

2026 Nevada District Court Judges Seminar & Family Law Conference



ADMINISTRATIVE
OFFICE OF THE COURTS
RESPECTED AND INFLUENTIAL VOICE OF THE NEVADA JUDICIARY

Family Law Conference-Tuesday, April 21, 2026

7:00 AM-11:00 AM	Conference Check-In	
7:30 AM-8:30 AM	Continental Breakfast	
8:30 AM-8:45 AM	Conference Welcome	
8:45 AM-9:45 AM	Chaos, Control, and the Court: Rethinking High-Conflict Custody Through a Developmental Lens	Dr. Pamela B. Payne, CFLE, CA
Session Description	<p>Custody cases marked by volatility, repeated litigation, and child refusal are often labeled “high conflict.” Research shows, however, that mutual escalation and coercive control are fundamentally different dynamics with distinct implications for children and judicial response.</p> <p>This session explores how Nevada courts can distinguish chaotic bilateral conflict from asymmetrical coercive control within the framework of NRS 125C.0035, including the domestic violence presumption under NRS 125C.0035(5). Using a developmental lens, the session examines how children experience chaos versus threat, how refusal behaviors may reflect anxiety or fear, and how misclassification can increase harm.</p> <p>The session provides a practical analytical structure to align custody determinations with statutory mandates and developmental risk science.</p> <p>Learning Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distinguish mutual high-conflict dynamics from coercive control and apply Nevada’s best interest factors under NRS 125C.0035 with attention to developmental risk and power asymmetry. • Interpret child refusal, alignment, and expressed preference through a developmental framework, differentiating loyalty conflict from trauma-based fear. • Evaluate how the domestic violence presumption under NRS 125C.0035(5) shapes custody analysis and identify intervention strategies that promote stability and safety. 	
9:45 AM-10:00 AM	Break	

10:00 AM-11:00 AM	Recognizing Key Connections: The Intersection of Child Abuse, Animal Abuse, and Domestic Violence.	Judge John Romero
Session Description	<p>This workshop will offer participants an opportunity to discuss how these forms of abuse may co-occur within a family environment and the effects on children. The session will include an overview of strategies and resources to enhance system responses.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize the dynamics of abuse and the impact on children and adult survivors. • Connect with resources to improve court responses to abuse. • Identify strategies for possible system change to improve outcomes for families. 	
11:00 AM-11:15 AM	Break	
11:15 AM-12:15 PM	Trauma Audits: Pathways to Assistance	Dr. Allison List, Ph.D.
Session Description	<p>For over a decade, the NCJFCJ has provided courts with a trusted trauma consultation process. Now, through our collaboration with the Center for Trauma Recovery in Juvenile Justice (CTRJJ), this service has evolved to offer deeper insights and stronger support for juvenile and family courts. Participants will learn about the updated process, the benefits of this new partnership, and how courts can leverage these tools to strengthen trauma-informed practices.</p> <p>Learning Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the NCJFCJ trauma audit process and our history in providing trauma-informed and responsive TA to courts. • Discuss how the NCJFCJ and the CTRJJ will be working to support one another in the trauma audit process to support sustainable and systemic changes for courts. • Explain how courts can explore their readiness and commitment to a trauma audit and how to request one. 	
12:15 PM-1:15 PM	Lunch on Your Own	
1:15 PM-2:15 PM	Guide to Educational, Psychological, and Neuropsychological Testing Services	Dr. Jennifer Highsmith, Ph.D. & Dr. Suzanne Aberasturi, Ph.D
Session Description	<p>A review of the differences between psychological, neuropsychological, and educational evaluations, and the reasons for choosing one over the other, based on the question before the court. This will include a review of school programs and supports, as well as common terms used in educational settings.</p> <p>Learning Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differentiate between psychological and neuropsychological testing and identify when each type of evaluation is most appropriate. • Understand the purpose and scope of educational testing, including how it informs learning needs and academic supports. • Recognize the range of services provided by schools, including special education programs and the development and implementation of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). 	

