

The Supreme Court
State of Washington

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Dear Judges, Court Administrators, County Clerks:

At the Supreme Court's November administrative en banc conference, I was honored to be re-elected by my colleagues to a four-year term as chief justice. I am grateful for the trust the court has placed in me to continue in this important position, and I look forward to working with all of you over the next four years.

As a decentralized court system, the role of chief justice offers a unique opportunity to provide leadership to the branch alongside the judges and court administrators of our appellate, superior, and limited jurisdiction courts and our county clerks throughout Washington State. Before taking the oath of office for this second term in January, I wanted to discuss my priorities for the next four years directly with you.

- **Improving our budget process.** I am proud of the strides we have made to ensure that judicial branch budget requests are as cohesive as possible and represent our highest priorities. This is particularly important as Washington continues to experience slow economic and financial recovery. With the enhancement to the budgeting process instituted this year, representatives from each level of court, other judicial branch agencies, and the BJA, have a better opportunity to provide valuable input and help in achieving a unified position in working with the other branches of government. I am committed to continuing this tradition of transparency and collaboration at the earliest stages of the budget development process and to finding additional ways to increase participation by all levels of courts and our justice partners.

- **Enhancing the BJA's role as a policy-setting body.** In addition to my ongoing commitment to planning for our future, a critical first step in this effort will be to restructure the Board for Judicial Administration (BJA) to strengthen its role as a policy-setting body.

At a BJA retreat in September, we started this process by forming two work groups that will meet during the next 90 days to (a) review existing boards, commissions, task forces, and other entities to determine whether any of these can be combined to reduce duplication of efforts, and (b) develop recommendations for the restructuring of the BJA in order to be the most effective in the future. I am grateful to the leadership of BJA co-chair, Thurston County Superior Court Judge Chris Wickham, in these efforts, as well as the leaders of our appellate, superior, and district and municipal courts and look forward to starting the new year with recommendations that will further strengthen and unify our branch.

- **Fostering regional courts that best serve the public.** Our courts of limited jurisdiction are truly the "people's courts" with more than two million case filings per year. This is where most citizens interact with the judicial system, and we need to foster an approach that best serves the public. With more than 170 municipalities currently contracting with a district or municipal court, it is imperative that we examine the most efficient and cost effective method of providing judicial services to the citizens of Washington State. Many community leaders are interested in supporting cooperative operational arrangements among municipalities in the delivery of municipal court services, a concept that is broadly described as regional courts.

Thanks to a grant from the State Justice Institute, the National Center for State Courts is currently exploring existing configurations to better understand the attributes of combined courts that contribute to better court performance and fiscal efficiency. I would like to express my thanks to the BJA's Regional Court Study Oversight Committee, chaired by Judge David Svaren of Skagit County District Court, which is guiding this process. The committee work is scheduled to be completed at the first of the year, and I look forward to the report.

- **Finding ways to address racial disproportionality in our justice system.** As justices and judges, we are deeply committed to reducing racial disproportionality in our justice system, particularly in light of new research providing more detail on where disproportionality exists. The Task Force on Race & the Criminal Justice

System set us on a path to gather and examine data on disproportionality in our justice system, and to then recommend and help follow through on solutions. Following presentations by the task force, the Supreme Court requested that the Minority and Justice Commission take the lead on implementing recommendations of the task force and coordinating a roundtable at the Supreme Court to discuss our progress. The Washington State Center for Court Research, which operates within the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), has been hard at work collecting and sharing data not just on a statewide level but also county-by-county. It is the specific details at the county and court level that can help us determine the causes for disproportionality—which can vary as significantly as our counties vary—and guide our efforts in enacting solutions.

My colleagues and I take these recommendations very seriously and will continue to work as a branch to reduce and eliminate racial disproportionality and ensure that justice is administered equally for all of our residents.

- **Enhancing diversity and inclusion within our court system.** While we work to address racial disproportionality affecting court customers, we must remember to also look within to support diversity in our attorneys, judges, and court staff. Members of the public gain confidence in our system when they can walk into a court and see people like themselves—including women and minority judges and attorneys and staff—as part of the mix of professionals overseeing justice in their cases.

One way we work to support increasing diversity in the court community is through the Initiative for Diversity. The Initiative works through a broad partnership including the Gender and Justice Commission, the Minority and Justice Commission, minority bar association, law schools, the Washington State Bar Association (WSBA), and many law firms to produce measurable progress toward a legal profession that promotes diversity among lawyers. A diverse legal community is critical to ensuring a fair and unbiased legal system. I am committed to continuing to work with the Washington State Bar Association, law schools, courts, and law firms to find ways to increase opportunities for inclusion.

- **Supporting a transformation of AOC.** Finally, I am delighted to start this new term as Chief Justice with the assistance of Washington's new State Court Administrator Callie Dietz. As Callie mentioned in her letter of introduction to you, she is working to transform the AOC to provide better service from

technological advances to research and planning. While changes of this scale take time, I am confident that our shared vision of enhancing communications with our court family and external stakeholders and strengthening our relationships with the executive and legislative branches will be achieved.

Each of us has an important role to play in the success of these initiatives, which are critical to the success of the branch in meeting our mission of providing justice to the people of Washington. As we move forward I look forward to working with you and to keeping you informed each step of the way either with direct e-mail communications, or in our electronic newsletter for the judiciary, *Full Court Press*.

I would also like to take this opportunity to invite you to attend the 2013 State of the Judiciary Address, which is tentatively scheduled for January 23 at the House of Representatives Chamber. This address will be coordinated with the January BJA meeting, and there is plenty of seating in the gallery should you be able to join us in person. Further details will be provided on the courts' website.

It is an honor to serve you, and if you should have any questions, suggestions or concerns regarding the areas outlined above, or facing the judiciary in general, please contact me at 360/357-2037 or Callie Dietz at 360/357-2120.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Barbara A. Madsen".

Barbara A. Madsen
Chief Justice

c: Supreme Court Staff
AOC Staff
Joanne Moore
Paula Littlewood
Reiko Callner
Jim Bamberger