

Community Relations Committee

Judicial Conference of Indiana

Meeting Minutes for Friday, February 2, 2024

The Community Relations Committee met on February 2, 2024, by video conference. The meeting was chaired by Judge Maria Granger.

1. **Members present.** Kelly Benjamin, Judi Calhoun, Chadwick Hill, Michael Morrissey, Jason Mount, Bill Nelson, Sean Persin, Stephanie Steele, and Maria Granger (chair).
2. **Staff present.** Dave Kuhnz and Sarah Kidwell provided staff assistance.
3. **Approval of Minutes.** The Committee approved the November 3, 2023, minutes by consent.
4. **Cameras in Court Updates.** Judge Persin asked for guidance with media wanting to get all audio instead of just from the required mics. Sarah and Dave suggested to continue use of the required mics and see how things go for a bit longer. Judge Persin also brings up a case where there was media coverage and a hung jury. It will be interesting to see the impact of media with the jury. Dave indicated that in Marion County Washington Township Small Claims Court the local judge provided advance direction to media and those in the Courtroom both verbally and in writing. At Judge Steele's request, Dave will ask the local judge for permission to share a copy of the guidance provided to the folks coming into the Courtroom.
5. **Promoting Confidence in the Judiciary.** Dave Kuhnz provided an update on the survey results of the NCSC's annual [State of the State Courts](#). There were four key findings: 1) public trust measures are unchanged, 2) support for remote hearings continues to rise, 3) increasing number see courts as political institutions, and 4) older generation are consuming traditional media on a local level whereas younger generation are looking more toward social media. State courts have the highest confidence rating. Judge Benjamin and Judge Granger are interested in more details as far as who was surveyed for these results, whether they were involved with courts or just a public perception. Dave will reach out to NCSC with follow-up questions and provide the committee with additional research. Judge Calhoun and Judge Benjamin question ways to get correct information out to the public, give folks a better understanding, and provide an avenue for talking about procedure. What about a meet the judge night, an event at the library, or a chance for members of the bar to meet the judges. Judge Hill commented that he allows adults to sit with him on the bench for specific hearings to give a single person at a time an impression of what judges actually do. Judge Nelson, Judge Steele, and Judge Persin all allow students to participate as Judge Hill asks. Others, including Judge Granger and Judge Benjamin, think that it seems really neat and are encouraged to try it themselves.
6. **Constitution Day.** Information is coming in April weekly message to encourage judges to find schools before summer break. Judge Granger indicated that participating leaves an impression on students. She was hesitant to organize a visit at first, but ultimately it was good. She picked out an idea and ran it by another person for feedback. All Community Relations members are highly encouraged to participate themselves and to encourage fellow judges to do so as well.
7. **Other business.** Sarah Kidwell indicated that the Judges Speakers Bureau will be updated with confirmation emails coming soon. Judge Granger asked if any funding is available

for promoting confidence in judiciary, maybe something that we can do as a group. Dave Kuhnz indicated that he would look into it.

8. **Next meeting dates.** Meetings for 2024 will be held via Zoom on Fridays at 1:00 p.m. (Eastern). The remaining quarterly meetings will take place on May 3, August 2, and November 1.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Kidwell and Dave Kuhnz
Office of Communication, Education & Outreach

Community Relations Committee

Judicial Conference of Indiana

Meeting Minutes for Friday, May 3, 2024

The Community Relations Committee met on May 3, 2024, by video conference. The meeting was chaired by Judge Maria Granger.