2:15 PM-2:30 PM	Break	
2:30 PM-3:30 PM	Utilizing Peer Mentorship to Improve Child Welfare Outcomes	Judge Paige Dollinger, Crystal Hallock & Jacki Hallerbach
Session Description	<p>Lived expertise can go a long way to help parents feel seen and reduce stigma in judicial systems. The Second Judicial District Court in Washoe County has used peer mentors, parents who have navigated child welfare, substance use and domestic violence, to help others do the same. Crystal Hallock has done this work for 19 years and has helped many families to work through their child welfare cases and achieve the best permanency outcomes for families. Expect this presentation to be an eye-opener, with Ms. Hallock sharing her child welfare experience to show the humanity and potential of all parents. Judge Dollinger and Ms. Hallerbach will talk about incorporating peer mentorship into your court program and data on the effectiveness of peer mentorship.</p> <p>Learning Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the role of lived expertise in the courtroom and how peer mentors with child welfare experience can reduce stigma, build trust, and improve parent engagement. • Examine the structure and implementation of Washoe County’s peer mentorship model, including practical considerations for integrating parent partners into court programs. • Evaluate research and local data on peer mentorship outcomes to assess its impact on family engagement, case progress, and permanency results. 	
3:30 PM-3:45 PM	Break	
3:45 PM-4:45 PM	Civility and Professionalism; The Importance of Procedural Fairness	Judge David Connors
Session Description	<p>The presenter will discuss the importance of procedural fairness, also referred to as procedural justice, in the handling of matters before the judiciary. Many studies show that the acceptance of judicial orders is more closely tied to the participant’s perception of the fairness of the process, rather than the outcome. Primary components of procedural fairness include: understanding (ensuring that all participants understand the process); neutrality (decision-makers acting without bias or prejudice); voice (listening carefully to participants, giving them a chance to voice their questions and concerns and tell their side of the story), and respect (treating all participants with dignity and respect). These issues are even more important in family law matters, in which very often the parties are not represented by counsel.</p> <p>Learning Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help attendees understand the essential elements of procedural fairness. • Present specific examples of how to incorporate those elements into courtroom interactions. • Consider unique challenges in family law matters where participants are often unrepresented. 	

District Court Judges Seminar

Wednesday, April 22, 2026

10:00 AM-4:00 PM	Conference Check-In	
10:00 AM-11:30 AM	NDJA Executive Board and Committee Meeting	
11:30 AM-1:00 PM	Lunch on Your Own	
1:00 PM-1:15 PM	Seminar Opening	
1:15 PM-2:30 PM	A Two Part Presentation: A Brief Update on Jail-Based Restoration in Nevada and the Personality Disorder Puzzle in Competency Evaluations	Judge Christy Craig, Drew Cross, Ronna Dillinger, Ph.D., Dr. Steven Zuchowski
Session Description	<p>The presentation will open with a brief update regarding jail-based restoration in the state of Nevada. Following this, we will shift to discussing the challenge of distinguishing individuals with personality disorders from those with a serious mental illness. The focus will be on the competency to stand trial evaluation process as it relates to personality disorders and what differentiates them from serious mental illness from the perspective of forensic evaluators. Different data points will be discussed, along with how they influence the decision-making of the forensic evaluator.</p> <p>Learning Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Describe recent developments in jail-based competency restoration in Nevada.• Differentiate between personality disorders and serious mental illness in the context of competency to stand trial evaluations.• Identify key data points considered by forensic evaluators when assessing competency and how these factors influence evaluation outcomes.	
2:30 PM-2:45 PM	Break	
2:45 PM-4:15 PM	Nevada Appellate Courts Civil Opinion Review	Kelly Dove, Therese Shanks, Charlie Finlayson, & David Snyder
Session Description	<p>A review and commentary on civil opinions of the Nevada Supreme Court and Court of Appeals for 2025-2026.</p> <p>Learning Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify recent civil decisions that will have the most impact on the courts.• Summarize the importance and consequences of recent civil decisions on their judicial decisions.	
4:15 PM-4:30 PM	Break	

