



Title: Judicial Branch Workplace Wellness Policy

Policy Number: JB-HR-25-001

Authority: Operating Procedures for the Delaware Judicial Branch

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Supersedes: Not applicable

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1. Purpose

The Judicial Branch recognizes the vital role our employees play in maintaining the public's trust and confidence in Delaware's courts and acknowledges the higher risks that employees face of experiencing work-related stress, burnout, and trauma due to daily interactions with court users who themselves are experiencing or may have experienced trauma.

The purpose of the Judicial Branch Workplace Wellness Policy is to prioritize staff well-being and promote a culture of good health by establishing a Judicial Branch Employee Wellness Workgroup, whose goals are the following:

- Create trainings and educational materials to help employees recognize the signs of stress, burnout, and trauma in themselves and identify appropriate strategies to address it.
- Help create a trauma-sensitive professional environment in which employees understand and can apply trauma-informed responses in their daily work.
- Educate supervisors on how to recognize and address signs of stress, burnout, and trauma experienced by employees in the workplace.
- Provide access to wellness resources to enhance employee well-being and resilience and to improve job satisfaction.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all Judicial Branch employees, including Judicial Officers, full- and part-time employees, temporary employees, casual/seasonal employees, contractors, interns, and volunteers.

3. Definitions and Acronyms

- **Burnout** means a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. Burnout is

characterized by feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion; increased mental distance from one's job, negative or cynical thoughts and feelings; and reduced professional efficacy.

- **Compassion Fatigue** means a type of burnout resulting from the emotional strain of working with traumatized individuals. Compassion fatigue is characterized as a state of physical and mental exhaustion caused by a depleted ability to cope with one's everyday environment.
- **Court Administrators** refers to the Administrator of the Supreme Court; the Administrator of the Court of Chancery; the Administrator of the Superior Court; the Administrator of the Family Court; the Administrator of the Court of Common Pleas; and the Administrator of the Justice of the Peace Court.
- **Culture of Good Health** means a working environment where employee health and safety are valued, supported, and promoted through training, policies, benefits, and environmental supports.
- **Employer** means, individually or collectively, the Administrative Office of the Courts, a Court, or a Judicial Agency.
- **Human Resources (HR) Representative** means HR staff designated to work with the employee and the employee's Supervisor regarding options and benefits available to foster and implement a culture of good health under this policy.
- **Individual Trauma** means an individual's reaction to an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening with lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual wellbeing.
- **Resilience** means the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands. Several factors contribute to how well people adapt to adversities, including the ways in which individuals view and engage with the world, the availability and quality of social resources, and specific coping strategies.
- **SAMHSA** refers to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration within the United States Department of Health and Human Services.
- **Supervisor** means a full-time Judicial Branch employee who recommends hiring, separation, and promotion decisions and is responsible for planning, assigning, reviewing, and disciplining subordinate employees on a regular and continuing basis.
- **Trauma**, as used in this policy, means individual trauma, vicarious trauma, or both.
- **Trauma-Informed Care** means an intervention and organizational approach that focuses on the widespread impact of trauma on all individuals by recognizing the

signs and symptoms of trauma; fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices; actively promoting resilience and self-care; and resisting re-traumatization.

- **Trauma Response** means a person's response to individual trauma or vicarious trauma. Trauma responses are neutral and a normal part of emotional processing. Trauma responses are not a sign of psychopathy or other psychological disorder. Trauma responses may include, but are not limited to, volatile emotions, exhaustion/fatigue, difficulty concentrating, physical aches and pains, relationship issues, addictive behaviors, aggression, social withdrawal, shame, or numbness.
- **Vicarious Trauma** means the experience of people accumulating and carrying other people's stories of trauma, including images, sounds and details, that they hear or witness.
- **Workgroup**, as used in this policy, refers to the Judicial Branch Employee Wellness Workgroup.

4. Policy

- a) It is the policy of the Judicial Branch to create a culture of good health and to ensure a safe and supportive workplace for employees who may be experiencing stress, burnout, or trauma. To that end, the Judicial Branch, through the Administrative Office of the Courts, hereby establishes the Judicial Branch Employee Wellness Workgroup (Workgroup), which is volunteer-based and includes members from across the Judicial Branch.
- b) The Workgroup is charged with constructing a strategic plan with the vision, among other things, to create a trauma-sensitive environment and culture of good health within the Judicial Branch.
- c) The Workgroup will meet regularly and work to achieve the objectives laid out in its strategic plan. The Workgroup will regularly report on its work to the Administrative Office of the Courts and the Court Administrators.
- d) The Workgroup is authorized to create training and resources to raise employee awareness about stress, burnout, and trauma and strategies to prevent or reduce symptoms and build resilience. The Workgroup also is authorized to host voluntary wellness activities.
- e) The Workgroup will maintain the [Judicial Wellbeing Webpage](#), which provides employees access to wellness resources to enhance employee well-being and improve job satisfaction.

