



**CENTERS OF
EXCELLENCE**
A Judicial Branch Initiative

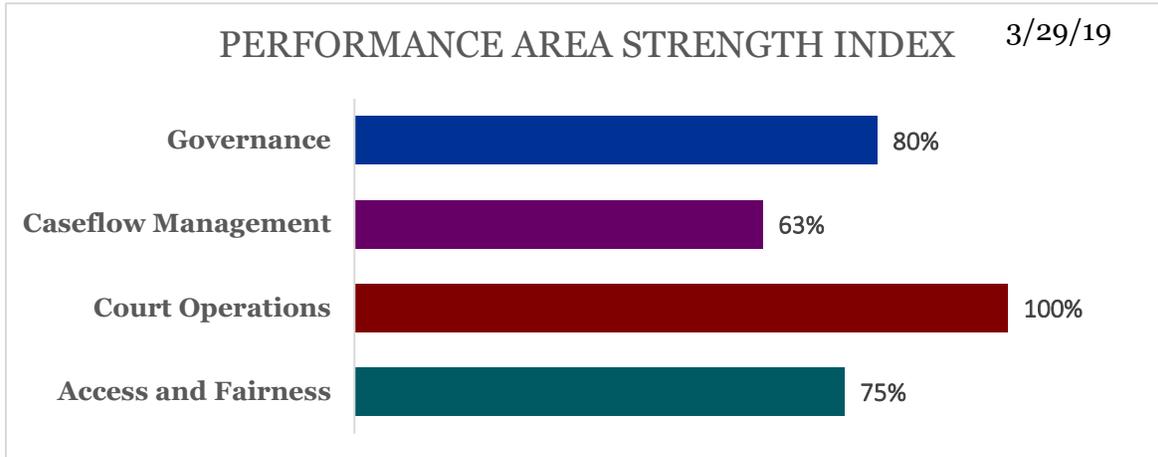
**Centers of Excellence Nomination Report on Montgomery County
Court-at-Law II, Conroe, Texas**

Presiding Judge: Honorable Claudia Laird
February 14th, 2020

Introduction to the Montgomery County Court-at-Law II

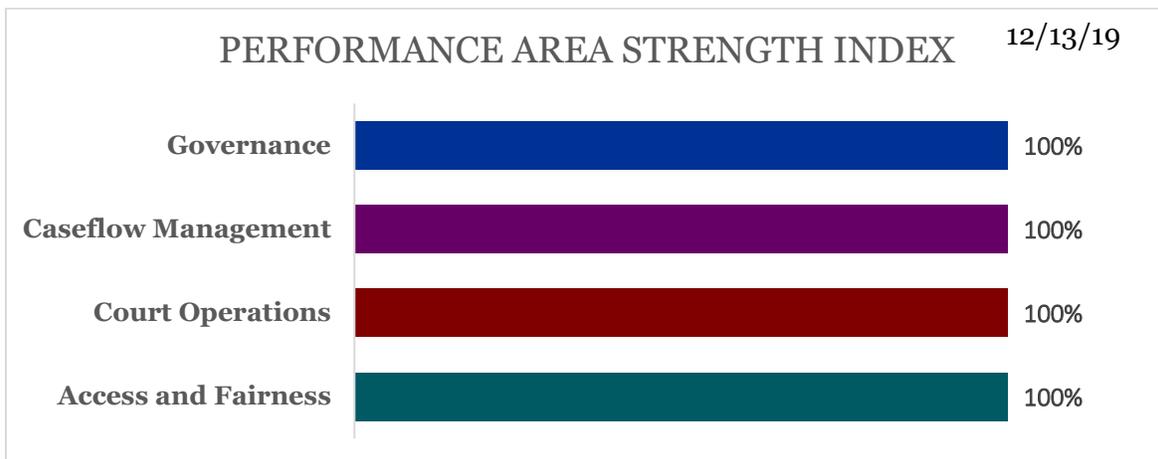
County Court-at-Law II (CCL II) is one of five county courts-at-law in Montgomery County and is presided over by Judge Claudia Laird. Judge Laird has presided over CCL II since 2010. CCL II is a civil jurisdiction docket with cases focused on probate, guardianship, and other civil matters.

Baseline Performance Measures:



County Court-at-Law II was a strong performer in most **Performance Areas** with a 100% showing in **Court Operations** and 80% in the **Governance**, area where the court lacked a written communications plan. In **Data-Driven Caseflow Management** CCL II was lacking a written caseflow management plan and a documented continuance policy leading to a score of 63%. Under **Access and Fairness** CCL II scored 75% where the court lacked a process for court users to make comments and complaints.

Post Centers of Excellence Performance Measures:



Following participation in the Centers of Excellence program, County Court-at-Law II implemented several procedural changes to judicial administration. At initial assessment, Judge Laird's court was already implementing best practices in **Data Driven Caseflow Management**. Judge Laird regularly conducts audits on cases herself, highlighting open cases, asking staff to follow up. Ensuring that court users receive full time and attention. In working towards becoming a Center of Excellence, Judge Laird

outlined that process to the program. Indicating which staff were engaged. On top of that, Judge Laird and staff conduct yearly audits. Conducted over three days every year, the court reviews every case before it, to further ensure there are no oversights and successfully preventing any significant delays.

In 2018 Montgomery County conducted an **Access and Fairness** survey to review court user experience. Judge Laird’s court was instrumental in that effort and reviewed the findings as part of their participation in the Centers of Excellence Program. Visitor complaints are handled by a dedicated member of staff and notice of the complaints process are posted around the courtroom. As part of their work in **Governance**, the court drafted a communications plan which outlines each staffers responsibility for communicating both with stakeholders and the public.

Compliance Areas



From the start, County Court-at-Law II has been in been at full compliance with state and federal regulations. As a civil court, the CCL II does not have much involvement with court collection or indigent defense. However, the court remains involved in Montgomery County’s policy making bodies and is fully apprised of the County’s efforts to comply with the Texas Indigent Defense Commission standards. CCL II is not a statutory probate court, yet it strives to remain in line with the Guardianship Abuse, Fraud, and Exploitation Deterrence Program (GAFDEP).

Summary of Findings

Judge Laird was an early participant in the Centers of Excellence program and is the first court with an exclusive civil docket to complete the program. Her commitment to her court and community is evident in the Court Visitor Volunteer Program. This program is mandated for statutory probate courts, but Judge Laird voluntarily began the program with her court to ensure that cases relating to guardianship get the full benefit of the court’s time and oversight.

In order to sustain the *Guardianship Visitor Program*, Judge Laird and her Guardianship Investigator Kathleen Rice, have developed close working relationships with civic, county, and state institutions including Sam Houston State and local volunteer organizations. The court’s volunteer program is a model for how a volunteer outreach program can be run, not only by a court, but by other civic institutions as well.

Judge Laird is a dedicated public servant. Committed to pursuing judicial excellence in her role as County Court-at-Law judge and a representative of the Judiciary. She takes her role as mediator of disputes seriously, giving fair time and due consideration to the cases before her court. Providing a reliable and steady arena for dispute resolution and the fair administration of civil justice.