

FEDERAL PRACTICE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

January 23, 2026
Omaha, Nebraska

Attendees included Chief District Judge Robert Rossiter, Jr., District Judge Brian Buescher, District Judge Susan Bazis, Senior District Judge Joseph Bataillon, Chief Bankruptcy Judge Brian Kruse, Magistrate Judge Michael Nelson, Magistrate Judge Jacqueline DeLuca, Magistrate Judge Ryan Carson, Clerk of Bankruptcy Court Kyle Crockett, Chief Probation and Pretrial Services Officer Doug Steensma, Chief Deputy Clerk of District Court Gabriela Acosta, Deputy Chief Probation and Pretrial Services Officer Kimi Camacho, Federal Public Defender Richard McWilliams, Assistant United States Attorney Christopher Ferretti, Committee Chairperson Marcia Washkuhn, Isaiah Frohling, Jennifer Huxoll, Andrew Schlosser, George Martin, Timothy Thalken (by telephone), Jennifer Turco Meyer, Patrick Cooper, and Steven Olson. Also in attendance were Supervisor of Administrative Services Pat Williamson and Financial Supervisor Jeremy Reece.

The following committee members were unable to attend: Senior District Judge John Gerrard, Clerk of District Court Denise Lucks, United States Attorney Lesley Woods, Dwyer Arce, Eric Berger, and Joshua Fershée.

1. Introductions and Opening Comments

Judge Buescher welcomed the Federal Practice Committee (FPC) members and called the meeting to order. He announced that Marcia Washkuhn is the new chair of the committee.

2. Roll Call

Roll call was taken.

3. Reports and Updates

a. Chief Judge Rossiter's Report on District Court

Chief Judge Rossiter provided the following comments and updates:

- The legislative package for the Judiciary's FY 2026 budget is better than expected.
- Rich McWilliams was appointed Federal Public Defender and is no longer in Acting status.
- Judge Kruse was appointed Chief Judge of the Bankruptcy Court effective January 1, 2026.
- Kyle Crockett was appointed Clerk of the Bankruptcy Court effective January 1, 2026.
- Doug Steensma will retire as Chief Probation and Pretrial Services Officer on April 30, 2026. Assistant Deputy Chief Probation and Pretrial Services Officer Aaron

Kurtenbach has been selected to replace Doug. Judge Rossiter thanked Doug for his service to the court.

- The District of Minnesota has requested assistance from our court due to an increase in their caseload, particularly habeas petitions for immigration cases. Judge Bataillon and Judge Gerrard have agreed to assist. The clerk's office will also provide assistance.
- The court is continuing with the digital production of judges' portraits. In 2024, the decision was made to switch from oil portraits to digital production because the cost of oil paintings had become prohibitive. In Lincoln, portraits for Judges Kopf and Gerrard have been completed. In Omaha, digital portraits are now on display for Judges Schatz, Denney, Dier, and Robinson. Arrangements are being made to produce digital portraits of Judges Strom, Smith Camp, Shanahan, Cambridge, and Bataillon. Judge Rossiter is working with the District of Nebraska Historical Society to provide bios similar to those for other historical portraits in the courthouse. Anyone wishing to assist with the write-ups or who may have details to contribute on a particular judge should contact Judge Rossiter. Judge Rossiter thanked the FPC for funding the project.
- Plans are underway for Judge Rossiter to host the meeting of the Chief District Judges of the Eighth Circuit in May 2026. The meeting was originally scheduled for October 2025, but it was cancelled due to the government shutdown.

b. Magistrate Judges

Judge Nelson reported that plans are underway for the 2026 Magistrate Judges' Forum. The event is scheduled for May 15 at Quarry Oaks in Ashland, with a half day for the civil portion and a half day for the criminal portion. Speakers are being lined up for both sessions. The members of the FPC agreed that a subcommittee should be formed to determine topics for the forum. The magistrate judges will serve on the subcommittee together with the following volunteers: Rich McWilliams, Chris Ferretti, and Marcia Washkuhn. Judge Nelson will distribute an email to request additional volunteers for the subcommittee.

Judge Nelson further reported that the annual mediation training offered by the court is scheduled for August 12-14 at Hruska Courthouse. The training is limited to 24 participants. In addition to Judge Nelson, the faculty includes academics, practicing attorneys, and mediators. An announcement regarding the training will be published soon. Judge Nelson added that in the future, the goal is to route more cases to court-certified mediators.

c. District Judges

Judge Buescher encouraged members of the committee to review the court's local rules and consider whether any rules should be revisited. Each year in May, the court sends an email to stakeholders, including registered CM/ECF users and FPC members, asking for suggested changes to the rules. Suggestions may be sent to Marcia Washkuhn.

