



VISITOR'S GUIDE

# The Connecticut Supreme Court

231 CAPITOL AVENUE, HARTFORD



The mission of the State of Connecticut Judicial Branch is to serve the interests of justice and the public by resolving matters brought before it in a fair, timely, efficient and open manner.

**The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court is the head of the Judicial Branch.**

**The Chief Court Administrator manages the day-to-day operations of the Judicial Branch.**

# Visiting the Supreme Court

The Supreme Court is located at 231 Capitol Avenue in Hartford. Members of the public are invited to attend oral arguments. The Judicial Branch provides tours of the Supreme Court courtroom from Monday through Friday during regular business hours. To obtain the schedule of cases, please visit the Judicial Branch's website at [www.jud.ct.gov](http://www.jud.ct.gov). To arrange a tour, please call the External Affairs Division at (860) 757-2270.

## While You Are in the Courtroom Observing Arguments

If you plan to observe Supreme Court arguments, please remember that the justices and attorneys are engaged in a discussion of very complex issues requiring their undivided attention. Therefore, please observe the following:

- ◆ Do not create any noise or engage in conversation.
- ◆ Do not bring food or beverages into the courtroom.
- ◆ Turn off all cell phones.
- ◆ Do not use cell phones, cameras, audio recorders or any other electronic device to take or broadcast pictures, videos or sound recordings in the courtroom unless you are a member of the media and are in compliance with the Connecticut Practice Book as well as the *Supreme Court's Guidelines for the Possession and Use of Electronic Devices*. Please note that if you are visiting the Supreme Court courtroom for a tour or lecture, cameras are permitted.
- ◆ Do not engage in casual reading.
- ◆ Give your full attention to the court.

## History of the Court

Prior to the creation of the Supreme Court in 1784, the power to review lower court rulings was vested in the General Assembly, which determined appeals by examining trial court records. Even after its creation, the Supreme

Court was not completely independent of the executive and legislative branches, since its members included the Lieutenant Governor, members of the Council (or upper chamber of the General Assembly), and, in 1794, the Governor.