4:30 PM-5:30 PM	Is that Warrant Warranted?	Judge Jacqueline Bluth
Session Description	<p>This course is designed to cover the review and approval of search warrants, identify and avoid common pitfalls, analyze recent case law, and apply this knowledge to hypothetical scenarios.</p> <p>Learning Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go over proper methods of review for telephonic, written, and electronic warrants. • Understand the different types of warrants you will review: Ordinary search warrants, PEN registers, Trap and Trace, Interception of Wire, Electronic or Oral Communication, etc. • Review recent Nevada Supreme Court rulings in the area of Search and Seizure. 	
5:30 PM-7:30 PM	Welcome Reception	

Thursday, April 23

7:15 AM-8:15 AM	Breakfast	
8:30 AM-9:30 AM	Social Media and Judicial Ethics	Judge Linda Marquis & Judge Scott Freeman
Session Description	<p>Judges Freeman and Marquis provide guidance for judges navigating the pitfalls of social media by exploring cases in which judges have run afoul of ethics guidelines by using social media in ways that taint the credibility of their offices, betray public confidence, and call into question their impartiality.</p> <p>Learning Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify common ethical risks and pitfalls associated with judges' use of social media. • Examine case examples in which judicial social media activity has violated ethical guidelines and undermined public confidence in the judiciary. • Apply judicial ethics principles to evaluate appropriate and inappropriate uses of social media by judges. 	
9:30 AM-9:45 AM	Break	
9:45 AM-11:00 AM	Justice under Threat: Safety, Security, and De-Escalation for Judges	Dr. Christine McDermott, Ph.D
Session Description	<p>In a single year, hundreds of judges receive threats—and some escalate to violence. The question is no longer whether judicial officers face risk, but how prepared they are to manage it. This interactive session provides Nevada judges with a practical, research-informed overview of the modern judicial security landscape. Drawing on national data, real-world incidents, and emerging best practices, the program will examine how and why threats occur, what patterns are evident, and where vulnerabilities most often arise—both inside and outside the courthouse.</p> <p>Participants will gain concrete strategies to enhance personal safety, strengthen courthouse security awareness, and respond effectively to volatile situations. The session will also introduce de-escalation techniques specifically adapted to the judicial role—balancing authority, neutrality, and safety in high-conflict public-facing environments.</p>	

	<p>Learning Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate the judicial threat landscape and personal risk. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Understand current trends in threats and attacks against judges and identify key risk factors and vulnerabilities in both professional and personal contexts. • Implement practical security strategies. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Apply best practices to enhance personal safety, protect sensitive information, and support effective courthouse security in coordination with justice system partners. • Respond to threats and deescalate high-risk situations. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Recognize concerning behaviors, follow appropriate response protocols, and use judicially appropriate de-escalation techniques to manage conflict while maintaining authority and fairness 	
11:00 AM-11:15	Break	
11:15 AM-12:45 PM	Working Lunch: Empowered Compassion: Advanced Wellness for the Judiciary	Dr. Kristen Davis-Coelho, Ph.D
Session Description	<p>Working in the judiciary brings unique challenges and stressors. In this 90-minute presentation, Dr. Davis-Coelho offers a new conceptualization of judicial wellness. Key concepts will be explored, and attendees will be invited to apply these concepts to their own individual wellbeing through self-assessment activities. Practical, evidence-based strategies will be presented that can be used immediately to support participants' own professional and personal wellness.</p> <p>Learning Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss the difference between empathy and compassion and the impact of each on burnout. • Discuss research regarding self-compassion, assess their own level of self-compassion, and utilize tools to improve it. • Identify and utilize three different strategies to improve their personal and professional wellness. 	
12:45 PM-1:00 PM	Break	
1:00 PM-2:00 PM	Understanding and Applying Rule 65, Temporary Restraining Orders and Preliminary Injunctions	Judge Maria Gall & Judge Al Kacin
Session Description	<p>This session will explore Rule 65 and attendant case law on temporary restraining orders and preliminary injunctions, including the standards for granting extraordinary preliminary relief, doing so ex parte, and the purpose and requirement for imposing sufficient security and/or bond.</p> <p>Learning Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differentiate between prohibitory and mandatory injunctions and between temporary restraining orders and preliminary injunctions. • Evaluate when temporary restraining orders may be granted, including the appropriateness of ex parte relief and what constitutes irreparable harm. • Identify procedural considerations in injunction proceedings, including evidentiary requirements, the role of discovery, damages for wrongful injunctions, and how to determine appropriate security. 	