Judge Buescher next provided an update on the activities of the Judicial Conference Committee on Information Technology, of which he is a member. Work continues on the high-priority project to replace the federal courts' electronic case filing system (ECF). The current ECF system has security vulnerabilities and requires modernization. A consultant has been hired to help the project move forward expeditiously. Judge Buescher added that some advanced features may not be included in the initial upgrade of the system.

d. Bankruptcy Judges

Chief Judge Kruse shared the following updates:

- Kyle Crockett has been appointed Clerk of the Bankruptcy Court and he is off to a great start.
- Bankruptcy filings are up approximately 10% from last year.
- The court adopted amended local bankruptcy rules effective January 1, 2026.

e. Federal Public Defender

Federal Public Defender Rich McWilliams reported that the Federal Public Defender's Office will be relocating to 1901 Howard Street this year. The move is expected to occur in late summer.

The FY 2026 budget package provides full funding for Defender Services. The Public Defender's Office plans to post advertisements to hire an Assistant Federal Public Defender and a staff interpreter.

Rich also reported that the panel selection committee worked throughout 2025 to streamline the CJA Panel. The panel now consists of 73 members. The goal is for every attorney to receive six cases per year to maintain proficiency in federal court. Rich also noted that the panel selection committee is in the process of revamping the application process for attorneys wishing to join the CJA Panel.

f. United States Attorney

Assistant U.S. Attorney Chris Ferretti shared the following updates:

- The U.S. Attorney's Office hopes to hire additional attorneys and support staff this year. The effort began last year but stalled for various reasons. Many interviews have already occurred to fill positions in both the criminal and civil divisions. Currently, the office has 19 prosecutors and four attorneys in the civil division.
- Plans are underway for the U.S. Attorney's Office to move to the Woodmen Building.
- The U.S. Attorney's Office is busy with habeas petitions.

g. Federal Practice Committee Chair

Chairperson Marcia Washkuhn invited committee members to email her with any suggested changes to the local rules. She noted that the subcommittee formed in 2025 discussed various rules unrelated to discovery, which were not included among the amended rules. These non-discovery issues could be revisited this year and possibly included as a discussion item at the upcoming Magistrate Judges' Forum.

Next, Marcia asked the committee for input on whether the FPC should participate in organizing discussion panels of the Article III judges and the magistrate judges at the annual meeting of the Nebraska State Bar Association (NSBA). The committee members agreed that the panel discussions are well received and that the FPC should participate. Judge Bazis and Judge Rossiter added that a time slot on Thursday morning has worked well in previous years. Marcia will reach out to the NSBA and coordinate additional planning for the panels.

4. Business Meeting

a. Approval of Minutes

The committee members approved the [minutes](#) from the September 19, 2025, meeting.

b. Review of Federal Practice Fund Reports

Pat Williamson began his report with an overview of the project to upgrade the attorney wi-fi systems in the Omaha and Lincoln courthouses. Pat explained that the project is a joint effort between the court and the FPC that began two years ago. After the FPC agreed in January 2024 that an upgrade to the wi-fi networks should be funded by the Federal Practice Fund, court staff determined that an upgrade to the court's wi-fi network should be done as well. The court is paying for the court's wi-fi upgrade, and the Federal Practice Fund is paying only for the attorney wi-fi portion. To date, the Federal Practice Fund has expended approximately \$156,000 and the court has spent approximately \$300,000. However, Pat stated the expenses are now winding down. In February, all access points will be connected and the systems configured. In early March, a consultant will perform final inspections of the cabling and other equipment. The consultant will also conduct heat mapping to ensure the signal is penetrating as intended.

Pat then reviewed the Federal Practice Committee's financial reports as of December 31, 2025. The beginning balance of the Federal Practice Fund on January 1, 2025, was \$274,761. In 2025, pro hac vice fee deposits were \$28,500, interest earned was \$5,124, and expenditures totaled \$106,868. Approximately \$75,000 of the expenditures went toward wi-fi cabling. The year-end balance of the Fund was \$201,516.

Turning to the 2026 budget, Pat reported that projected income includes \$26,000 from pro hac vice fees and \$4,800 from interest.

Projected expenditures for 2026 include the following:

- \$1,000 for case-related expenses
- \$6,000 for prisoner civil rights cases
- \$3,000 for assistance to the Bar, societies, and training
- \$5,740 for expenses related to the attorney wi-fi project (mainly licensing fees and service charges)
- \$5,000 for the Magistrate Judges' CLE program at Quarry Oaks as discussed by Judge Nelson
- \$3,000 for the 2026 meeting of the Chief District Judges of the Eighth Circuit to be hosted by Judge Rossiter
- \$800 for non-CLE meetings
- \$8,750 for five digitally produced judge portraits
- \$40 for tax preparation software
- \$2,500 for miscellaneous expenses

The budgeted expenditures total \$35,830, resulting in a projected year-end balance of \$196,486.

Regarding whether a vote was needed in order for the Federal Practice Fund to pay the expenses for the Magistrate Judges' CLE program, Pat stated that if such expenses exceed \$5,000, he will seek approval.