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Chief Justice Bevan Delivers 2021 State of the Judiciary

Idaho Supreme Court Justice G. Richard Bevan today shared his vision for a transparent and accessible court system and updated lawmakers on the courts' response to the COVID-19 pandemic during his 2021 State of the Judiciary address.

The yearly address to the Idaho Legislature complements the Judicial Branch's annual report and provides a regular touchpoint between the two branches of government.

To support precautions and best practices surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, Chief Justice Bevan delivered his address over video and spoke from the Supreme Court courtroom in Boise — the first time the address has not been delivered in the Idaho Capitol itself. A recording of his remarks is now available at vimeo.com/504850197. The text of his address accompanies this press release and is also available on the Idaho Supreme Court's main website, isc.idaho.gov.

The Chief Justice, who assumed his leadership role on Jan. 1, stated his commitment to a transparent and data-driven court system and to advancing public understanding about the courts. He shared his driving belief and vision "that the law as applied in the lives of our citizens can truly make a difference."

Much of the address focused on the effects of the pandemic. The Chief Justice highlighted the tools used to keep courts operating throughout the year, including pivots to virtual courtrooms and partnerships among county clerks to cover each other's offices. Not every challenge could be overcome, however, and the Chief Justice provided a frank look at the calculus that goes into determining court protocols during a pandemic: balancing the effects of delaying jury trials with the potential harm of compelling case parties and jurors to attend court.

"These decisions must be made while navigating an ever-changing understanding of the dangers and the impact on available health care and all while the landscape of community spread rises and ebbs," Chief Justice Bevan said.

This year saw other successes that benefit Idahoans, including updated quality standards for Idaho's treatment courts, improved court data reporting and analysis capabilities, and the Judicial Branch's contributions to the work of the Idaho Behavioral Health Council. The Chief Justice discussed the Supreme Court's investment in technology and how that will continue after the pandemic, offering as example new functionality for the court's website (courtsselfhelp.idaho.gov) that

walks Idahoans through common filings such as civil protection orders. Fifty years after Idaho created the magistrate division of its district courts, Chief Justice Bevan also reflected on the services that division provides to Idahoans.

For the 2022 fiscal year, the Chief Justice asked lawmakers to fund one new district judge and two new magistrate judges for Canyon County, which faced a shortage of judicial resources even before the pandemic.

"Right now," Chief Justice Bevan said, "we are living in an extraordinary time and fulfilling the constitutional responsibilities placed upon the judiciary can be difficult, but I am proud to tell you that with your support, the Idaho judiciary is rising to the challenge."

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