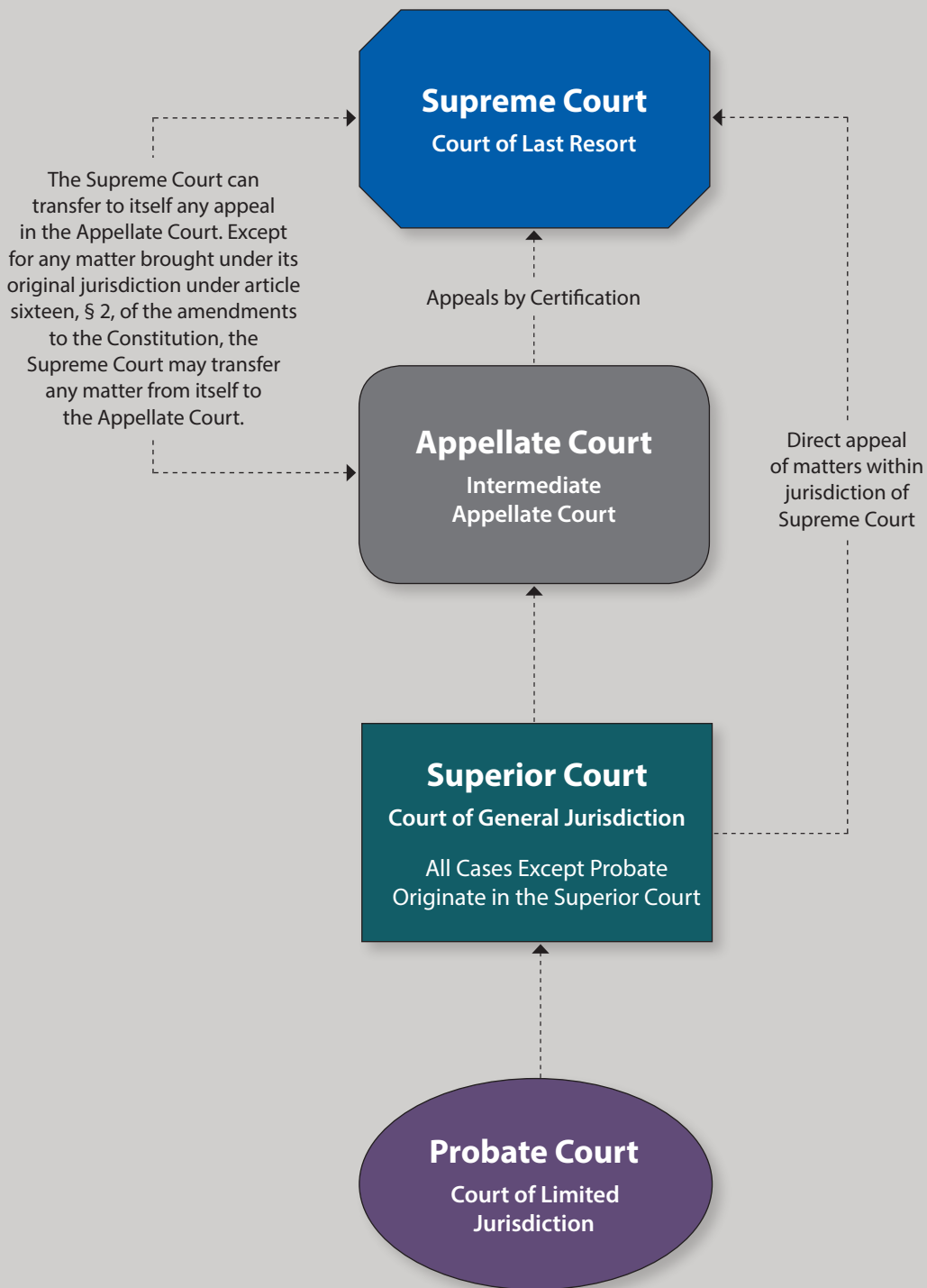
In 1806, the number of Superior Court judges was increased from five to nine and those judges, sitting together, constituted the Supreme Court, replacing the Governor, Lieutenant Governor and Council Members. The General Assembly, however, retained the power to overturn the court's rulings. Twelve years later, in 1818, the Connecticut Constitution established an independent judiciary, with the Supreme Court of Errors as the state's highest court. (The words "of Errors" were deleted in 1965). The creation of an independent judiciary established the third branch of government, which is responsible for interpreting the laws enacted by the legislative branch of government. The Connecticut Supreme Court is comprised of one chief justice and six associate justices.

In 1982, in response to an overwhelming Supreme Court docket, Connecticut's voters approved a constitutional amendment creating the intermediate Appellate Court. That court, which consists of nine judges, is at 75 Elm Street in Hartford.

*The Supreme Court hopes that your visit today  
is interesting, informative and rewarding.*

# Relationship Between Connecticut's Courts

Dotted Lines With Arrows Indicate Routes of Appeal



## How Do Cases Come to the Supreme Court?

The Supreme Court is the court of last resort for the State of Connecticut. Almost always, the cases heard in the Supreme Court have first been decided in the Superior Court, which is a trial court where a judge or a jury considers conflicting stories from witnesses who describe the history of their dispute. The losing party in the Superior Court has the right to appeal to another court. Most of these appeals go first to the Appellate Court, the intermediate court of appeals.

Appeals come to the Supreme Court in one of three ways. A person who disagrees with the judgment of the Appellate Court can ask the Supreme Court to take another look at the legal issues in dispute by filing a request that the appeal be considered. This request is called a petition for certification. The Supreme Court does not grant every request to hear an appeal. It will grant a request only where there are special and important reasons. Other appeals come here as a result of this court's decision to transfer the case to itself instead of having it heard in the Appellate Court. Lastly, some appeals, because of their extreme significance (e.g. how voting districts are determined), are automatically heard first by the Supreme Court.

