior Court Clerk’s Office. To assist in the management of these administrative functions across judicial districts, the Presiding Judge also selects an Administrative Judge in the alternate district. Presiding Judge Gallivan named the Honorable Denise M. Francois to serve as the Administrative Judge in the District of St. Thomas-St. John. The Judiciary thanks the Honorable Debra S. Watlington and the Honorable Alphonso Andrews for their prior service as Presiding Judge and Administrative Judge respectively, and the Honorable Denise M. Francois for her service as Administrative Judge until her elevation to the Supreme Court.

Subject to the Authority of the Presiding Judge, the Clerk of the Superior Court is responsible for the management of cases at the trial court level. The Clerk’s Office also facilitates the availability of interpreting services, including American Sign Language, enters the court’s orders, judgments, and decrees, and—in coordination with the Judicial Branch Administrative Office—generates and validates statistical reports from the automated case management system. The following caseload trends are reported by Superior Court Divisions for FY 2025.

**Civil Division.** In accordance with Title 4 V.I.C. § 76(a), the Superior Court has original jurisdiction over all local civil actions regardless of the amount in controversy. During FY 2025, 965 new non-complex civil cases were filed (704 non-jury cases and 261 jury cases). The Superior Court disposed of 1,101 non-complex civil matters for a case clearance rate of 114%, reducing the pending non-complex civil caseload by 12%. Regarding cases pending within the Complex Litigation Division, 855 complex litigation cases were disposed,

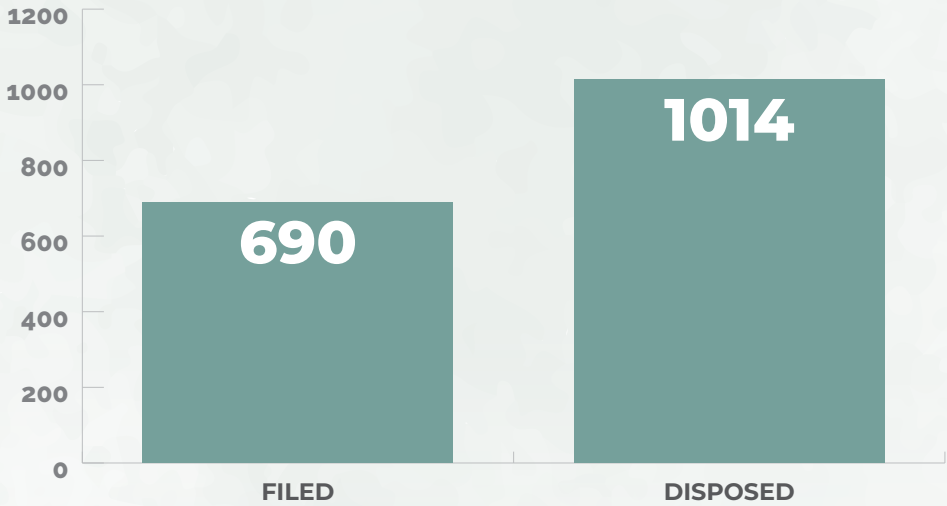


while just 8 new civil matters were designated as complex in FY 2025. By the close of FY 2025, the pending complex litigation caseload had been reduced by nearly 49%. It is important, however, to highlight the correlation between the resolution of two Master Cases, otherwise known as consolidated cases, at the trial court complex litigation level and the immediate increase in filings of civil appeals in the Supreme Court of the Virgin

Islands. The resolution of the two Master Cases resulted in 160 cases appealed directly to the Supreme Court.

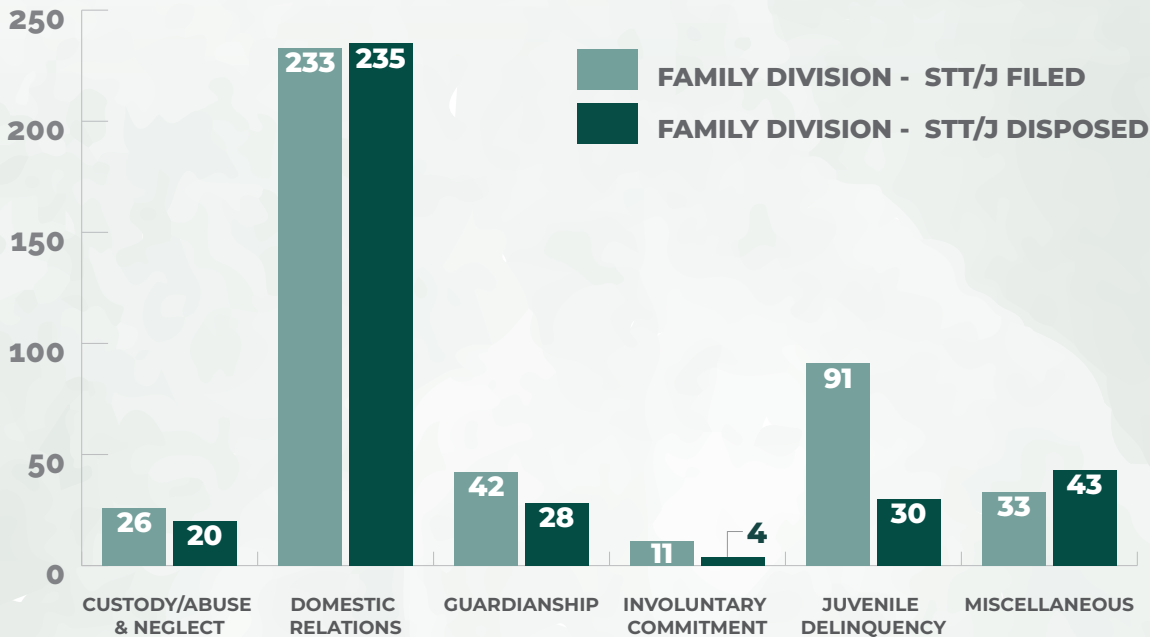
**Criminal Division.** Effective January 1, 1994, the Superior Court of the Virgin Islands assumed original jurisdiction over all criminal offenses committed in violation of the Virgin Islands Code. During FY 2025, the Superior Court continued to make significant progress in reducing the number of pending criminal matters. 690 new criminal cases were filed and 1,014 cases were disposed for a reduction of 38% in the pending criminal caseload. By the close of FY 2025, a total of 367 criminal cases were pending in the Superior Court, 137 in the District of St. Thomas and St. John and 230 in the District of St. Croix.

FY '25 GENERAL JURISDICTION - CRIMINAL



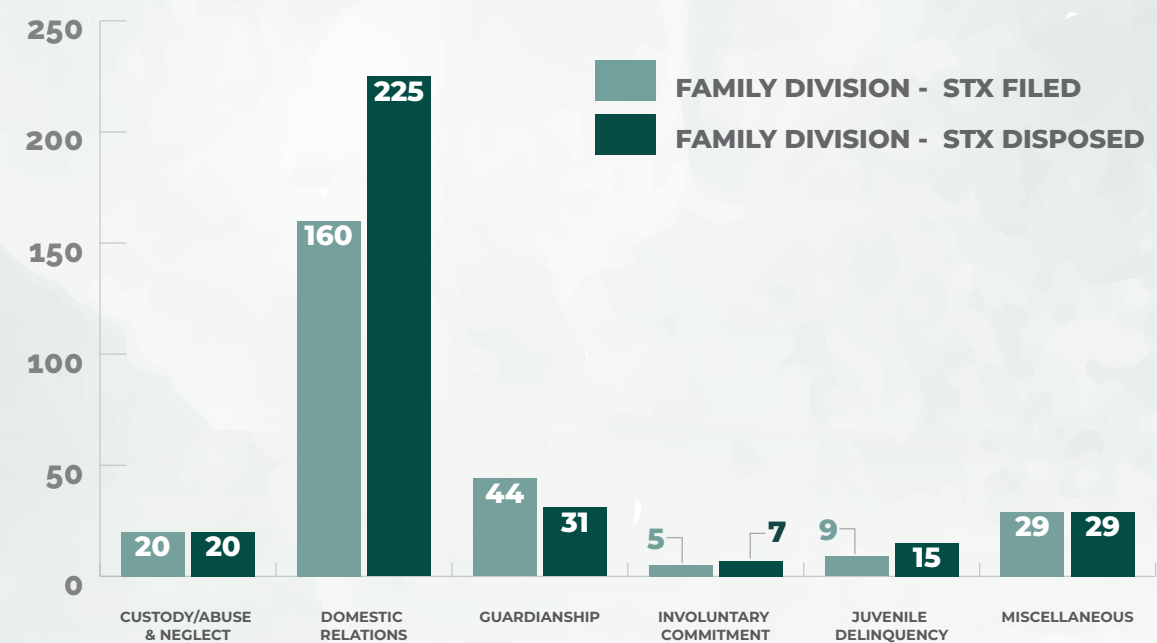
**Family Division.** The Family Division was established in accordance with Title 4 V.I.C. § 79. This division maintains all pending case files pertaining to marriage, divorce, separation, and annulment; actions relating to support of relations; adoption; changes of name; paternity suits; actions to appoint and supervise guardians; and actions relating to juvenile matters. During FY 2025, a combined total of 703 new cases were filed, and 687 cases were disposed resulting in an annual case clearance rate of 98%. Filings and dispositions by district are detailed in the two charts below.

