



alaska judicial council

510 L Street, Suite 450, Anchorage, Alaska 99501-1295 (907) 279-2526 FAX (907) 276-5046
http://www.ajc.state.ak.us E-mail: postmaster@ajc.state.ak.us

Press Release

Contact: Susanne DiPietro, Executive Director
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For immediate release
May 26, 2026

Announcing Nominees Alaska Court of Appeals, Anchorage Superior & Anchorage District Courts and intent to re-advertise Kotzebue Superior Court

The Alaska Judicial Council met in Anchorage on May 18, 20, and 21, and in Kotzebue on May 19, 2026, to interview applicants for vacancies on the Alaska Court of Appeals, Kotzebue Superior, Anchorage Superior, and Anchorage District courts.

The Council voted on Monday, May 18, 2026, to nominate **Patricia L. Haines** and **Kelly Taylor** as the most qualified applicants to fill the Alaska Court of Appeals vacancy, and **David Wilkinson** and **Matt Widmer** as the most qualified applicants to fill the Anchorage Superior Court vacancy. Following interviews held on May 20-21, the Council voted to nominate **Michael John Branson**, **Julia Metzger**, **Ben Muse**, **Eric Salinger**, **Sam Vandergaw**, and **Matt Widmer** for a vacancy on the Anchorage District Court. The governor has 45 days in which to appoint from among these nominees to fill the positions.

For the Kotzebue Superior Court vacancy, the Council nominated one applicant, Daniel DalleMolle. Because the Council's vote did not result in at least two sufficiently qualified nominees, the Council declined to submit any names to the governor and will re-advertise the position.

The Judicial Council is required to nominate two or more of the most qualified applicants applying for a judicial vacancy. (The framers of our Constitution referred to this standard as the "best available timber.")

The Council is a citizens' commission created by the Alaska Constitution composed of three attorneys, three non-attorneys, and the Chief Justice of the Alaska Supreme Court. The Council completes an extensive investigation and evaluation of judicial applicants. The Council reviews each applicant's education, experience, bar discipline and credit records, participation in community activities, and other records. It asks members of the Alaska Bar to evaluate the applicants, encourages the public to submit comments, and interviews the applicants.

Nominees for the Alaska Court of Appeals vacancy are:

Patricia L. Haines: Judge Haines has been an Alaska resident for 15½ years and has practiced law for 14 ½ years. She graduated from Temple University Beasley School of Law in 2010 and is currently a superior court judge in Fairbanks.

Kelly Taylor: Ms. Taylor has been an Alaska resident for 45 years and has practiced law for 15½ years. She graduated from Duke University School of Law in 2009 and is currently an assistant public defender with the appellate unit in Anchorage.

Nominees for the Anchorage Superior Court vacancy are:

Matt Widmer: Mr. Widmer has been an Alaska resident for 21 years and has practiced law for 21 years. He graduated from William & Mary Law School in 2005 and is currently in private practice in Anchorage.

David Wilkinson: Mr. Wilkinson has been an Alaska resident for 39 years and has practiced law for 14 years. He graduated from Seattle University School of Law in 2012 and is currently an assistant attorney general with the Department of Law in Anchorage.

Nominees for the Anchorage District Court vacancy are:

Michael John Branson: Mr. Branson has been an Alaska resident for 44½ years and has been practicing law for 9½ years. He graduated from Southern Illinois University School of Law in 2016 and is currently in private practice.

Julia Metzger: Ms. Metzger has been an Alaska resident for 14 years and has practiced law for 14 years. She graduated from Villanova University Charles Widger School of Law in 2012 and is currently an assistant public advocate in Anchorage.

Ben Muse: Mr. Muse has been an Alaska resident for 44½ years and has practiced law for 15 years. He graduated from Gonzaga University School of Law in 2010 and is currently an assistant federal defender in Anchorage.

Eric Salinger: Mr. Salinger has been an Alaska resident for 13 years and has practiced law for 13 years. He graduated from University of Pittsburgh School of Law in 2013 and is currently an administrative law judge in Anchorage.

Sam Vandergaw: Mr. Vandergaw has been an Alaska resident for 41½ years and has practiced law for 16 years. He graduated from Gonzaga University School of Law in 2009 and is currently an assistant attorney general with the Office of Special Prosecutions in Anchorage.