1. **Members present.** Kelly Benjamin, Judi Calhoun, Stefanie Crawford, Chadwick Hill, Jason Mount, Sean Persin, Cheryl Rivera, Austin Shadle, Stephanie Steele, and Maria Granger (chair).
2. **Staff present.** Dave Kuhn and Sarah Kidwell provided staff assistance.
3. **Approval of Minutes.** The Committee approved the February 2, 2024, minutes by consent.
4. **Cameras in Court Updates.** Dave followed up from the last meeting's discussion about the NCSC's State of the State Courts with information that the 1000 registered voters who took survey were randomly selected, but 785 of them did have some contact with the courts. Dave and Sarah presented information from an OCEO survey of media in regard to cameras in court and provided this committee advance look at a similar, but shorter, survey for judges. Judge Calhoun requested the Odyssey cheat sheet be shared for codes to appropriately enter cases into the system for tracking. Judge Benjamin suggested a change in the order of questions for the judge survey. Judge Persin indicated that he believes there is one case in the state that will have a major impact on the public's perception of cameras in court. Judge Granger asks about any instance of problems or details the media might be asking for with a uniform request system. Dave and Sarah answer based on additional information.
5. **Constitution Day.** Judges have been asked to find schools now before summer since September quickly approaches once school begins. Magistrate Crawford spoke highly of Constitution Day at district meetings and shared her thoughts. Specifically, she recommends blocking your calendar and potentially talking to some of your staff's children. Judge Calhoun enjoys the classroom as well with details on Goldilocks for a high school group (though not a part of Constitution Day). Judge Granger encourages judges to find schools now and asks all Community Relations to potentially get information out their districts. Sarah will be sure to send registration information in August once it opens.
6. **Judges Speakers Bureau.** This information has been updated and will be adjusted again once committee selection ends. OCEO has sent this information to the Department of Education.
7. **Plan for IJA Excellence in Public Information and Education awards.** This committee is responsible for choosing two awards: 1 for media and 1 for judges. OCEO has approval from Judge Granger and IJA to move forward with plan to open nominations in summer. This committee will need to be prepared to review information after the close of nominations on July 26 and before next meeting on August 2. Sarah will send out a survey with names of those nominated to help guide August 2 discussions.
8. **Other business.** A few instances of judges in the media discussed. Judge Granger was thanked for her time on the committee and for serving as chair.

9. **Next meeting dates.** Meetings for 2024 will be held via Zoom on Fridays at 1:00 p.m. (Eastern). The remaining quarterly meetings will take place on August 2 and November 1.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Kidwell and Dave Kuhnz
Office of Communication, Education & Outreach

Community Relations Committee

Judicial Conference of Indiana

Meeting Minutes for Friday, August 2, 2024

The Community Relations Committee met on August 2, 2024, by video conference. The meeting was chaired by Judge Sean Persin.

1. **Members present.**

Polly Beeson, Kelly Benjamin, Judi Calhoun, Stefanie Crawford, Aleksandra Dimitrijevic, John McGauley, Michael Morrissey, Cheryl Rivera, Emily Salzmann, Austin Shadle, Stephanie Steele, and Sean Persin (chair).

Members not in attendance.

Lisa Berdine (indicated unable to attend), Murielle Bright (indicated unable to attend), Chadwick Hill (indicated unable to attend), Jason Mount, Bill Nelson, Lori Schein, and Gary Schutte.

2. **Staff present.**

Kathryn Dolan and Sarah Kidwell provided staff assistance.

3. **Approval of minutes.**

The Committee approved the May 3, 2024, minutes by consent.

4. **Voting for IJA Excellence in Public Information and Education awards.**

Chair Persin notes the links provided on the nominated media stories show a level of commitment from many members of the press. Judges on the committee discuss how these stories showcase information about the judicial branch. Ultimately, the committee determines the story on the attorney shortage is powerful for a statewide audience and shows the necessity for people to understand the need for lawyers in every community. All members voted unanimously in favor of Kara Kenny and Brad Forestal for the media award.

For the judge award, Marion County Judge Mark Stoner is unanimously determined to be the recipient in recognition of his years of service with an eye toward transparency throughout his career as well as his work for cameras in court.

5. **Cameras in Court updates.**

Due to time constraints, discussion was tabled for the next meeting. However, an *Indiana Court Times* story will be published soon and sent to members of committee.

6. **Constitution Day.**

Sarah Kidwell encourages participation in this event. Registration info is coming soon in a weekly message.

7. **Other business.**

Consider the possibility of discussing whether local courts/counties are holding their own “state of the judiciary” events.

8. **Next meeting dates.**

The remaining meeting for 2024 will be held via Zoom on Friday, November 1 at 1:00 p.m. (Eastern).

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Kidwell
Office of Communication, Education & Outreach

Community Relations Committee

Judicial Conference of Indiana

Meeting Minutes for Friday, November 1, 2024

The Community Relations Committee met on November 1, 2024, by video conference. The meeting was chaired by Judge Sean Persin.

1. **Members present.**

Polly Beeson, Kelly Benjamin, Lisa Berdine, Aleksandra Dimitrijevic, Chadwick Hill, John McGauley, Michael Morrissey, Jason Mount, Cheryl Rivera, Austin Shadle, Stephanie Steele, and Sean Persin (chair).