FY '25 FAMILY DIVISION - STT/J





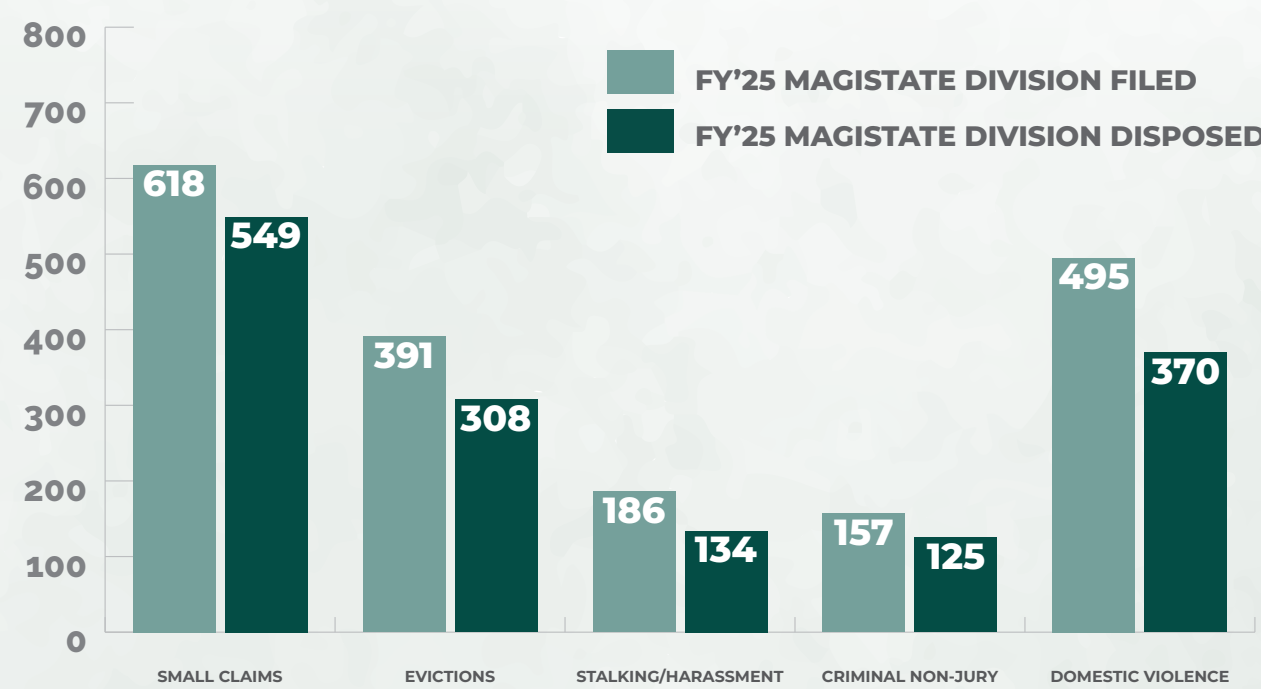
FY '25 FAMILY DIVISION - STX



MAGISTRATE DIVISION OF THE SUPERIOR COURT

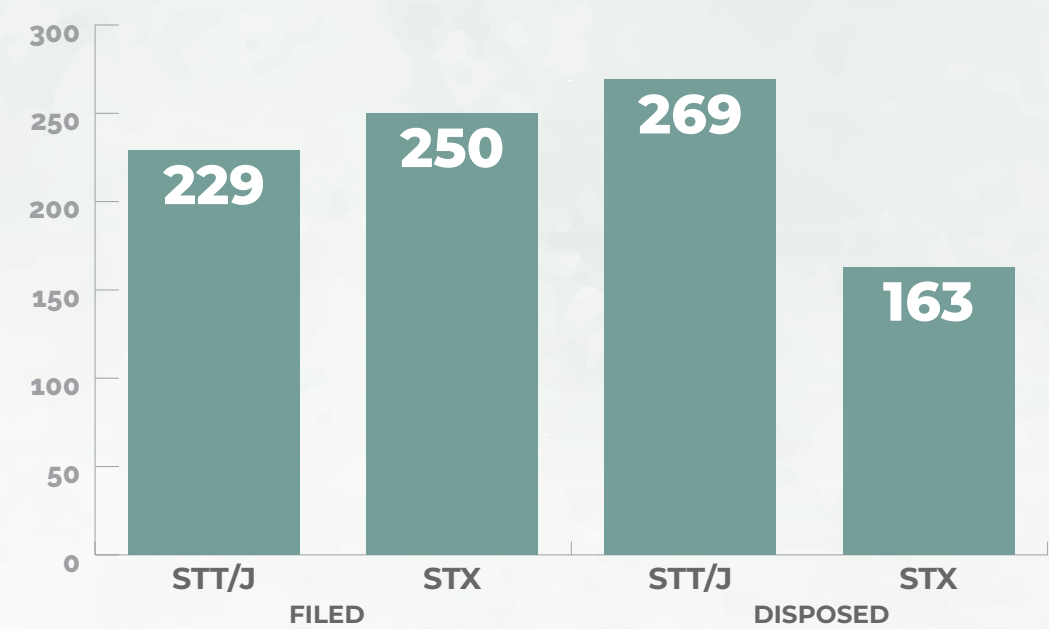
The Magistrate Division of the Superior Court consists of a total of four Magistrate Judges with two in each judicial district. The division hears non-felony traffic cases, forcible entry and detainer cases, misdemeanor criminal cases under one-year sentence, domestic violence cases, landlord-tenant actions, small claims, probate, and litter cases. In FY 2025, a total of 18,223 new matters were filed in the Magistrate Division in both districts and 12,529 matters were terminated for a clearance rate of 94%. Due to increased traffic and litter enforcement initiatives, filings increased by nearly 24%. Nonetheless, the Superior Court experienced a 21% increase in the number of cases disposed when compared to the 10,381 cases closed in the previous year.

FY '25 MAGISTRATE JURISDICTION



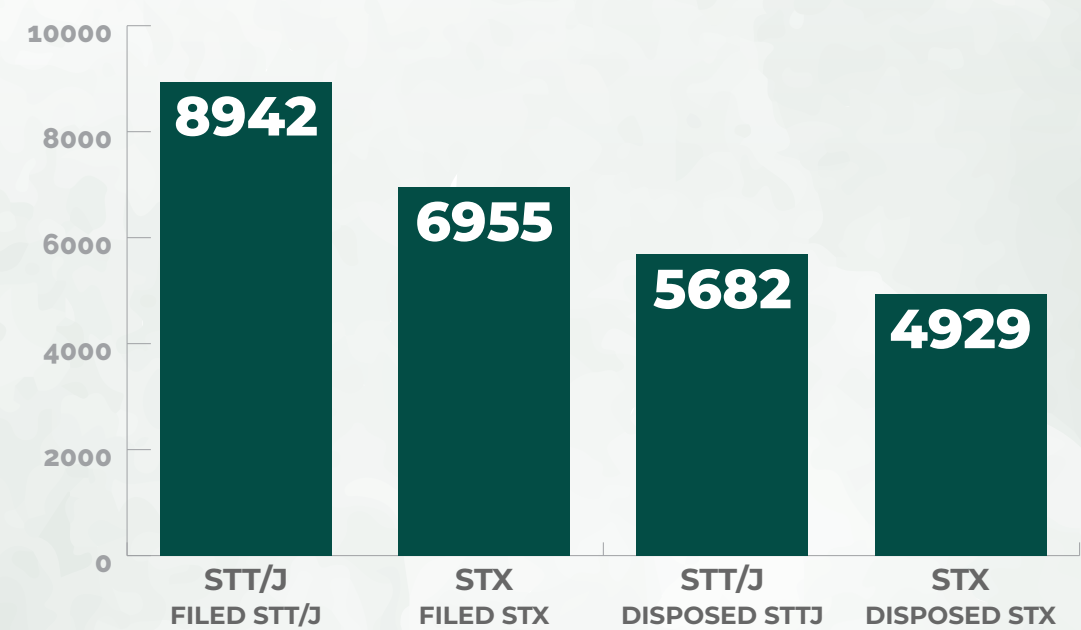
**Probate Division.** The Superior Court has original jurisdiction over the probate of wills and the administration of decedents' estates. Consistent with 4 V.I.C. §79, probate matters are handled primarily in the Magistrate Division. During FY 2025, 479 new probate matters were filed in the Magistrate Division of the Superior Court and 432 were disposed resulting in an annual case clearance rate of 90%.

