

Dec. 2, 2024 — Galveston

8:00–10:00am — General Session

Hon. Richard G. “Rick” Hill, Justice of the Peace, Brazos County, Pct. 3

Past Pres, JPCA — Fmr Chr, JPCA Legis Cmte — Faculty, JCTC

*Building Bridges: Courts & the Community* — How do courts foster confidence in the judiciary within their community? This class examines resources and strategies for judges to build bridges, relationships, and understanding.

Confidence in the Judiciary

Our Place in the Community

Public Perception and Your Role

Guidelines for Success

Building Bridges to the Community

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Good morning to my judicial colleagues. Thanks to my friend, Judge Rick Hill, for allowing me to say a few words to you on behalf of the Texas Judiciary.

We face a challenge: public trust and confidence in the courts, state and federal, from the U.S. Supreme Court on down, is at an all-time low. But it’s part of a general disillusionment with all our institutions, and the good news is: the perception of courts is improving. Like everyone, we struggled through COVID, but courts mostly stayed open, providing a forum for communities seeking justice. I was in contact with the Justice Court Training Center throughout, learning together how to function in the pandemic, to conduct proceedings remotely when appropriate, to adjust dockets and procedures to accommodate needs. I was President of the national Conference of Chief Justices at the time and saw first-hand court operations in every state. I’ll tell you this: the Texas Justices of the Peace performed spectacularly.

And here’s why. The Training Center here is one of the best in the nation. It is a clearinghouse of experiences from 800 Justices of the Peace in the field, who handled 1.3 million cases in 2023, and an invaluable resource for you and your colleagues. Our Justices of the Peace are dedicated to providing equal justice under law to everyone seeking it. For most Texans, you are the face of justice, the person they see when they go to court. When you are fair, constant, listening to all sides, and adapting procedures to meet participants’ work and family pressures, you fulfill the promise of justice for all that Texans are counting on.

I’m retiring at the end of this month after more than 43 years’ judicial service. Every moment has been an honor for me, as I hope your service will be for you. There is no better state court system in the country than ours. And each of you is a key part of it. God bless you, and God bless Texas.

Nathan L. Hecht, Chief Justice, The Supreme Court of Texas