

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE COCHISE COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
WORK SESSION HELD ON  
TUESDAY, MARCH 25, 2025**

A work session of the Cochise County Board of Supervisors was held on Tuesday, March 25, 2025, at 1:00 p.m. in the Board of Supervisors' Hearing Room, 1415 Melody Lane, Building G, Bisbee, Arizona.

Present: Frank Antenori, Chairman; Tom Crosby, Vice-Chairman; Kathleen L. Gomez, Supervisor

Staff Present: Sharon Gilman, Interim County Administrator  
Joe Casey, Interim Deputy County Administrator  
Paul Correa, Chief Civil Deputy County Attorney  
Lara Loewenheim, Clerk of the Board

Attendees: David Thorn, Presiding Judge  
Niltza Flores, Court Administrator  
Kenneth Curfman, Associate Presiding Justice of the Peace  
April Saathoff, Chief Deputy Probation  
Rachel Grey, Chief Deputy Clerk of Superior Court  
Terry Bannon, Presiding Juvenile Judge  
Craig Sullivan, CSA Executive Director  
Vanessa Fielder, CSA Director of Research and Analytics

Chairman Antenori called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

**ANY ITEM ON THIS AGENDA IS OPEN FOR DISCUSSION**

***ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION***

**Board of Supervisors**

1. Discuss regarding the structure, operations, and future goals of the Cochise County Judicial System.

Craig Sullivan, County Supervisors Association Executive Director, presented an overview of court funding and relationships using a PowerPoint presentation. Mr. Sullivan discussed the organization's role as an intergovernmental office supporting county supervisors, focusing on data collection related to county functions, including the court system. He highlighted their efforts to improve the state-county-court relationship, particularly around funding issues such as probation officer support, and their ongoing work to provide better data to inform decision-making and advocate for sustainable state funding solutions.

Ms. Vanessa Fielder, Director of Research and Analytics, presented data from the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) regarding court and probation expenditures in Cochise County over the past 25 years. She highlighted that while overall court funding increased by 90%, county contributions grew by 150%, while state funding remained stagnant. She stated the county's share of funding for courts and probation has

increased significantly, reaching a 70/30 split between county and state, mirroring trends in other medium-sized rural counties in Arizona. She stated probation funding has also seen increased county contributions, particularly for adult probation, with juvenile detention funding declining.

Ms. Fielder also discussed the staffing-to-case load ratios, noting that Cochise County has faced challenges in meeting statutory case load limits, though recent improvements have been made in adult probation staffing. She stated juvenile probation case loads are significantly lower compared to statutory maximums. Ms. Fielder addressed the county's high property tax burden, which funds criminal justice expenditures, explaining that Cochise's property tax base is relatively weaker compared to other similar counties like Coconino and Navajo, which have more robust tax bases. She stated the comparison highlighted the county's struggle to balance the need for adequate funding with its limited revenue generation capacity.

In response to the Board, Mr. Sullivan explained that there is no set statutory minimum for the state-county relationship, as it is largely determined by local needs and demands. He emphasized that the best approach is data-driven decision-making to ensure efficiency. He mentioned that a survey of the court system was conducted to examine decisions across counties, with Ms. Fielder adding that very few statutory requirements govern the relationship. Ms. Fielder pointed out that, beyond statutory case load ratios and certain funding requirements for judicial salaries, each county handles its court-budget relationship differently. Ms. Fielder stated that in general, counties and courts work together, with the county setting the court's budget.

Mr. Sullivan expressed concern about the lack of state support for the judiciary, noting that counties have been responding to judicial needs without state assistance. He emphasized that there hasn't been a strategic focus on shifting certain expenses from counties to the state, which could help alleviate the financial burden on local governments. He highlighted that many bills authorize local actions without providing corresponding funding. He called for more state focus on identifying county-specific expenses that could be relieved by state funding. Chairman Antenori added that this concern is growing among counties, especially as they are limited in their ability to raise revenue through fines or fees. He pointed out that while the state wants uniformity in fines across counties, rising court administration costs are being absorbed by counties without any financial relief from the state.

Judge Thorn discussed how fines are collected through mechanisms like tax intercepts, but highlighted the ongoing issue of local counties bearing the costs of judicial functions due to the state's historical reliance on counties to fund these expenses. He mentioned a recent bill proposing unfunded mandates, such as appointing lawyers for unrepresented individuals in family law cases, which would create further financial strain on local counties.