After the parties are allowed to appeal, each party files a brief or briefs, and the court then schedules the case for oral argument at the next available session. On occasion, the court will hear a case right away, because, for example, it involves urgent issues, such as a pending election.

## What Happens In Oral Argument?

If you listen to an oral argument in the Supreme Court, you will notice that it differs from an oral argument in the trial court. In the trial court, the lawyer addresses a jury or a judge, urging the jury or judge to make certain findings of fact. In the Supreme Court, the lawyer requests the justices to reach certain conclusions of law. Before an oral argument, each justice has already carefully studied the written briefs that present each party's legal arguments, as well as the factual and procedural history of the case.

Consequently, the justices may ask many questions in order to fully understand the positions argued by each party. Although the justices sometimes ask about the facts, the discussion between the lawyers and the court usually centers on issues of law.

## What Happens After Oral Argument?

After hearing oral arguments, the justices gather in their conference room to reach a preliminary decision about the outcome of each case. The Chief Justice then assigns each case to one of the justices in the majority to prepare a draft opinion.

Preparing a draft opinion takes time because it requires careful analysis of the law and the facts to develop a persuasive written document for the court and the parties.

Once the draft opinion is completed, the other justices who heard the case review it and make extensive comments. Because the cases often present difficult questions of law, the justices may disagree and write separate opinions. A justice who agrees with the outcome, but not with the analysis of the majority opinion, writes a separate concurring opinion. A justice who disagrees with the outcome, in whole or in part, writes a separate dissenting opinion. A final opinion is voted on at a court conference after all the opinions have been reviewed by the other justices and agreed upon. The majority opinion and the separate opinions are then sent to the Reporter of Judicial Decisions. The Reporter checks the opinions for technical accuracy, then sees to their publication on the Judicial Branch website and in the *Connecticut Law Journal*. The parties receive courtesy e-mail notification from the Reporter of the upcoming publication of the opinion in their case.

The *Connecticut Law Journal* is published weekly on the Judicial Branch website. After their initial publication in the *Connecticut Law Journal*, the opinions are published in bound volumes in *Connecticut Reports*. The *Connecticut Law Journal* and *Connecticut Reports* are available at Judicial Branch law libraries.

## The Courtroom

The Supreme Court courtroom is 43 feet wide, 56 feet long and 35 feet high. Most of the wood in the room is oak. The



state seal can be seen on many of the wall panels, the lamps and the carpet. Included in the seal is the motto, *Qui transtulit sustinet* – “He who transplanted still sustains.” The portraits on the walls are those of the most recently retired chief justices.

The two murals that dominate the room were painted by Albert Herter and placed in the building upon its completion in 1913. Behind the bench is *The Signing of the Fundamental Orders of the Constitution 1638-39*. The Orders – the first written constitution of the United States – were drawn up by Thomas Hooker, Roger Ludlow and John Haynes. Hooker is shown standing and addressing the gathering. Ludlow, the secretary, is seated, while Haynes stands in the background with a copy of the new constitution in his hand. In the corners of the mural are the seals of England, seventeenth-century Connecticut and modern Connecticut.

The ceiling mural is entitled *An Allegory of Education*. At the top, a mother is seated with the Book of Knowledge and Experience in her lap and her child by her side. On her left sits the Spirit of Wisdom, on her right, the Spirit of Progress.

The center portion shows two young men bearing flaming torches that represent the Light of Education gained from the Book of Knowledge and Experience. They are going forth into life’s activities, urged on by the Spirits of Wisdom and Progress. The bottom portion of the mural shows two figures, representing Ignorance and Superstition. They appear confused as they fall farther and farther into the darkness as the light of education advances.



The Signing of the Fundamental Orders of the Constitution 1638-39





[www.jud.ct.gov](http://www.jud.ct.gov)

© 2018 State of Connecticut Judicial Branch

#### ADA NOTICE

The Judicial Branch of the State of Connecticut complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). If you need a reasonable accommodation in accordance with the ADA, contact a court clerk or an ADA contact person listed at [www.jud.ct.gov/ADA](http://www.jud.ct.gov/ADA).