

A POCKET GUIDE *to the*
NORTH CAROLINA
JUDICIAL BRANCH



Anniversary Edition

This pocket guide provides basic information about North Carolina's three branches of government – legislative, executive, and judicial – with specific emphasis on the North Carolina Judicial Branch.



Thanks for your time and interest in learning more about North Carolina's state government. For more information and material, visit www.NCcourts.gov and search for "Speakers Bureau."



THE MISSION OF THE NORTH CAROLINA JUDICIAL BRANCH IS TO PROTECT AND PRESERVE THE RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES OF ALL THE PEOPLE AS GUARANTEED BY THE CONSTITUTIONS AND LAWS OF THE UNITED STATES AND NORTH CAROLINA BY PROVIDING A FAIR, INDEPENDENT, AND ACCESSIBLE FORUM FOR THE JUST, TIMELY, AND ECONOMICAL RESOLUTION OF THEIR LEGAL AFFAIRS.

from the NORTH CAROLINA CONSTITUTION

Article 1, Section 6

4

The legislative, executive, and supreme judicial powers of the State government shall be forever separate and distinct from each other.

from the NORTH CAROLINA CONSTITUTION

Article 4, Section 1

The judicial power of the State shall, except as provided in Section 3 of this Article, be vested in a Court for the Trial of Impeachments and in a General Court of Justice. The General Assembly shall have no power to deprive the judicial department of any power or

from the NORTH CAROLINA CONSTITUTION

Article 4, Section 1 (continued)

6

jurisdiction that rightfully pertains to it as a coordinate department of the government, nor shall it establish or authorize any courts other than as permitted by this Article.

THREE BRANCHES *of* NORTH CAROLINA'S STATE GOVERNMENT

- LEGISLATIVE BRANCH
- EXECUTIVE BRANCH
- JUDICIAL BRANCH

*The state motto of
North Carolina is
Esse Quam Videri —
“To Be Rather Than to Seem.”*



THREE BRANCHES *of* NORTH CAROLINA'S STATE GOVERNMENT

8

LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

The Legislative Branch makes laws for North Carolina. It is made up of the Senate and the House of Representatives, which together are known as the General Assembly. The Legislature meets biennially, and all members are elected for two-year terms.



OUR STATE'S LEADERS

Legislative Branch

Speaker of the House

The House of Representatives consists of 120 members who serve a term of two years. The presiding officer of the House of Representatives is the Speaker of the House. The speaker is elected by the members from their membership for a two-year term. The speaker's duties include maintaining order in the House and appointing members to the House's standing committees.

President Pro Tempore

The Senate consists of 50 members who serve a term of two years. The lieutenant governor is president of the Senate and presides over the daily session. The lieutenant governor is elected by the citizens of North Carolina for a four-year term. He / she has no vote in the Senate except to break a tie. The Senate elects officers from their membership including the President Pro Tempore.

THREE BRANCHES *of* NORTH CAROLINA'S STATE GOVERNMENT

10

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

The Executive Branch of government enforces laws made by the Legislature. The head of this branch is the governor, who is elected every four years. Along with the governor, the Executive Branch also includes the lieutenant governor, the Council of State, and many state agencies.



OUR STATE'S LEADERS

Executive Branch

Governor

The governor is the head of the Executive Branch and serves as commander-in-chief of the state's military forces. The governor is responsible for preparing and presenting the state budget to the General Assembly. The governor of North Carolina has extensive powers of appointment of Executive Branch officials, some judges, and members of boards and commissions.



THREE BRANCHES *of* NORTH CAROLINA'S STATE GOVERNMENT

12

JUDICIAL BRANCH

The Judicial Branch interprets what our laws and constitution mean and makes decisions about the laws and those who break them. North Carolina's court system is called the General Court of Justice and consists of three divisions: appellate, superior court, and district court.



OUR STATE'S LEADERS

Judicial Branch

Chief Justice

In addition to presiding over the sessions of the Supreme Court of North Carolina, the chief justice has numerous administrative duties as head of the Judicial Branch, including appointing the director and assistant director of the Administrative Office of the Courts, designating the chief judge of the Court of Appeals and a chief district court judge for each district court district, creating the

schedule of superior court sessions and assigning superior court judges to those sessions, transferring district court judges to other districts for temporary or specialized duty, appointing the chief administrative law judge of the Office of Administrative Hearings, and either serving on or appointing representatives of the Judicial Branch to groups such as the State Judicial Council and the Office of Indigent Defense Services.

