

The Rural Justice Collaborative: An overview of resources and opportunities available to courts serving rural communities

Friday, October 21, 2022
3:15 – 4:30 PM



Rural communities face unique challenges that impact their ability to deliver fair and equitable justice. Despite these challenges, rural communities rely on their many strengths to address the needs of their residents. In 2021, the National Center for State Courts, in partnership with Rulo Strategies, launched the Rural Justice Collaborative (RJC) to showcase the strengths of rural communities and highlight the cross-sector collaboration that is a hallmark of rural justice systems. These strengths include strong professional networks, deep ties to the communities they serve, resiliency, and ingenuity. Attendees will learn about the RJC, rural innovation centers, the RJC roadmap, and intended future work.

At the end of the session, participants will come away with:

1. Introduction of the Rural Justice Collaborative
2. Highlights of innovative rural communities
3. A roadmap to the future of the RJC
4. Leadership work for the future

Speakers:

Kristina Bryant, Principal Court Management Consultant, National Center for State Courts



Kristina Bryant, MBA, began her work for the NCSC in 2017, as a Principal Court Management Consultant after 20 years' experience in community corrections as a Juvenile Court Probation Officer, Criminal Justice Planner, and Assistant Director of adult pretrial and probation services agency. She has worked extensively with the judiciary, elected officials, and policymakers to improve justice policies and practices, and to expand collaborative court diversion and intervention efforts. Ms. Bryant is skilled in court administration, including training and process analysis and has broad experience in drug policy issues. She has also facilitated cross-system information sharing and collaborations between justice and behavioral health partners. Ms. Bryant served four years on the Virginia Community Criminal Justice Association, Executive Committee and served as co-chair of the statewide probation Quality Assurance Committee and the Legislative Committee. She graduated from Averett University with a Master's in Business Administration and

received her BS in Criminal Justice from Radford University. Ms. Bryant also has extensive experience in education and learning styles, teaching at the university level for seven years.

Tara Kunkel, Executive Director, Rulo Strategies



Prior to founding Rulo Strategies, Tara served as a Senior Drug Policy Advisor at the U.S. Department of Justice where she led the implementation of the Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant, and Substance Abuse Program (COSSAP). Under Tara’s leadership, the COSSAP program grew from a \$27 million grant program in 2017 to \$187 million in 2019. Prior to joining the Federal government, Tara served as a consultant for the National Center for States more than nine years leading, managing, and evaluating projects at all points in the justice system from diversion programs, pretrial supervision, courts, probation, and corrections.

Before becoming a consultant, Tara gained invaluable field experience serving as a probation officer, criminal justice planner, and drug court administrator in Virginia. Tara has developed and overseen cooperative agreements and grants with a variety of government agencies including planning, developing and implementing multiyear grant proposals. She received a Masters in Social Work from Virginia Commonwealth University, and Bachelors degree in Psychology from the University of Virginia.

Hon. Michelle Rick, Judge, Michigan Court of Appeals



The Honorable Michelle Rick was elected to the Michigan Court of Appeals bench in November 2020, and began serving her term in January 2021. Judge Rick represents the 4th Judicial District. Judge Rick served as a trial judge for the 29th Circuit Court from 2007- 2020. Before that, Judge Rick worked briefly as a private practitioner before transitioning to a career in public service. That service included working as an assistant prosecutor, a senior assistant attorney general for the State of Michigan, and deputy legal counsel to Michigan’s Governor Jennifer M. Granholm.

Judge Rick is a graduate of Michigan State University and the University of Detroit Mercy School of Law. She is a member of the UDM Law Justice Frank Murphy Honor Society. Judge Rick is the District 7 Director of the National Association of Women Judges. She is the incoming President of the Michigan Judges Association and a member of the State Bar of Michigan Judicial Council. Judge Rick is a member of the Rural Justice Collaborative, whose mission is to showcase the strengths of rural communities and highlights the cross-sector collaboration that is a hallmark of rural justice systems across the country. Judge Rick is a committee member of the State Bar of Michigan Corrections and Prisons section, and a judicial advisor to the Justice For All Commission.

In 2015, the Women Lawyers Association of Mid-Michigan awarded Judge Rick the Carolyn A. Stell Award. January 2019, the Michigan Supreme Court recognized Judge Rick as a judge who gives back and makes a difference. In 2020, the State Bar of Michigan awarded Judge Rick and select University of

Detroit Mercy School of Law faculty and students the Kimberly M. Cahill Bar Leadership Award. The award was given for creating and executing “Project Access” a traveling expungement clinic that brought expungement relief to 6 rural communities in Michigan’s northern Lower Peninsula. In 2021, the Michigan Women Lawyers Association of Michigan awarded Judge Rick the Mary S. Coleman Award, recognizing Judge Rick’s significant contributions as a judiciary role model for women in the legal profession and in society.

Judge Rick teaches Access to Justice at Detroit Mercy Law School. She is a frequent guest speaker and lecturer at various statewide and local law-related events. Judge Rick is a Michigan State Bar Foundation Fellow and an American Bar Foundation Fellow. Judge Rick is married to her college sweetheart, Matthew, and they have 4 adult children.