



# Press Release

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## Chief Justice Joel Bolger to Retire June 30, 2021

**Anchorage, Alaska, November 30, 2020 -**

On November 25, 2020, Chief Justice Joel Bolger notified Governor Dunleavy of his plan to retire from the court effective at the end of his term on June 30, 2021. Chief Justice Bolger spent the majority of his professional career in rural Alaska, serving as a VISTA volunteer attorney in Dillingham, as an assistant public defender in Utqiagvik, and in private practice with the firm of Jamin Ebell Bolger & Gentry in Kodiak. Chief Justice Bolger was appointed to the Valdez District Court by Governor Knowles in 1997, to the Kodiak Superior Court by Governor Murkowski in 2003, to the Court of Appeals by Governor Palin in 2008, and to the Alaska Supreme Court by Governor Parnell in 2013. His three-year term as chief justice began in July 2018. Chief Justice Bolger is the first person to be appointed to all four levels of the Alaska judiciary.

Chief Justice Bolger notes that he is giving early notice of his retirement because the process for filling a judicial vacancy can take several months, and he wishes to ensure a smooth transition. The Alaska Constitution prescribes a system for selecting judges based on merit, which requires a comprehensive evaluation of judicial candidates by the Alaska Judicial Council. The evaluation includes detailed applications with references and writing samples, in-depth investigation of applicants, polling of all lawyers and judges in the state, public hearings, interviews, nominations to the governor, and appointment by the governor.

Chief Justice Bolger chairs the Family Justice Initiative at the National Center for State Courts, promoting family court reform, including judicial training, aggressive case triage, court process simplification, self-help resources, alternative dispute resolution, and trauma responsive practices. He also serves as a commissioner on the Alaska Criminal Justice Commission. He previously served as Second Vice President of the Conference of Chief Justices, as Chair of the Fairness Diversity & Equality Committee and the Judicial Conference Planning Committee, and as a member of the Criminal Pattern Jury Instructions Committee, the Appellate Rules Committee, the Child Support Review Committee, and the Family Law Rules Committee.

Chief Justice Bolger extends his gratitude to all of the judges and court staff who have worked so hard to continue to provide fair and impartial access to justice during the trying circumstances of the current global pandemic.

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