Members not in attendance.

Murielle Bright (indicated unable to attend), Judi Calhoun (indicated unable to attend), Stefanie Crawford (indicated unable to attend), Bill Nelson (indicated unable to attend), Emily Salzmann (indicated unable to attend), Lori Schein, and Gary Schutte (indicated unable to attend).

2. **Staff present.**

Adam Clay and Sarah Kidwell provided staff assistance.

3. **Approval of minutes.**

The committee approved the August 2, 2024, minutes.

4. **Cameras in court updates.**

Sarah Kidwell briefly shared results from the judges survey. Chair Persin commented about 62% approved and that he was not surprised by outright denials. Judge Steele has denied because she streams. Chair Persin is interested in looking at the Odyssey numbers which will show approval rate after another year. It is noted that some judges will deny requests because the rule is still new. Chair Persin comments that judges might want to know what parties think before making a decision on the camera in court request, but the challenge is that it's better for the media if the court rules on the request prior to the hearings. Policies can be approved over time as cameras in courts move forward. Suggested improvements from survey include a standardized form for requests, and a better explanation of procedure to media. John McGauley indicates that for Allen County, requests must be filed at least 3 days prior to hearing and judges typically rule same or next day. Discussion with Chair Persin, Commissioner Shadle, and John McGauley on a specific case situation includes no recordings at all, 12 media seats that are pooling and sharing, and 15 minutes to look at exhibits at end of day.

5. **National Adoption Day.**

Sarah Kidwell indicates to share photos with OCEO if you get them!

6. Constitution Day recap.

Chair Persin indicated that not everyone on the committee signed up, but I know that all of you go out into schools to participate. Sarah Kidwell noted that OCEO will continue collecting photos and create a Flickr gallery. Information will be coming in a weekly message in April 2025 for judges to start planning before the end of the school year. Commissioner Shadle didn't participate this year because schools have block scheduling. It wouldn't work out for teachers because only 1 set of kids would hear the presentation. Sarah Kidwell suggested judges with scheduling concerns consider partnering up with another judge. Chair Persin emphasized that trying to schedule something even within weeks of Constitution Day is ok, that reaching community members and students is important part, and that it's not speaking on Constitution Day exactly.

7. IJA Excellence in Public Information and Education awards recap.

Chair Persin noted that award winners were happy to be selected. He encourages committee members to keep an eye and ear out for stories that sticks out for nomination next year.

8. Judges Speakers Bureau.

OCEO periodically checks the list and adds new judicial officers. DOE has been reminded about the list in the past, and OCEO will continue to do so. If you do go and speak to a group, please let OCEO know to maybe be included in Court Times. Chair Persin enjoys speaking to the groups that come into the courthouse.

9. County State of the Judiciary.

Chief Justice Rush told Chair Persin about a county state of the judiciary. The purpose is to explain how courts are operating, trends, issues, and potentially a Q&A with stakeholders. Chair Persin wants to go visit a county that does it to see how they do it. If Tippecanoe County would have one this year, it would be talking about the new juvenile center and commercial court. Several judges question if holding a local state of the judiciary could invite problems. Transparency would be great to educate community, but it could go bad. Judge Steele said that there has not been negative feedback associated with budget presentations, which are somewhat of an update to the county of what is going on. Chair Persin will try to attend another county's presentation.

10. Other business.

Judge Steele notes that there is a misperception of how often judges are in the courtroom and that people think that judges have easy jobs. Not sure of a single thing that we can do to address this. Chair Persin agrees that it is hard if decision makers see an empty courtroom during the one time they visit. He also is not sure of the fix. Judge Steele and other local judges do annually invite all local representatives for breakfast/lunch. Chair Persin has extended invitations to some stakeholders for veterans court graduation. John McGauley hosts a local podcast that covers basic civics and courts 101. The podcast (<https://www.soundcloud.com/allensuperiorcourt>) has had nearly 3000 listens.

11. Next meeting dates.

The meeting dates for 2025 were approved. They will be held via Zoom on Fridays at 1:00 p.m. (Eastern) on February 7, May 2, August 8, and November 7.

Commissioner Shadle questions about having in-person meetings. Chair Persin will work with staff about the possibility of the August 8 meeting being in-person.

Respectfully submitted,

Adam Clay and Sarah Kidwell
Office of Communication, Education & Outreach