5. Procedures

- a) **Best Practices for Supervisors:** Supervisors are critical to the Judicial Branch. The following outlines best practices for supervisors to address and prevent trauma responses experienced by staff due to stress, burnout, or trauma. These

practices can be used regularly. This section can also be used as a reference, when a supervisor notices that an employee is experiencing a traumatic event or reacting to chronic stress. It is important to remember that while supervisors cannot and should not fill the role of a therapist, they can be critical in helping affected employees get connected to needed resources.

i) Leadership and Promoting a Culture of Good Health:

- (1) Supervisors should meet regularly with their staff, both one-on-one and as a unit. These meetings can be used as a space to identify if a recent event at work has caused staff stress. These meetings can also be a time where staff can debrief away from the public. This can be helpful in reducing stigma and establishing an environment that allows for discussion and increased understanding of issues that staff are facing.
- (2) Due to the nature of our work in the Judicial Branch, conversations regarding trauma may arise during regular supervision. Note: When supervising employees who are survivors of individual trauma, it is important for supervisors to be clear that the supervisor's role is to support the staff member so they can be successful in their work, not to become their counselor or advocate. This includes affirming that the employee need not disclose details of their experience to seek support and guidance from a supervisor. (On occasion, when there is a workplace safety concern, a survivor may be asked to share relevant information.)
- (3) Supervisors should familiarize themselves with available resources that can help employees explore and identify ways to manage stress, burnout, or trauma and discuss these options with their employees. This may include:
 - Encouraging staff to reach out to the [Employee Assistance Program](#) for a higher level of care.
 - Encouraging the employee to attend relevant training when offered.
 - Encouraging the employee to seek out counseling and other services, through their health care provider, Employee Assistance Program, community-based programs, or resources contained within the Judicial Wellbeing Webpage.
- (4) Supervisors may refer employees to their HR representative to explore other available options and benefits, such as leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) or a reasonable accommodation under Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- (5) Reasonable accommodations may be available for an employee who is experiencing domestic violence, sex offenses, or stalking in the workplace. (Refer to Section 9 - Associated Policies, Regulations, and Resources.)

b) Best Practices for Employees: The following outlines best practices that employees can use to help mitigate the risks of stress, burnout, and trauma. These practices can be used regularly. This section can also be used as a reference, when an employee is experiencing a trauma response or are having reactions to chronic stress. Employees can help create an environment that is supportive of co-workers needing support and resources to cope with stress, burnout, or trauma.

- i) Educate yourself on stress management, burnout, and trauma by attending training available through [the Delaware Learning Center](#) or by accessing resources available through the [Judicial Wellbeing Webpage](#).
- ii) Outline a plan for, and practice, self-care. The Workgroup can distribute self-care plan outlines to any employee that wishes to have a copy. Employees are encouraged to create a self-care plan before it is needed.
- iii) Develop a consistent daily routine to help maintain a sense of control, including keeping a regular sleep schedule.
- iv) Seek healthy work/life boundaries.
- v) Take regular breaks during the day to stand, stretch, or walk.
- vi) Plan regular vacation time away from work.
- vii) Connect with family, friends, and coworkers outside of work.
- viii) Engage in mindfulness or other stress-relieving activities. Take time during your day (either before or after your workday or during breaks) to spend on simple, stress-relieving activities that interest you. Consider journaling, mindful breathing exercises, reading, or engaging in creative activities.
- ix) Familiarize yourself with resources that may be available to you through your medical benefits or the [Employee Assistance Program](#). If there is an incident at work, or if you are struggling with the effects of trauma, please do the following:
 - Contact your supervisor or HR representative if you need immediate assistance, options, or referrals.
 - Contact the Employee Assistance Program directly to connect with a counselor or call the crisis hotline. Contact and referral information are located at the end of this policy. (Refer to Section 9 - Associated Policies, Regulations, and Resources.)
 - Use annual and sick leave as needed according to your Court's coverage needs and the policies of the Judicial Branch.

6. Exclusions

There are no exclusions.

7. Dissemination and Training

This policy will be distributed statewide to all employees by the Administrative Office of the Courts. A virtual information session on the policy will take place on October 31st from noon to 1pm. A recording of the information session will be available on the Delaware Learning Center. The Administrative Office of the Courts will also host resource tables at the following locations:

- Leonard L. Williams Justice Center
- Kent County Courthouse (main courthouse and Family Court's courthouse)
- Sussex County Courthouse (main courthouse and Family Court's courthouse)

Additional details regarding the information session and resource tables will be provided via email.

8. Data Reporting

There is no required data reporting. However, the Workgroup will regularly report on its work to the Administrative Office of the Courts and Court Administrators. Such reports will also be made available on the [Judicial Wellbeing Webpage](#).

9. Associated Policies, Regulations, and Resources

- [Judicial Branch Domestic Violence Policy](#)
- Americans with Disabilities Act: <https://www.ada.gov/>
- The [Judicial Wellbeing Webpage](#) contains a multitude of resources including a list of trainings, smart phone apps, podcasts, videos, articles and links to other external websites on a variety of topics including recovery, grief, self-care, and resiliency.
- 24-hour assistance can be accessed through the State's [Employee Assistance Program](#) (EAP). The EAP website includes articles, webinars, and contact information.
- Statewide Benefits Office [Behavioral Health / Emotional Wellbeing](#) webpage
- [Delaware's Executive Order 21: Creation of a trauma-informed state webpage](#)
- For more information on burnout, please refer to the following World Health Organization website: <https://www.who.int/news/item/28-05-2019-burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon-international-classification-of-diseases>
- For more information on compassion fatigue, please refer to the article *Compassion Fatigue among Healthcare, Emergency and Community Service Workers: A Systematic Review* accessible at the following website: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4924075/>
- For more information on the importance of addressing trauma through a trauma-informed framework, please refer to *SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and*

Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach available at the following website:
[SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach](#)

- The American Psychological Association provides information and resources on resilience at this website: <https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience>
- An in-depth examination of trauma responses can be found in chapter three of SAMHSA's Treatment Improvement Protocol 57, titled *Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services*. This resources can be accessed at the following webpage: [TIP 57: Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services | SAMHSA Library](#)
- To learn more about vicarious trauma, please refer to *The Vicarious Trauma Toolkit* created by the Office for Victims of Crime. The toolkit can be accessed at this website: <https://ovc.ojp.gov/program/vtt/what-is-vicarious-trauma>
- [Delaware Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health resources](#)
- [Delaware National Alliance on Mental Illness resources](#)

10. Associated Forms

None