PROBATE CASELOAD



**Traffic Division.** The Magistrate Division is also responsible for the disposition of cases related to traffic offenses and other citations, as well as the preparation of the applicable records and reports relating to traffic offenses and citations as directed by the Superior Court. In FY 2025, 15,897 new cases were filed, and 10,611 cases were closed as of September 30, 2025. As previously reported, the Go-Live for the E-citation project occurred in late FY 2025.

TRAFFIC & OTHER CITATIONS



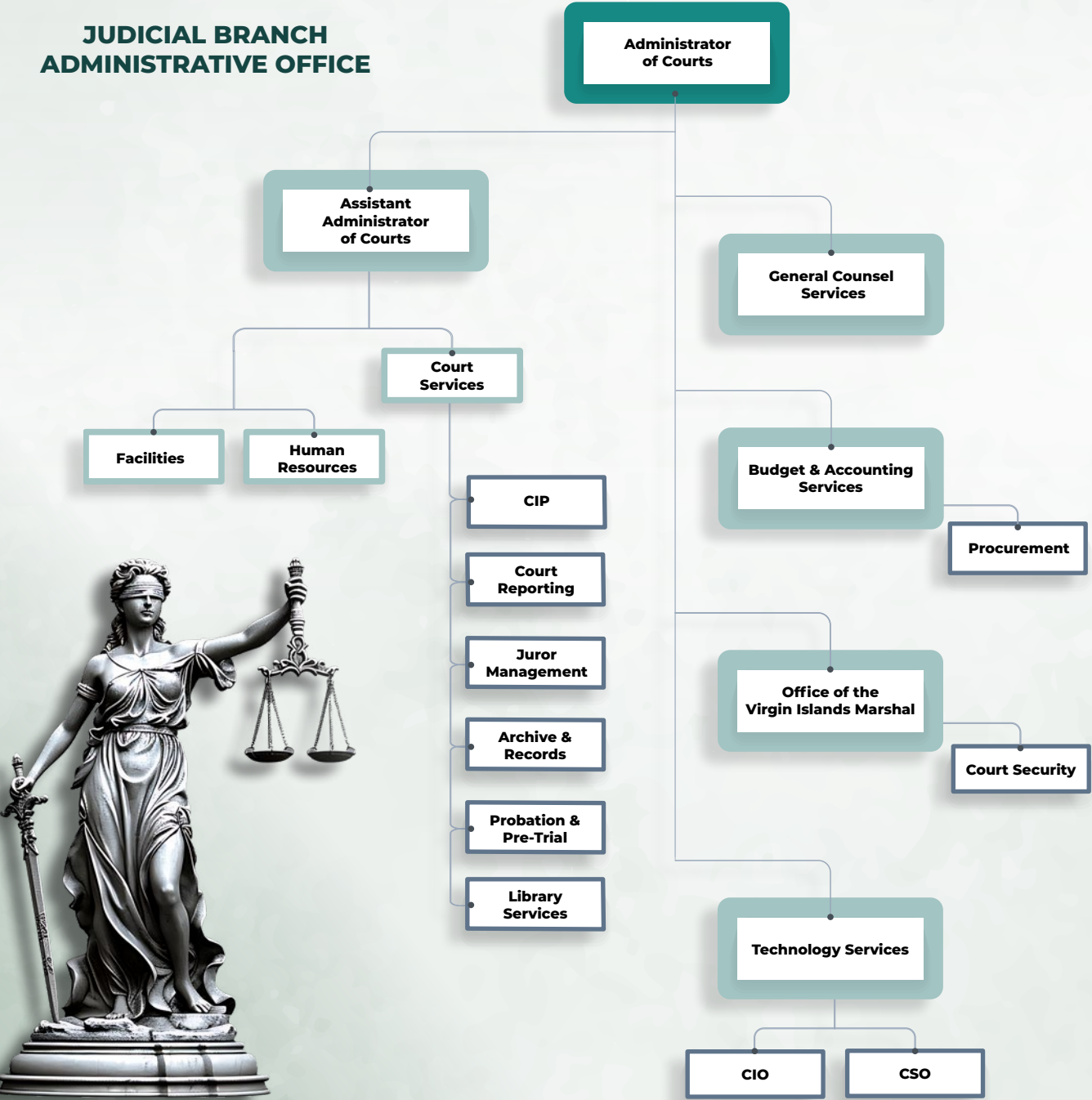
By the close of the fiscal year, 964 moving violations and 7 parking violations had been processed as E-Citations, 87% of which were issued in the St. Thomas-St. John District.





# The Judicial Branch Administrative Office

The Judicial Branch Administrative Office, under the direction of the Administrator of Courts and subject to the authority of the Chief Justice, is responsible for the management and supervision of the day-to-day centralized non-judicial operations of the branch. This office assists the Chief Justice in the preparation and publishing of the annual report of the judiciary, as well as the preparation of the Judiciary’s annual budget. For FY 2025, the Judiciary of the Virgin Islands requested an appropriation of \$55,385,237 to fund its normal operations and was appropriated \$41,080,00 by the 36th Legislature of the Virgin Islands to fund operations of the branch.



## FISCAL YEAR 2025 EXPENDITURES BY PROGRAM

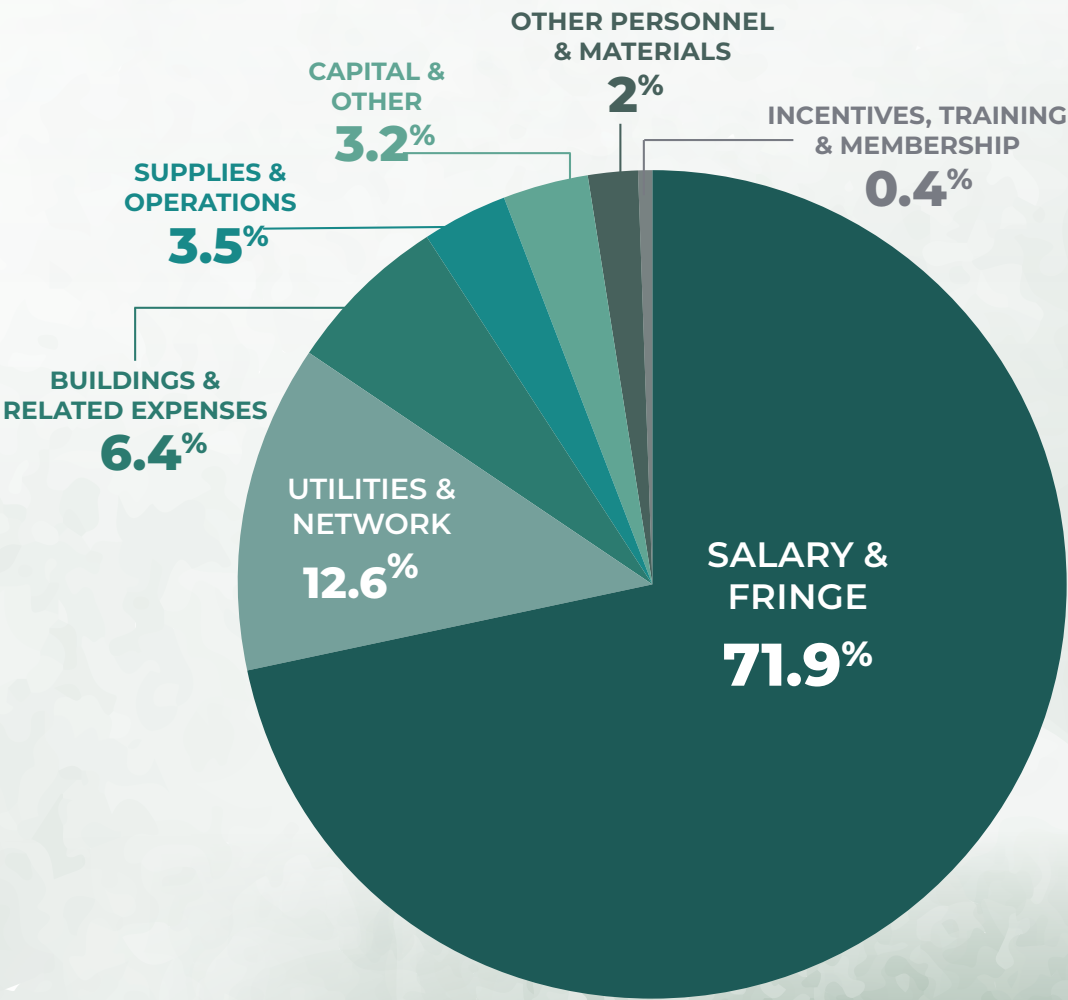
### Expenditures By Program

- Salary & Fringe: **\$30,306,087**
- Utilities & Network Infrastructure: **\$5,307,061**
- Buildings & Related Expenses: **\$2,699,807**
- Supplies & Operations **\$1,462,708**
- Capital & Other **\$1,347,359**
- Other Personnel & Materials: **\$820,617**
- Incentives, Membership & Training: **\$188,916**

