

MINUTES
BENCH BAR COMMITTEE
Monday, February 2, 2026
By C. Edward S. Mitchell, Chairman

Attendance

Participants were: Judge Linhardt, Judge Tira, Judge Carlucci, Judge Gardner, Rob Cronin, Jeana Longo, Marc Lovecchio, April McDonald, Ed Mitchell, Cliff Rieders, Adrienne Stahl, Dave Wilk and LLA Executive Director Michele Frey

Method: the meeting was conducted in person at the LLA Office.

Old Business

Staffing in the Public Defender's Office and the District Attorney's Office was discussed. The Public Defender's Office is now fully staffed. The District Attorney's Office remains understaffed.

New Business

Judge Linhardt gave a detailed report on the status of the Courts.

The Commissioners have requested that the Court reduce its budget by \$1.1 million. The Court has complied by eliminating some positions and reducing allocations to some programs.

The judicial assignments are as follows:

- Judge Linhardt and Judge Gardner – Criminal
- Judge Carlucci – Civil and Orphans Court
- Judge Tira – Family Law, Children & Youth, Juvenile and Domestic

Visiting judges include Judge Workman from Lancaster County, Judge Saylor from Northumberland County and Judge James from Columbia County.

The treatment courts will continue. Judge Salisbury from Clinton County has volunteered to preside in Lycoming County for Drug Court and DUI Court on Wednesdays. Retired Judge Lovecchio has accepted an appointment to be a Special Master in Mental Health Court and Veterans Court.

There is again a backlog of criminal cases. There were 1,100 cases carried over from 2025 to 2026. That is 2 ½ to 3 times more than should be.

Attempts are being made to move cases more quickly. Waiver of formal arraignments will not be permitted. Attorneys and parties must appear in order to dispose of guilty pleas and assign cases to trial track or non-trial track. Status

conferences are being held to force discussion with the goal of helping attorneys identify cases for earlier resolution.

There are 15 pending homicide cases. Judge Linhardt and Judge Gardner are both recused in one which has been assigned to Judge Carlucci. Judge Linhardt and Judge Gardner will each preside over seven of the remaining 14.

Lycoming County has not previously had overnight detention. This necessitated District Magistrates being required to get up at night for arraignments. Arrangements are being implemented for overnight detention.

Efforts are being implemented to improve collection of fines and costs. There have been millions of dollars in unpaid fines and costs. An outside collection agency is being retained. Efforts are being made to require costs and fines to be paid during probation as a condition for completion of probation.

A study is being conducted concerning the feasibility of merging Adult Probation and Juvenile Probation.

The Court does not anticipate the appointment of a judge to fill the existing vacancy. It is a decision to be made by Senator Yaw and Governor Shapiro.

Judge Linhardt was questioned about delays in service of scheduling orders. Orders are served by the Prothonotary. Service on local attorneys is through the courthouse mailboxes. Service on out-of-town attorneys has been by mail. It was suggested that there be a discussion with Prothonotary Heaps about the possibility of serving out-of-town attorneys by email as permitted by the Rules of Civil Procedure if the attorney has listed their email address on pleadings.

Although her position as Executive Secretary to Judge Butts has been eliminated, Jerri Rook continues to voluntarily bring the courthouse dog to hearings as needed and requested.

The Commissioners have agreed to replace the carpeting and to update the lighting in the second floor of the courthouse.

The Commissioners have changed the morning opening of the courthouse door to 8:30 a.m. from 8:15 a.m.

Judge Tira announced the Family Law Bar lunch meeting.

Judge Carlucci discussed his decision to implement Motion Court. The purpose is to reduce the amount of judge time devoted to disposing of Motions. Concern was expressed about the amount of attorney time that would be required for attorneys waiting during Motions Court for their Motions to be heard. One session has been held to date. Judge Carlucci said half of the Motions were disposed of within 15 minutes and the remainder during the balance of the hour scheduled. Concern was also expressed about the delay that would be caused waiting for one session per month of Motions Court on Motions where there has not been a response.

Judge Carlucci suggested that Motions Court should be scheduled every two weeks and possibly in two separate one hour sessions if necessary.

It was requested that Motions Court not be scheduled for late Friday afternoons.

In anticipation of the meeting, letters were sent to all LLA substantive committees for any requested topics for discussion at the meeting. No responses were received.

There are vacancies in the Committee in the topics of Medical Malpractice – Plaintiffs; Plaintiff Civil; and Dependency. Appointments will be made to fill these vacancies.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:50 p.m.

The next meeting will be May 4, 2026 at noon in the LLA Office.

Respectfully submitted,

C. Edward S. Mitchell
Chairman