

Judging Utah Judges Brings Positive Results, Study Shows

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The Utah Judicial Performance Evaluation Commission is releasing results of an independent study conducted by University of Utah graduate students. The comprehensive study underscores the significance of JPEC's judicial evaluations in improving overall judicial performance and accountability of Utah judges.

"The study reveals compelling evidence that JPEC's evaluations are pivotal in enhancing judicial performance," said Mary-Margaret Pingree, executive director at JPEC.

Key findings show steady improvement in scores and enhanced accountability of judges.

"Since JPEC began publishing reports in 2012, we've seen a notable increase in average judicial performance scores," Pingree said. "Judges who undergo multiple evaluation cycles showed marked improvement in their scores from their first term to subsequent terms, which is a very good sign for Utahns, who are affected by decisions from Utah courts."

The study validates that judges who receive feedback on areas for improvement demonstrate better performance in future evaluations.

"We've also seen an enhanced sense of accountability by judges," she said. "Judges with significantly lower scores than their peers are 25% more likely to step down rather than seek retention. Specifically, a one-point decrease in a performance score correlates with a 15-30% increase in the likelihood of a judge stepping down."



An independent study validates that Utah judges who are evaluated and apply feedback on areas for improvement demonstrate better performance in future evaluations, including an enhanced sense of accountability.

For Utahns, these findings are particularly significant because the steady improvement in judicial performance scores translates into a more effective and reliable judiciary, which is foundational to public trust and confidence in the legal system.

“Knowing that our judges are held to high standards and are continually improving is reassuring. It underscores the importance of JPEC's work in promoting judicial excellence,” she said. “By ensuring transparency and accountability, JPEC not only supports judges in their professional growth but also upholds the integrity of our judicial system.”

Systematic evaluations measure legal ability, integrity, judicial temperament, administrative performance, and procedural fairness.

To access JPEC’s 2024 Report to the Community, visit <https://judges.utah.gov/2024/01/16/jpec-2024-report-to-the-community>. For more information about JPEC, visit judges.utah.gov.

Established in 2008 by the Utah State Legislature, JPEC is an independent state commission that evaluates performances of judges for voters. Utah’s three branches of government appoint JPEC’s 13 volunteer commissioners to staggered terms. Commissioners are from diverse professions, backgrounds, and geographic regions of Utah.

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