**Total Expenditures: \$42,132,554\***

*\*Includes expenses supported or otherwise reimbursed by grant funding.*

## EXPENDITURES BY PROGRAM





**Other Funding.** In FY 2025, the Judicial Branch Administrative Office continued to manage approximately 8.5 million dollars in Federal Grants after offsets and adjustments as shown below:

| GRANTOR AGENCY                               | TYPE OF GRANT                                                                             | MANAGED GRANT AWARDS | Expense/ Reimbursement as of 9/30/25 | BALANCE FORWARD |
|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------|
| U.S. Department of Health and Human Services | State Court Improvement Program Basic, Training and Data Grants                           | \$ 518,671.00        |                                      |                 |
| Basic, Data, Training                        | FY2024 Two-Year Grant \$258,615.00                                                        |                      |                                      |                 |
| Basic, Data, Training                        | FY2025 Two-Year Grant \$260, 056.00                                                       |                      |                                      |                 |
| U. S. Department of Treasury Public Law      | American Rescue Plan Act of 2021                                                          | \$ 4,977,258.00      | \$ 3,575,565.57                      | \$ 1,401,692.43 |
| U.S. Department of Homeland Security         | Office of Disaster Recovery (ODR) - FEMA                                                  | \$ 1,038,531.00      | - \$ 985,027.40*                     | \$ 53,503.60    |
| U.S. Department of Homeland Security         | Office of Disaster Recovery (ODR) - FEMA                                                  | \$ 3,885,596.16      | - \$ 1,042,391.42*                   | \$ 2,843,204.74 |
| Law Enforcement Planning Commission          | FY2022 VAWA STOP Grant - (In Process- Formula Subgrant Application Completed) \$28,350.00 | \$ 28,350.00         | \$ 28,350.00                         | \$ -            |
| Law Enforcement Planning Commission          | FY2021 VAWA STOP Grant - (In Process- Formula Subgrant Application Completed) \$28,182.00 | \$ 28,182.00         | \$ 28,182.00                         | \$ -            |
| Law Enforcement Planning Commission          | FY2020 Edward Byrne Memorial Assistance Grant - (JAG) \$137,790.00                        | \$ 137,790.00        | \$ 69,879.00                         | \$ 67,911.00    |
| TOTAL                                        |                                                                                           | \$ 10,614,378.16     |                                      | \$ 4,366,311.77 |

\*Insurance Offsets applied to Judiciary Recovery Projects.

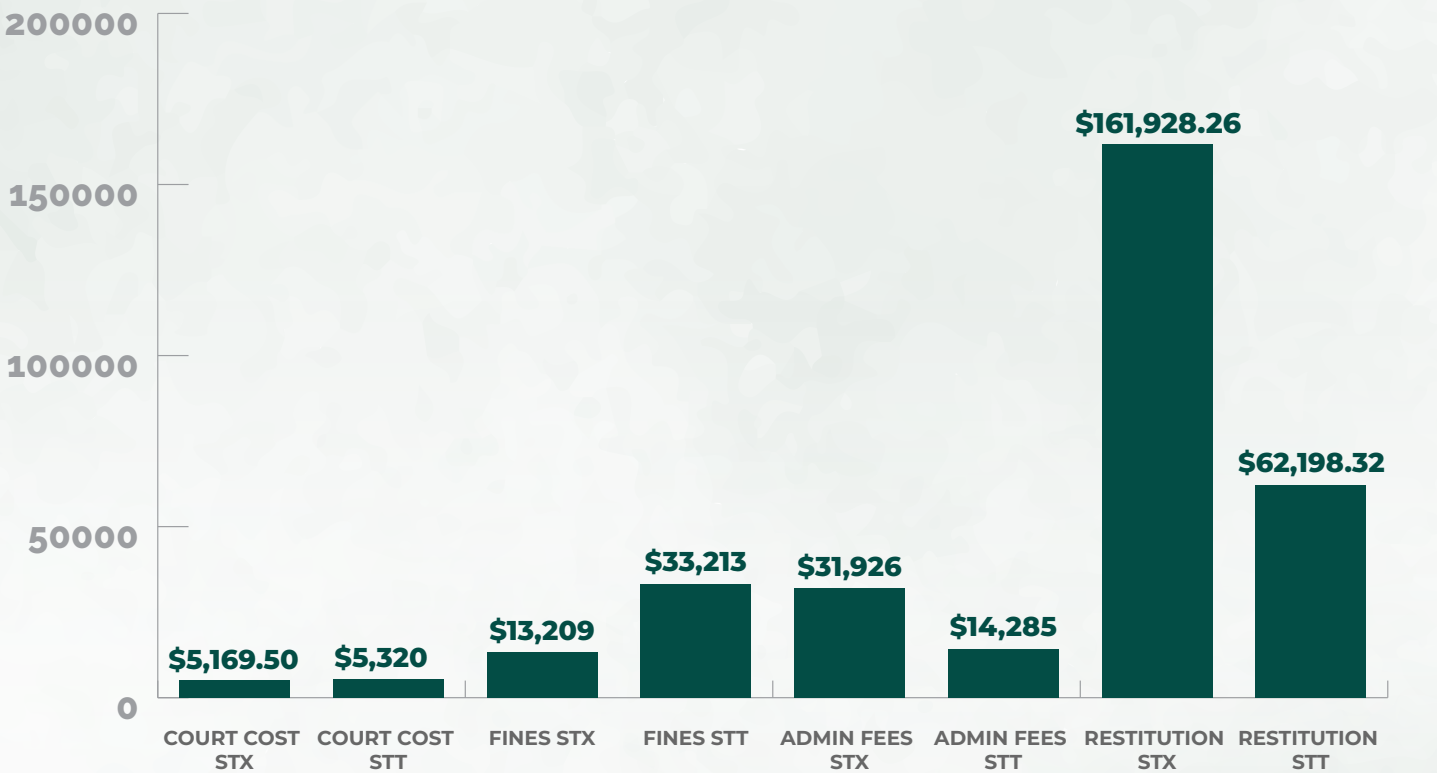
REVENUE COLLECTIONS

The Judicial Branch is a passthrough entity with regards to court generated collections. The fees collected include but may not be limited to filing fees, marriage license and ceremony fees, certified marriage returns, traffic and parking fines, court costs and penalties, criminal fines, probation administrative fees, pre-trial administrative fees, certified document fees, bail forfeitures, conservation and litter fines, and notary fees. In FY 2025, the Judicial Branch collected a total of \$2,055,718.47 in fines and fees payable to the government and allocated to the various government funds as shown below.

| FISCAL YEAR 2025 COURT GENERATED REVENUE |                      |            |                    |              |
|------------------------------------------|----------------------|------------|--------------------|--------------|
|                                          | St. Thomas- St. John | St. Croix  | Online Collections | Total        |
| General Fund                             | 334,100.97           | 325,757.50 | 288,532.00         | 948,390.47   |
| Transportation Trust Fund                | 348,592.50           | 286,027.50 | 205,065.00         | 839,685.00   |
| Special Fund                             | 50,655.00            | 59,393.00  | 64,900.00          | 174,948.00   |
| Solid Waste Fund                         | 55,600.00            | 33,095.00  | 4,000.00           | 92,695.00    |
| TOTAL                                    | 788,948.47           | 705,273.00 | 273,965.00         | 2,055,718.47 |

In addition, collections from the Offices of Pre-Trial Intervention, Pre-Trial, Probation and Parole contributed to the overall revenue collection in the courts as follows:

COLLECTIONS (FY 2024-2025)