Judge Curfman explained that the cycle of issuing arrest warrants for unpaid fines and attempting to collect money from individuals often leads to increased jail incarceration, which has become problematic due to the rising jail population and associated costs. He also highlighted the significant burden of managing large caseloads, where probation officers are overwhelmed with cases and often work with insufficient staff, leading to supervisors covering multiple caseloads. He stated the personnel shortage, combined with the need to track and collect fines, creates an additional strain on the system.

Judge Thorn provided an overview of the court system's operations, highlighting its goals and current challenges. He mentioned that this discussion is aimed not only at the Board but also at the public, offering insight into how the court system functions and the

services it provides. Judge Thorn outlined the strategic goals set by Chief Justice Scott Timmer for Arizona's courts, focusing on expanding access to justice, maintaining public trust, protecting children and families, advancing judicial excellence, and enhancing professionalism within the judicial branch. He emphasized the importance of providing self-help resources for individuals, especially those who are self-represented, and ensuring access to services like court interpreters and remote court appearances. Judge Thorn also discussed the need for public confidence in the judicial system and the efforts to engage the community, including educational programs and outreach. He concluded by stressing the significance of maintaining effective court administration, including staff recruitment and retention, while ensuring that the court facilities reflect the seriousness and dignity of the justice process.

Ms. Grey provided an overview of the Clerk's Office, detailing its roles as the official record keeper, financial officer, jury commissioner, and probate register for the Superior Court. She highlighted the office's responsibility in processing documents, handling fines and fees, and managing cases related to estates, guardianships, and mental health, while supporting nearly every function of the judicial system. She also mentioned efforts to improve public access to case documents, with plans to implement a website for high-profile cases in the near future. Ms. Flores added that counties like Maricopa and Pima have their own robust IT departments and case management systems, allowing for real-time document updates. She stated Cochise County's system relies on the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), resulting in a 24-hour delay before documents are available on public access.

The Board and staff discussed the county and state for day-to-day operations, noting that the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) requires counties to pay for things like printers and computers. Ms. Flores stated the court's system lacks the ability to provide public access to certain documents in the same real-time manner as larger counties, due to both security concerns and lack of resources to develop a robust database. The Board and staff also touched on the challenges in making the court system more accessible, particularly through technological advancements like virtual courtrooms and AI-driven systems to help users navigate legal processes.

Judge Curfman presented an overview of the six Justice of the Peace (JP) courts in Cochise County, emphasizing their significant role in managing a variety of cases, including civil, traffic, juvenile, and criminal matters. He highlighted that the Justice Courts handle a large volume of cases, with approximately 41,000 cases in 2024, representing about one-third of the county's population, including cases from outside the county and state. Judge Curfman also discussed the complexity of some cases, such as restitution orders, protective orders, and civil suits, as well as the impact of state mandates, particularly those requiring the sealing of court records. He noted the strain on staffing and resources in handling these cases, especially given the strict timeframes and legislative requirements that the courts must adhere to.

Judge Bannon stated she oversees a dedicated juvenile probation team focused on early intervention to prevent juvenile behavior from escalating, using tiered consequences and various programs, including diversion and restitution assistance. She emphasized holding both juveniles and their families accountable, with initiatives like the restitution assistance program helping juveniles work off their debts. Judge Bannon also addressed the growing concern about juvenile involvement in child pornography and the impact of juvenile deaths, and highlighted the importance of peer support for staff. She stressed the need for economic development to provide alternative opportunities for youth, which she believes will help reduce juvenile crime and allow them to remain productive members of their communities.

Ms. Saathoff discussed the professionalism and training of probation officers, emphasized their role in reshaping lives by providing structure and accountability to probationers. She highlighted the challenging nature of the job, including assessing offenders using evidence-based practices and managing a high-risk caseload, such as sex offenders. She mentioned the use of technology, such as the upcoming Reconnect app, to monitor probationers in real-time, which ensures compliance and improves communication with probationers. She stated that despite the challenges, the department maintains strong community partnerships and focuses on ensuring officer safety while aiding in rehabilitation and reducing recidivism.

Chairman Antenori adjourned the meeting at 2:23 p.m.

APPROVED:

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Frank Antenori, Chairman

ATTEST:

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Lara Loewenheim, Clerk of the Board