Matt Widmer: Mr. Widmer has been an Alaska resident for 21 years and has practiced law for 21 years. He graduated from William & Mary Law School in 2005 and is currently in private practice in Anchorage.

Attached are records of the Council members' votes.

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Nominees for the Alaska Court of Appeals vacancy are:

Patricia L. Haines: Judge Haines has been an Alaska resident for 15 years and has practiced law for 14 years. She graduated from Temple University Beasley School of Law in 2010 and is currently a superior court judge in Fairbanks.

Kelly Taylor: Ms. Taylor has been an Alaska resident for 44½ years and has practiced law for 15½ years. She graduated from Duke University School of Law in 2009 and is currently an assistant public defender with the appellate unit in Anchorage.

Nominees for the Anchorage Superior Court vacancy are:

Matt Widmer: Mr. Widmer has been an Alaska resident for 20½ years and has practiced law for 20½ years. He graduated from William & Mary Law School in 2005 and is currently in private practice in Anchorage.

David Wilkinson: Mr. Wilkinson has been an Alaska resident for 38½ years and has practiced law for 13½ years. He graduated from the Seattle University School of Law in 2012 and is currently a senior assistant attorney general with the Department of Law in Anchorage.

Nominees for the Anchorage District Court vacancy are:

Michael John Branson: Mr. Branson has been an Alaska resident for 44½ years and has been practicing law for 9 years. He graduated from the Southern Illinois University School of Law in 2016 and is currently in private practice.

Julia Metzger: Ms. Metzger has been an Alaska resident for 13½ years and has practiced law for 13½ years. She graduated from the Villanova University Charles Widger School of Law in 2012 and is currently a supervising assistant public advocate with the Office of Public Advocacy in Anchorage.

Ben Muse: Mr. Muse has been an Alaska resident for 44 years and has practiced law for 15 years. He graduated from the Gonzaga University School of Law in 2010 and is currently an assistant federal defender with the Federal Public Defender in Anchorage.

Eric Salinger: Mr. Salinger has been an Alaska resident for 12½ years and has practiced law for 12½ years. He graduated from the University of Pittsburgh School of Law in 2013 and is currently an administrative law judge in Anchorage.

Sam Vandergaw: Mr. Vandergaw has been an Alaska resident for 41½ years and has practiced law for 15½ years. He graduated from the Gonzaga University School of Law in 2009 and is currently an assistant attorney general with the Office of Special Prosecutions in Anchorage.

Matt Widmer: Mr. Widmer has been an Alaska resident for 20½ years and has practiced law for 20½ years. He graduated from William & Mary Law School in 2005 and is currently in private practice in Anchorage.

Attached are records of the Council members' votes.

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**Vote Tally Sheet
Alaska Court of Appeals
May 18, 2026**

Candidates	Council Members						
	Babcock	Collins	DeWitt	Fletcher	Robinson	Miller	Carney*
Mark Clark	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Patricia L. Haines	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Kelly Taylor	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Matt Widmer	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	

**The Chief Justice votes only when to do so would change the result.*



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**Vote Tally Sheet
Anchorage Superior Court
May 18, 2026**

Candidates	Council Members						
	Babcock	Collins	DeWitt	Fletcher	Robinson	Miller	Carney*
Loren P. Hildebrandt	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	
David Wilkinson	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Matt Widmer	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	

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**Vote Tally Sheet
Kotzebue Superior Court
May 19, 2026**

Candidates	Council Members						
	Babcock	Collins	DeWitt	Fletcher	Robinson	Miller	Carney*
Daniel DalleMolle	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Nicholas Defreitas	No	No	No	No	No	No	

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Vote Tally Sheet Anchorage District Court May 20-21, 2026

Candidates	Council Members						
	Babcock	Collins	DeWitt	Fletcher	Robinson	Miller	Carney*
Michael Branson	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	
Eva Khadjinova	No	No	No	No	No	No	
Julia Metzger	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Ben Muse	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Eric Salinger	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Hannah Steketee	No	No	No	No	No	No	
Sam Vandergaw	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	
Matt Widmer	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	

**The Chief Justice votes only when to do so would change the result.*