2:00 PM-2:15 PM	Break
2:15 PM-3:15 PM	Leveraging AI in Legal Writing Professor Joe Regalia
Session Description	<p>Learn about the latest AI tools to leverage in your legal writing, including the many possibilities and many pitfalls now and in the years to come.</p> <p>Learning Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop AI literacy about what current tools are available and their potential uses in legal writing—including the ability to spot the use of AI in legal writing. • Develop practical, ethical frameworks for quickly leveraging AI effectively. • Ensure that we are the pilots of AI tools and not their passengers by actively engaging as the "human in the loop" at the right times in the right ways.
3:30 PM-4:30 PM	NDJA Meeting and Elections
4:30 PM-5:00 PM	NDJA Education Committee Meeting
5:30 PM-6:30 PM	Networking Reception and Photos
6:30 PM-8:30 PM	District Court Judges Annual Awards Banquet

Friday, April 24

7:15 AM-8:15 AM	Breakfast
8:30 AM-10:00 AM	Courts and AI Professor David Engstrom
Session Description	<p>Two powerful forces are bearing down on American courts: mounting concern about access to justice, and potent new technologies, particularly AI. This session will provide a tour of how these forces are causing courts to rethink some of their most vital work. It will also explore Stanford University's first-of-its-kind collaboration with the L.A. Superior Court, the nation's largest trial court, including their joint work on a suite of litigant-facing and internal, court-facing AI tools designed to make the court more accessible to all.</p> <p>Learning Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn why courts are uniquely well-positioned to incorporate AI into the American civil justice system in responsible and trustworthy ways. • Learn the many ways that AI is transforming courts' work, from new litigant-facing chatbots and platforms to internal, court-facing tools that help advance the mission of fair and accurate adjudication. • Learn about Stanford University's first-of-its-kind research collaboration with the L.A. Superior Court, the nation's largest trial court, to leverage AI to make the court more accessible to all.
10:00-10:15 AM	Break

10:15 AM-11:15 AM	2025 Criminal Law Update—Nevada Supreme Court & Court of Appeals Veronica Bath Wright	
Session Description	<p>This session reviews significant criminal law decisions issued by the Nevada Supreme Court and Court of Appeals in 2025. The presentation highlights key rulings affecting trial practice and appellate review, focusing on cases most likely to impact district court proceedings. Participants will gain a practical understanding of recent developments and how they may influence criminal litigation in Nevada courts.</p> <p>Learning Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify significant Nevada Supreme Court and Court of Appeals decisions issued in 2025 in the area of criminal law. • Understand how recent appellate rulings may impact district court procedure, evidentiary rulings, and criminal litigation. • Apply recent case law developments to common issues arising in criminal proceedings. 	
11:15 AM-11:30 AM	Break	
11:30 AM-1:00 PM	United States Supreme Court Opinion Review Dean Erwin Chemerinsky	
Session Description	<p>Dean Chemerinsky's annual review of U.S. Supreme Court opinions and insights about cases heard in 2025-2026.</p> <p>Learning Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify recent U.S. Supreme Court decisions that will have the most impact on the court. • Summarize the importance and consequences of recent Supreme Court decisions on their judicial decisions. 	
1:00 PM-1:15 PM	Seminar Closing	