CHIEF JUSTICE CHERI BEASLEY

SUPREME COURT OF NORTH CAROLINA



Cheri Beasley was appointed in 2019 as the 29th chief justice. She is the first African-American woman to serve as chief justice of the Supreme Court of North Carolina and fourth in the nation. Beasley's judicial career began in 1999 with her appointment as a district court judge in the Twelfth Judicial District. She served 10 years in that position, elected in 2002 and in 2006. In 2008, she was elected to serve as an associate judge on the North Carolina Court of Appeals, making her the first African-American woman elected in *any* statewide election without an initial appointment by the governor. After four years on the Court of Appeals, she was appointed to the Supreme Court, and subsequently won election to that position in 2014.



ELECTED OFFICIALS *of the* NORTH CAROLINA JUDICIAL BRANCH

The North Carolina Judicial Branch includes about 545 independently elected judicial officials. These officials are:

- Justices of the Supreme Court
- Judges of the Court of Appeals, District Court, and Superior Court
- Clerks of Superior Court
- District Attorneys

The Judicial Branch has about 6,300 employees located in all 100 counties and 240 facilities across the state.

TYPES *of* COURT

Appellate Division

Supreme Court

The Supreme Court of North Carolina is the state's highest court, and there is no further appeal from its decisions on matters of state law. It is made up of the chief justice, who also serves as the head of the North Carolina Judicial Branch, and six associate justices. Each justice serves an eight-year term. The Supreme Court has no jury and makes no determinations of fact, but considers whether error occurred at

trial or in judicial interpretation of the law.

Court of Appeals

The Court of Appeals is the state's intermediate appellate court. The court has 15 judges who serve eight-year terms and hear cases in panels of three. The court is led by a chief judge, who is appointed by the chief justice of the Supreme Court of North Carolina. The Court of Appeals

reviews the proceedings that occurred in the trial courts for errors of law or legal procedure. Most of the court's sessions are held in Raleigh, but individual panels sometimes meet in other locations throughout North Carolina.

Like the Supreme Court, the Court of Appeals decides only questions of law – not questions of fact. Its decisions are printed in the bound North Carolina Court of Appeals reports and posted online at appellate.NCcourts.org at the same

site as opinions of the Supreme Court. Both appellate courts are located in downtown Raleigh.

The Supreme Court building is located at 2 East Morgan Street. The Court of Appeals building (pictured below) is located at 1 West Morgan Street.



TYPES *of* COURT

Trial Division

Superior Court Division

Unlike the appellate division that decides only questions of law when a party appeals a case, the superior and district court divisions are the trial court divisions that hold trials to determine the facts of cases. The superior court division consists of the superior court, which is the court with general trial jurisdiction. This court “sits” (holds court) at least twice a year in each county of the state. In the

busiest counties, several sessions may be held concurrently each week.

District Court Division

Like the superior court division, the state is divided into district court districts for electoral purposes and administrative purposes. (A map of the district court judicial districts is available at www.NCcourts.gov.) Also like the superior court, the district court sits in the county seat of each

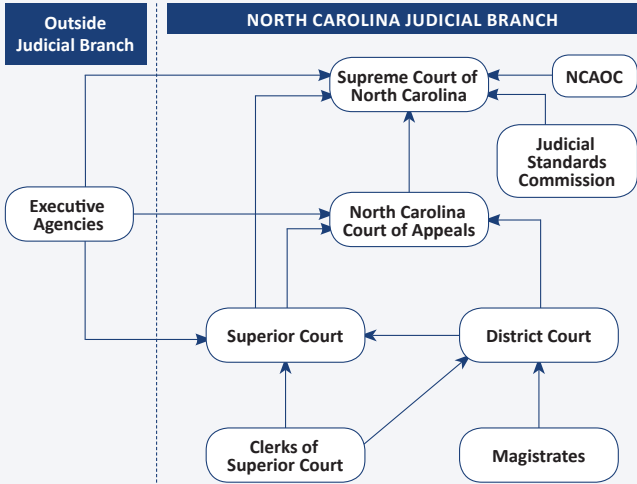
county. It may sit in certain other cities and towns if authorized by the General Assembly. Most counties have only one seat of court, but a few counties have several. Unlike the superior court, the district court districts are not grouped into larger judicial divisions. Each administrative district court district has a chief district court judge who manages the administrative duties of the court.