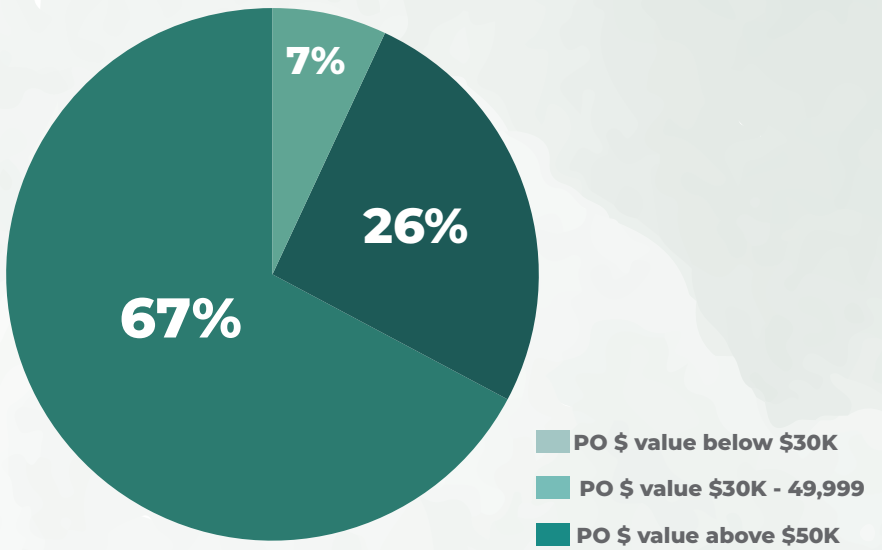
In FY 2025, major projects within the Judicial Branch also contributed \$205,180.63 in revenue to the government due to gross receipt withholdings paid directly by the Judiciary to the Bureau of Internal Revenue in accordance with 33 V. I. C. §43.

PROCUREMENT

In FY 2025, the Judicial Branch Administrative Office processed 315 purchase orders with a total value of \$4,618,088.58. \$1.4 million of the total purchases were funded by grants.

When compared to the previous fiscal year, the decrease in overall purchasing is primarily attributable to the completion or near completion of several large, one-time capital and construction projects. Purchasing and infrastructure repair projects were also curtailed due to funding constraints. Consequently, only one formal solicitation was issued in FY 2025 and was critically necessary due to the impending expiration of the term for the Judiciary's contract for Monitored

\$ VALUE BY THRESHOLDS





House Arrest. Accordingly, in the fourth quarter of FY 2025, the Judiciary issued a Request for Proposal 0001/2025 for electronic monitoring equipment and services for the Judiciary’s House Arrest Program. Due to the timing of the solicitation and fiscal year reporting cutoff, the final evaluation of vendor proposals and award occurred in the first quarter of FY 2026. A new three-year contract was awarded in the amount of \$171,094 per annum, resulting in a projected 52% increase for fiscal year 2026.

COURT SERVICES

**Court Reporting Division.** The Court Reporting Division continues to operate under a hybrid service model, combining traditional stenographic reporting with digital recording technology through the use of the JAVS electronic recording system, supported by Qualified Electronic Operators (QEOs). This structure allows for operational flexibility across the Territory and adequate coverage for in-person and virtual proceedings to maintain verbatim record integrity. Successful integration of QEOs has ensured operational continuity despite national stenographer shortages. Moreover, increased use of JAVs has eliminated prior backlog concerns.

The following reflects key performance metrics for FY 2025:

Total Transcript Requests: 185

Distribution by District:

- St. Croix: 101 (55%)
- St. Thomas-St. John: 84 (45%)

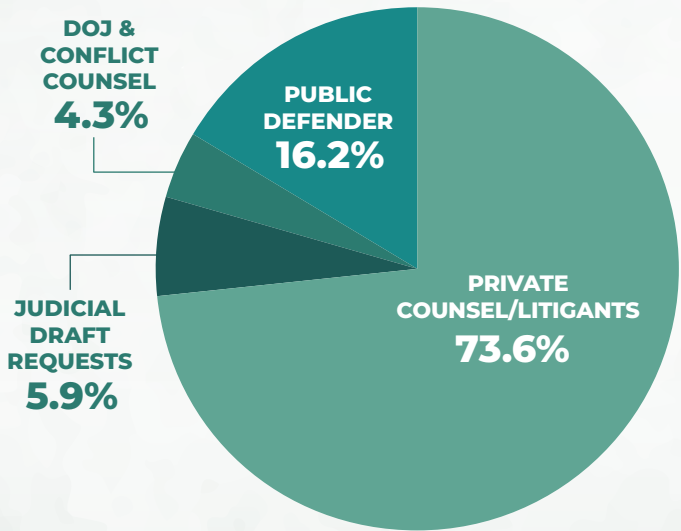
Request Breakdown by Source:

- Private Counsel/Litigants: 136 (73.5%)
- Public Defender: 30 (16.3%)
- DOJ & Conflict Counsel: 8 (4.3%)
- Judicial Draft Requests: 11 (5.9%)

Breakdown of Other Category:

- Appellate Transcripts: 26
- JAVS-Based Transcriptions: 76

TRANSCRIPT REQUEST SOURCE DISTRIBUTION (FY 2025)



When compared to FY 2024, there is a marginal decrease of 2.1% in the number of transcript requests. This slight downward shift is negligible and reflects a stabilization in operations rather than a decline. Of the total request for FY 2025, 94% were external requests, 29% of which were related to cases on appeal. 41% of the transcripts produced were generated from JAVS recordings. A greater reliance on technology, primarily funded through the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds, continues to successfully mitigate the impact of the ongoing national shortage of stenographers.

**The Jury Management Division.** The Jury Management Division is responsible for overseeing the preparation of the master list of qualified prospective jurors for criminal and civil jury trials conducted in the Superior Court of the Virgin Islands. The division secures jurors, representing a cross-section of the community, by sending Juror Qualification Questionnaires to determine prospective jurors’ ability to serve and by issuing corresponding summonses to appear for juror service. In FY 2025, the division issued 8,071 Summons/Juror Questionnaires and qualified 4,095 persons for jury duty, an 11% increase in qualified jurors when compared to the number in 2024. Of those qualified for service, 2,2970 or nearly 73% were excused, exempted or otherwise disqualified.

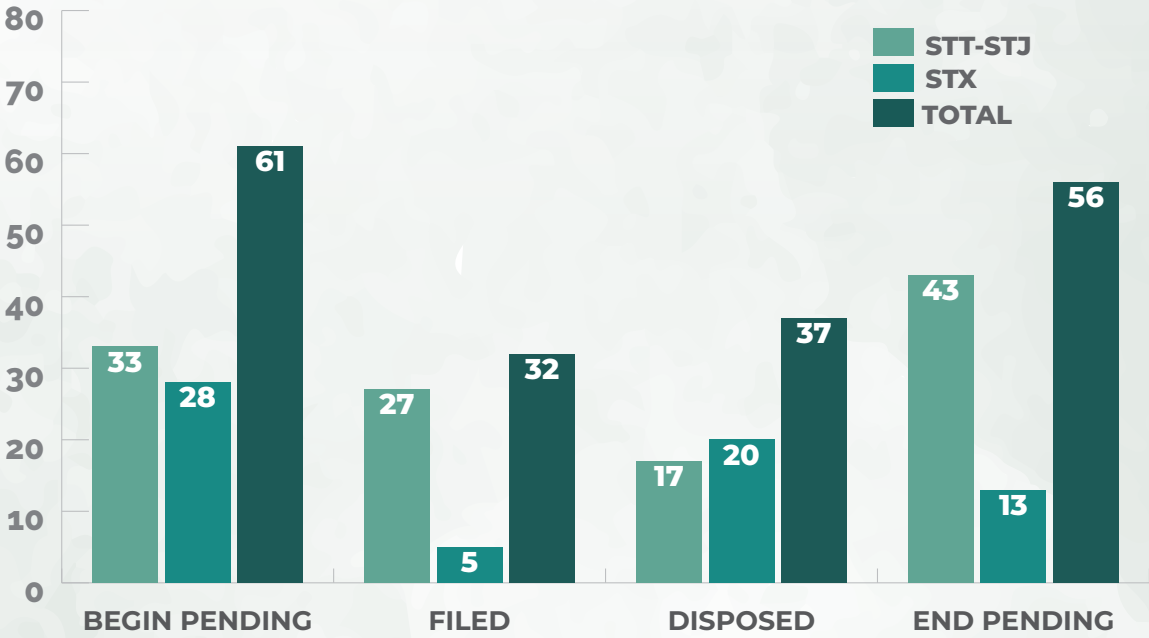
Overall, the data confirms that strengthening juror pool development—through improved data accuracy, fewer undeliverable juror summons, and expanded outreach—remains critical to ensuring consistent availability of jurors across both districts

The Judiciary expended \$107,489.30 for juror service in FY 2025 as follows :

| JUDICIARY EXPENSE FOR JUROR SERVICE - FISCAL YEAR 2025 |                 |                           |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|
| EXPENSE                                                | ST. CROIX (STX) | ST. THOMAS-ST. JOHN (STT) |
| Jury Fees                                              | \$45,720.00     | \$27,795.00               |
| Transportation Allowance                               | \$7,800.00      | \$4,065.00                |
| Meals                                                  | \$12,525.80     | \$9,583.50                |
| TOTAL EXPENDITURES                                     | \$66,045.80     | \$41,443.50               |

**Pre-trial Intervention (Diversion Cases).**The Pre-trial Intervention Program (PIP) provides an alternative to incarceration for first-time offenders pursuant to V.I.C. Title 5 § 4612. Participation is voluntary. However, once a client is accepted into the program, he/she is required to pay an administrative fee in the amount of \$200.00, pursuant to Title 5 V.I.C. Section 4612 (d) along with \$75.00 in court costs. Upon successful completion of the program, cases are dismissed, and participants may petition the Superior Court for expungement of their record. During FY 2025, 32 new cases filed territorially: 27 cases in the St. Thomas-St. John District and 5 cases in the St. Croix District. By the close of the fiscal year, 37 cases were successfully terminated: 17 cases in the St. Thomas-St. John District and 20 cases in the St. Croix District, and 56 cases remained active.

