

**Evaluating Appellate Judges: Preserving Integrity, Maintaining Accountability**  
*Post-Conference Overview Statement*

On August 11 and 12, the Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System (IAALS) at the University of Denver convened a national conference on appellate judicial performance evaluation (JPE). The conference—*Evaluating Appellate Judges: Preserving Integrity, Maintaining Accountability*—brought together over 70 judges, practitioners, academics, JPE program coordinators from states across the nation, and other leaders in the field.

The two-day discussion began with a broad conversation on the roles and responsibilities of an appellate judge, which differ in marked ways from those of a trial court judge. The panelists sought to identify the qualities of a good appellate judge, as a precursor to framing and defining an appropriate evaluation process. Panelists pinpointed a number of aspects unique to an appellate judge, transitioning the conference discussion into the second panel, on which a diverse group of panelists debated various—and sometimes competing—strategies for improving existing performance evaluation programs. The third panel brought together first-hand perspectives from those observing and studying the growing contentiousness that has come to characterize appellate judicial retention elections. Panelists explored why this trend has emerged and how best to leverage JPE results in this new environment. The first day concluded with a dinner keynote speech by Iowa Supreme Court Chief Justice Mark Cady who offered his thoughtful perspective on judicial independence and performance evaluation.

In a unique panel format centered on an IAALS-generated sample JPE program, the second day began with a discussion of what measures and methods would be best suited to the evaluation of appellate judges. Panelists debated the merits of the sample JPE program and offered additional metrics for evaluating appellate judge and court performance. The second panel brought together individuals with opposing viewpoints on JPE, to discuss the challenges and obstacles commonly encountered in establishing and implementing such programs, including judicial resistance and budgetary concerns. The conference concluded with a panel discussion on how best to leverage JPE results during retention election cycles, and how best to make the results of official JPE programs available to the public.

Over the course of the conference, participants of varying backgrounds and perspectives engaged in an open and honest dialogue with one another with the goal of identifying concrete and meaningful improvements that can be made to evaluation processes for appellate judges. According to Malia Reddick, IAALS Director of Judicial Programs, IAALS plans to use the conference dialogue to identify proven practices in appellate JPE, and make innovative recommendations for states with existing JPE programs and states interested in implementing such programs.