Magistrates' Courts

Magistrates hold court in both civil and criminal matters as officers of the

district court under the supervisory authority of the chief district court judge. Magistrates do not preside over a separate trial division of the General Court of Justice, so technically there is no such court as “magistrate’s court.” In the civil context, magistrates generally are assigned by the chief district court judge to preside over “small claims” court. For criminal matters, magistrates conduct certain preliminary proceedings and are authorized to dispose of some cases by pleas of guilty or by trial.

COURT STRUCTURE and ROUTES of APPEAL



North Carolina's unified court system handles nearly 3 million cases each year; cases that help keep our citizens safe, our economy vibrant, and our rights and liberties secure.

NORTH CAROLINA'S JUDICIAL BRANCH SEAL

The North Carolina Judicial Branch seal includes elements also found in the seal of the Supreme Court of North Carolina.

Elements and symbolism in the seal include:

- Lady Justice symbolizes the moral force in judicial systems.
- The balanced scales held by Lady Justice represent the impartiality with which justice is served.
- The sword held by Lady Justice symbolizes the power of justice and reason.



NORTH CAROLINA'S JUDICIAL BRANCH SEAL

- Lady Justice is blindfolded to show that justice is not subject to influence.
- The three stars collected together symbolize three co-equal branches within North Carolina's state government – legislative, executive, and judicial.
- The General Court of Justice refers to a unified judicial system. As defined by the General Statutes: "North Carolina's court system, called the General Court of Justice, is a unified statewide, state-operated system comprised of three divisions."



- The phrase “Suum Cuique Tribuere” is Latin for “To render to every one his own.”
- Colors used are dark blue and gold.
- The dark blue symbolizes authority, confidence, dignity, intelligence, stability, trust, and truth.
- The gold represents courage, illumination, knowledge, and wisdom. Gold is also a precious metal associated with wealth and prosperity – which solidifies the Judicial Branch as being a co-equal branch of government also of high value and worth its weight.

justice for all

NORTH CAROLINA COURT ANNIVERSARIES

CELEBRATE.NCCOURTS.ORG

24

Unified Courts

The North Carolina Constitution establishes the Judicial Branch as a separate and co-equal branch of state government. North Carolina's court system, called the General Court of Justice, is a state operated and state-funded unified court system.



1966-2016

NCAOC

The 1962 amendment of the State Constitution that created the current Judicial Branch also established the North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts (NCAOC) to support this third branch of North Carolina's state government.



1966-2016

NORTH CAROLINA COURT ANNIVERSARIES

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District Court

District courts hear cases involving civil, criminal, and juvenile matters, as well as appeals from the magistrate.

Like superior court, district court sits in the county seat of each county. It may also sit in certain other cities and towns specifically authorized by the General Assembly.



1966-2016

Court of Appeals

The Court of Appeals is North Carolina's intermediate appellate court that decides

questions of law in cases appealed from superior and district courts and from some administrative agencies of the Executive Branch of North Carolina's state government.



1967-2017

NORTH CAROLINA COURT ANNIVERSARIES

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Superior Court

All felony criminal cases, civil cases involving more than \$25,000, and misdemeanor and infraction appeals from district court are tried in superior court. Business court is a specialized forum that hears cases involving complex, significant issues of corporate and commercial law.



1777-2017

Supreme Court

The Supreme Court of North Carolina is the state's highest court. There is no further appeal in the state from its decisions. The court hears appeals of the decisions from the other divisions of the General Court of Justice and appeals of the decisions of some state agencies.



1819-2019

MORE INFORMATION

Learn more about North Carolina's state government at www.NC.gov.

Learn more about the North Carolina Judicial Branch and court system at www.NCcourts.gov.



Learn more about North Carolina's court anniversaries and history at Celebrate.NCcourts.org.

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