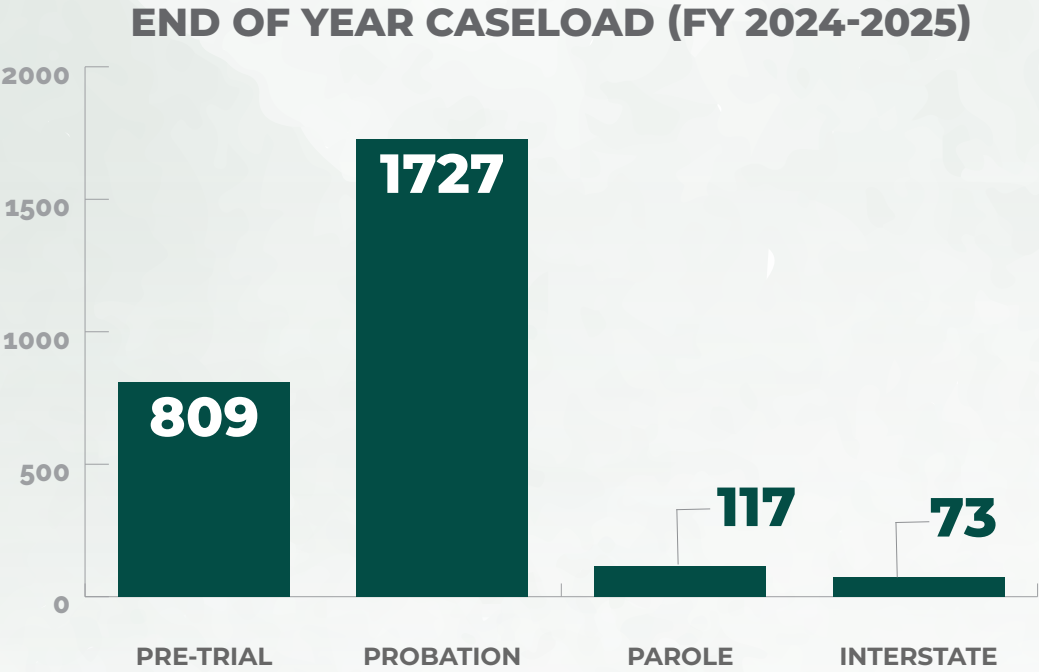
PRE-TRAIL DIVERSIONS (FY 2025)





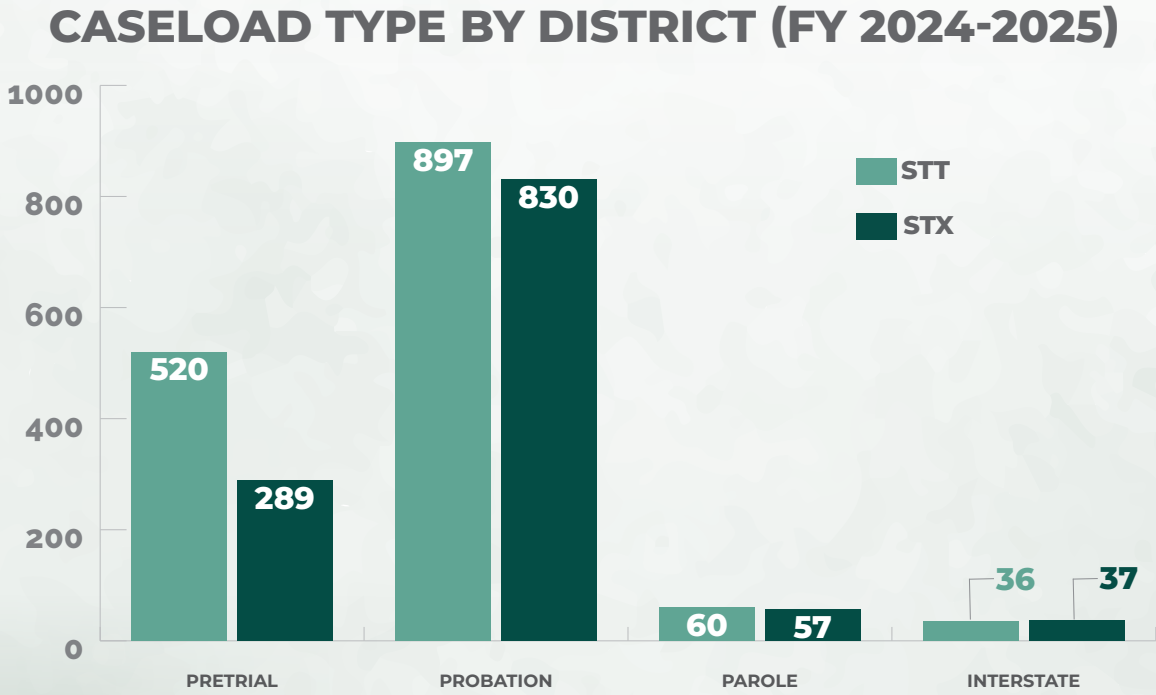
Pre-Trial, Probation & Parole

During FY 2025, the Office of Pre-Trial, Probation and Parole (OPPP) continued to provide comprehensive supervision and investigative services throughout the Virgin Islands, including pre-trial release supervision, probation and parole supervision, and interstate compact investigations and transfers. The division also maintained responsibility for the preparation of pre-sentence investigation reports and the delivery of structured case management services in support of the court.



By the close of the fiscal year, the division maintained a total territorial caseload of 2,726 cases (STT: 1513 / STX: 1213). This included 809 pre-trial cases, 1,727 probation cases, 117 parole cases, and 73 interstate compact cases. Probation supervision continued to represent the largest share of the division’s workload, reflecting the sustained demand for community-based supervision and offender management services across both districts.

In FY 2025, 218 new requests for pre-sentencing reports were processed, 150 in the District of St. Croix and 68 in the District of St. Thomas and St. John. OPPP completed 253 reports, 185 in the District of St. Croix and 68 in the District of St. Thomas and St. John. In addition to investigative responsibilities, probation officers carried out extensive case management activities to ensure compliance and support rehabilitation efforts. During the fiscal year, the division conducted 16,117 office visits in St. Croix and 13,826 in St. Thomas. Officers also performed 301 field visits

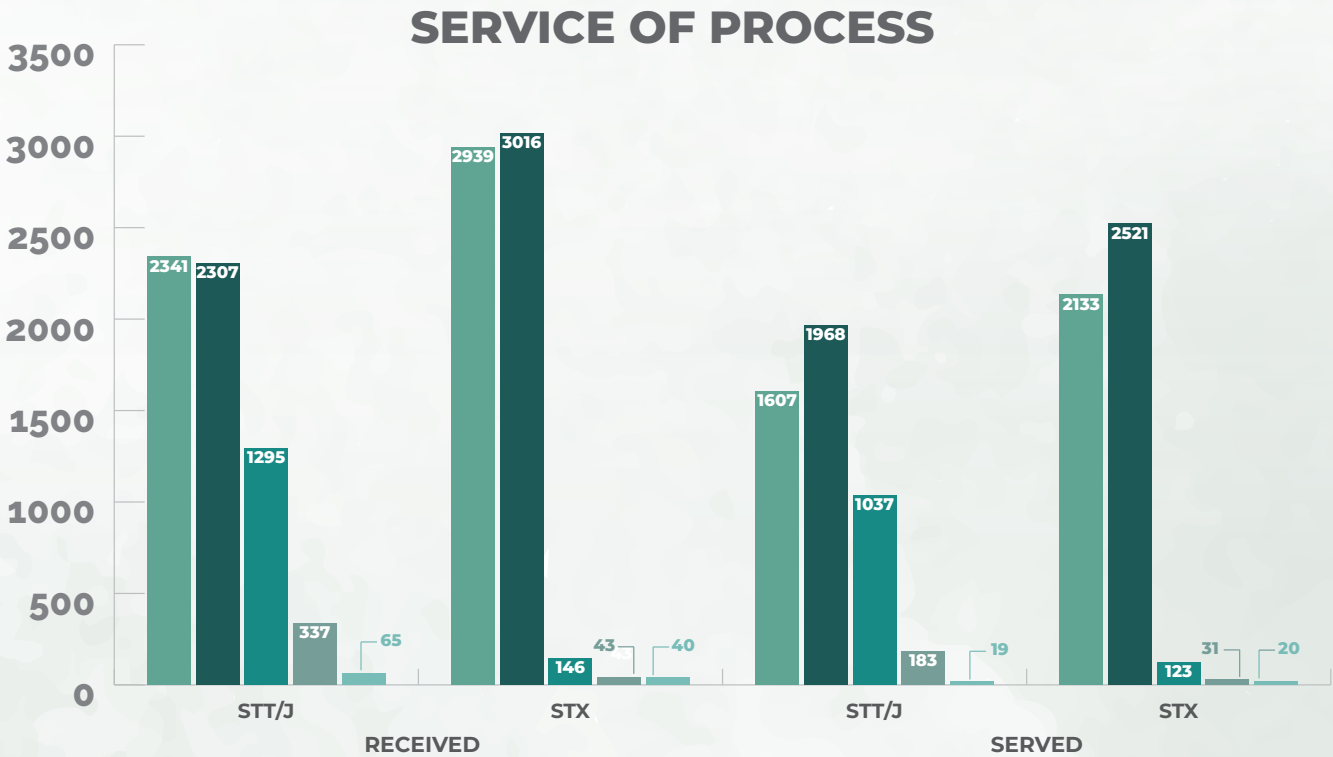


in St. Croix and 89 in St. Thomas; issued 100 referrals in St. Croix and 82 in St. Thomas; and attended 395 court appearances in St. Croix and 125 in St. Thomas. These activities reflect the division’s continued commitment to active supervision, monitoring, and engagement with clients and stakeholders.

JUDICIAL SECURITY

The Office of the Virgin Islands Marshal (OVIM) is responsible for ensuring the safety and security of judicial officers, judicial proceedings and facilities, as well as that of staff and members of the public at five courthouse locations across both districts. By the close of FY 2025, OVIM was staffed by just 46 sworn peace officers, 25 in the District of St. Thomas-St. John and 21 in the District of St. Croix. These staffing levels represent an 11% decrease from last fiscal year and a 15% reduction in staffing over two fiscal years, with retirements and resignations the leading cause of dwindling numbers. While this staffing represented a 5% decrease over the previous year, four candidates were already identified for matriculation in the January 2024 police academy. Court security officers are also included within this division, with a total of 12 out of 15 security officer positions filled with continual recruitment. By the close of FY 2024, a total of 61 employees served within OVIM, including three administrative assistants.

The Office of the Virgin Islands Marshals received 12,529 documents in FY 2025 for processing as follows:



|                    | RECEIVED |      | SERVED |      |
|--------------------|----------|------|--------|------|
|                    | STT/J    | STX  | STT/J  | STX  |
| Civil/Small Claims | 2341     | 2939 | 1607   | 2133 |
| Family             | 2307     | 3016 | 1968   | 2521 |
| Criminal           | 1295     | 146  | 1037   | 123  |
| Traffic            | 337      | 43   | 183    | 31   |
| Warrants           | 65       | 40   | 19     | 20   |



HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

**Compensation Study.** In FY 2025, the Judiciary completed the contract engagement with the National Center for State Courts to conduct a compensation study of all judicial branch positions excluding Judicial Officers. The project included staff interviews, the review and revision of job descriptions, training of internal subject matter experts, and a determination of fair and competitive salaries using market surveys and compensation recommendations. 80 benchmark jobs were identified, and comparison markets were found for 71.4% of the benchmark jobs, representing 70% of Judicial Branch staff. The results of the market study indicated that the salary structure for the branch was approximately 4% below market and that the segmented 21-step increases were constricting employee pay. The consultants provided two options for compensation adjustments: 1) Increase the structure by 4% or 2) eliminate the step structure and administer pay around the midpoint by compensation ratio. The judiciary chose option 1, which would increase pay ranges by 4% within the current steps, and increase employee pay by 4%. The Judiciary included the 4% market adjustment in its FY 2026 budget submission. However, the adjustment was not funded for FY 2026.

**Staffing.** Consistent with national labor trends reported by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics—reflecting the slowest job growth since the pandemic—the Judiciary experienced a modest and measured slowdown in hiring activity. New hires decreased slightly by 8%, from 39 in FY 2024 to 36 in FY 2025, reflecting a deliberate and stable approach to workforce management due to budget constraints. Likewise, promotions declined by 18%, from

26 in the prior fiscal year to 22 this year, aligning with broader market conditions while continuing to support internal career advancement.

The Judiciary closed FY 2025 with a staffing complement of 318 employees. While the branch successfully retained approximately 85% of its workforce, it experienced a separation rate of 15%, predominantly in critical areas such as court clerks and marshals service.

NEW HIRES VS. SEPARATIONS BY FISCAL YEAR



While this rate remains consistent with prior years, the courts are nonetheless experiencing an average of 50 separations annually.

In addition to the focus on workforce stability, the Judiciary continued to invest in strategic talent development initiatives through ongoing internship partnerships with local high schools. The internships provide students with meaningful, hands-on work experiences to enhance their skills, expand their knowledge, and foster mentorship relationships within the courts. These opportunities expose students to the dynamic operations of the Judiciary and are designed to cultivate long-term interest in public service careers.

The Judiciary also strengthened its collaboration with the Department of Labor through its summer employment programs, offering participants valuable opportunities to network, learn, and contribute to mission-critical work. Territorially, the Judiciary welcomed a total of 29 participants, including 11 high school students (6 in St. Thomas-St. John and 5 in St. Croix) and 18 Department of Labor participants. These individuals made meaningful contributions across the organization, supporting case management clean-up, file maintenance, library operations, mentoring Rising Stars students in the art of steelpan, assisting with interviews, filling temporary staffing gaps, and completing other essential tasks that supported the Judiciary’s operational goals.

EMPLOYEE CORNER

**2025 Employees of the Year.** The Judicial Branch expressed “heartfelt gratitude and kudos” to the 2025 Employees of the Year—Ms. Tashima O’Bryan, Procurement and Contracting Officer in the St. Croix District, and Ms. Kamilah Joseph, Court Improvement Program Coordinator in the St. Thomas-St. John District—for all the hard work and passion they bring to their roles within our courts. Ms. O’Bryan and Ms. Joseph were celebrated and honored all year and given special appreciation during Public Service Recognition Week. These employees are the true embodiment of the phrase “service above self.”

Ms. O’Bryan has dedicated 27 years of continuous service to the Judiciary. She exhibits a remarkable level of professionalism by providing assistance to others in a wide range of circumstances. Whether faced with challenging situations or routine tasks, she remains dedicated to supporting her colleagues and ensuring a positive work environment and vendor relations. Her willingness to lend a helping hand, regardless of the demands or pressures she encounters, reflects her strong commitment to teamwork and excellence.

Ms. Kamilah Joseph’s 19 years at the Judiciary, professionalism, customer focus, character, and integrity have culminated in this prestigious recognition. Ms. Joseph has challenged herself in the various positions she has held, taking advantage of the internal opportunities to grow and contributing her unique talent. In addition to her routine job duties, she has been a leader on the Employee Engagement Committee, focusing on collaboration and inclusivity of all staff. She’s an active listener who understands the needs and expectations of her colleagues and works steadfastly to address concerns and improve their experience.







### TRAINING & OTHER INITIATIVES

In FY 2025, annual employee training focused on succession planning as a strategic investment in the long-term health and sustainability of the Judicial Branch. This type of training is crucial for preparing internal staff to step into key roles, minimize disruptions during separations or other types of transitions, and maintain institutional knowledge by preparing successors before transitions occur. With so many long-tenured judicial branch employees approaching retirement eligibility, it was key to focus on the benefits of succession planning to establish internal talent development plans as a strategy for seamless leadership transfers as those retirements approach. Regular employees were provided tips on identifying and accessing developmental opportunities through increased engagement, and managers received targeted training to learn key tools for assessing the readiness of direct reports for growth and identifying areas for development. All employees also engaged in leadership personality exercises for dynamic team building, to understand not only the type of managers they can interact successfully with, but to provide insight into the type of managers and leaders they are prone to become with targeted development and mentorship.



The Office of the Virgin Islands Marshal also completed Parts I and II of annual Peace Officer Standards Training, as well as mandatory firearms qualification training for deputies in St. Thomas-St. John District by the close of the fiscal year. Qualification training for deputies and probation officers in the St. Croix District was held in December. CPR/AED recertifications were also completed.

## TRAINING FACILITATED BY FEDERAL GRANTS

### VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT (VAWA) SPONSORED TRAINING INITIATIVES

The Services, Training, Officers, and Prosecutors Violence Against Women Formula Grant (STOP) Program is awarded to states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa, Guam, and the Northern Mariana Islands to enhance the capacity of local communities to develop and strengthen effective law enforcement and prosecution strategies to combat violent crimes against women, and to develop and strengthen victim services in cases involving violent crimes against women.

Each state, territory, and the District of Columbia must allocate 25% for law enforcement, 25% for prosecutors, 30% for victim services (of which at least 10% must be distributed to culturally specific community-based organizations), and 5% to state and local courts. Accordingly, the Judiciary applies to the Law Enforcement Planning Commission for its 5% funding guarantee every year. For FY 2025, the following training initiatives were facilitated by a successful grant application:

### 2025 NATIONAL COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) host an annual 3-day conference that highlights stories of strength from survivors of Domestic Violence, elevates the voices of advocates, and is a form for community leaders and other champions for eliminating violence against women. With the assistance of VAWA STOP funding 8 court staff, including 2 judicial officers, 4 marshals and 2 court clerks attended this conference which was held in Las, Vegas Nevada.

### NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF CRIME PREVENTIONS

Trauma informed training is critical to equip frontline court employees with the skillset and sensitivity to interact with both victims and alleged perpetrators of domestic violence and sexual assault. Due in part to high employee turnover, this type of training is offered to Deputy Marshals, Court Clerks, Probation Officers, Magistrate Judges and General Jurisdiction Judges upon joining the branch. Ten court staff attended this conference which was also held in Las Vegas, Nevada, and attended by two Deputy Marshals and eight court clerks.

## COURT IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM SPONSORED TRAINING INITIATIVES

### NCJFCJ 88TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges' (NCJFCJ) 88th Annual Conference was held in Chicago, Illinois, from July 20-23, 2025, at the Fairmont Chicago Millennium Park. The event featured presentations on topics like juvenile justice, child trafficking, child welfare, family violence, court best practices and innovative solutions. A portion of the Judiciary's FY 2024 two-year Court Improvement Program grant was used to send nine participants to the 88th NCJFCJ Annual Conference. Because the child welfare continuum involves strategic partnerships for better outcomes, participants included judicial officers, an Assistant Attorney General, an Assistant Public Defender, and four Court Improvement Program staff members.



48TH NATIONAL CHILD WELFARE LAW CONFERENCE

As part of the Court Improvement Program’s ongoing commitment to professional development and capacity building within the child welfare system, representatives from the U.S. Virgin Islands Judiciary participated in the 48th National Child Welfare Law Conference. The annual conference convened professionals from across the nation to exchange ideas, information, and strategies that strengthen child welfare practice and promote systemic improvement.

The 2025 conference theme, “Catalysts for Change: Innovating Advocacy through Power Sharing and Transformational Leadership,” emphasized the importance of reimagining traditional advocacy models, promoting shared leadership, and leveraging creativity to advance meaningful policy and practice reform. Sessions were tailored for attorneys representing children, parents, and child welfare agencies, as well as for judges and multidisciplinary professionals involved in the child welfare continuum.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH  
CHILD WELFARE AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT



The Annual Youth Enrichment Day continues to be a dynamic and inclusive initiative. Organized by and through the U.S. Virgin Islands Court Improvement Program (CIP), it is an event to celebrate and support the well-being of youth involved in foster care and related systems, and brings together youth, caregivers, community partners, and stakeholders for a day of engaging workshops. The workshops include interactive activities, and meaningful dialogue focused on providing child welfare system impacted youth with access to vital resources, mentoring opportunities, and educational sessions designed to foster resilience, build self-esteem,

and promote healthy, positive relationships. On December 5, 2024, CIP hosted the 2nd Annual "Holiday Jingle Mingle" Youth Enrichment Day on St. Croix to continue to strengthen connections between at-risk youth and community role models. The event, hosted at the UVI Medical Simulation Center, engaged 18 youth in STEM exploration and mentorship opportunities.

As part of continued Youth Enrichment activities, a game night was hosted in the District of St. Croix by Presiding Judge Jessica Gallivan, where participants enjoyed a variety of games like Jenga, Uno, dominoes, and checkers, fostering both fun and team building. As part of ongoing support efforts, each participant received a backpack.



In the St. Thomas-St. John District, Youth Enrichment activities were led by Family Judge Debra S. Watlington, and themed “Rise and Thrive: Champions of Tomorrow.” This installment included an etiquette session where a guest presenter instructed 28 participants on proper dining manners and use of utensils. Members of the Superior Court Rising Stars Youth Steel Orchestra also presented on the history of the steel pan and encouraged participants to join. Games included participation of judges, marshals, and social workers, all partnering together to provide support and positive reinforcement and role models for participants.



STUDENT INTERNS AND YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

During FY 2025, the Judiciary also strengthened its collaboration with the Department of Labor through its summer employment programs, offering participants valuable opportunities to network, learn, and contribute to mission-critical work. Territorially, the Judiciary welcomed a total of 29 participants, including 11 high school students (6 in St. Thomas-St. John and 5 in St. Croix) and 18 Department of Labor participants. These individuals made meaningful contributions across the organization, supporting case management clean-up, file maintenance, library operations, mentoring Rising Stars students in the art of steelpan, assisting with interviews, filling temporary staffing gaps, and completing other essential tasks that supported the Judiciary’s operational goals.

2025 MOOT COURT

- **1st Place:** Antilles School - Yuvraj Dua and Ajay Mirpuri
- **2nd Place:** Antilles School - Christina Francois and Mikko Griffith
- **3rd Place:** St. Croix 7th Day Adventist Team A-Darnell Nelson, Angelica Griffin, and Amoreese McSween
- **4th Place:** Charlotte Amalie High School - Sumyah Mark and Sherisha Elizee

Six schools (three on St. Thomas and three on St. Croix) formed 10 squads to compete in the annual Moot Court competition. District rounds were combined and held on April 22, 2025, and the Championship competition was held on April 24, 2025 via Zoom, which was also live-streamed for the general public. The Honorable Douglas A. Brady, a Judge of the Superior Court of the Virgin Islands, served as the Moot Chief Justice; and the Honorable George W. Cannon, Jr., a Senior Magistrate Judge of the District Court of the Virgin Islands, and Honorable Emile A. Henderson, III, Magistrate Judge of the District Court of the Virgin Islands, served as Moot Associate Justices. Twenty students presented oral arguments, and five additional students served as alternates.



- **St. Croix Central High School:**  
Amaya Hamilton, Ellany Lopez, Amiyah Pamphile (A), and Nia Francis (A2)
- **Antilles School:**  
Yuvraj Dua, Ajay Mirpuri, Christina Francios, and Mikko Griffith
- **Good Hope Country Day School:**  
Aaliyah Boodhoo and Nevaeh Tricoche
- **St. Croix Seventh-day Adventist School:**  
Angelica Griffin, Learie Kai Aubert, Daniella Christian, Darnell Nelson, Amareese McSween (A), and Denacia Nelson (A)
- **All Saints Cathedral School:**  
Keiori Francois, Jaedon Hodge, Gabriel King, MorganRichardson, and Maleeqa Lett (A)
- **Charlotte Amalie High School:**  
Sherisha Elizee, Abigail Jabioin, Samara Warner, and Sumyah Mark

RISING STARS YOUTH STEEL ORCHESTRA

Established in the District of St. Thomas and St. John in 1981 and later extended to the District of St. Croix in 2007, the Superior Court Rising Stars continues to provide an atmosphere of a “home away from home” for its members. This program is unique in that it is the only steelband intervention program under any judicial system—locally, nationally, or internationally—and is becoming renowned for its many accomplishments.

FY 2025 began with preparation for the Rising Stars Youth Steel Orchestra’s Christmas season in the St. Thomas-St. John District and the Crucian Christmas Festival in the St. Croix District. On December 22, 2025, the Rising Stars hosted its highly anticipated annual Christmas concert themed “Sounds of Freedom: The Rebirth” at the Elridge Wilburn Blake Sports & Fitness Center. In the St. Croix District, the Rising Stars celebrated culture and legacy during their Annual Crucian Festival, themed “Keeping Our Traditions and Culture Alive”.

The following Seniors were celebrated in each district.







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