

2025-26 Budget Remarks
Unified Judicial System of Pennsylvania
Justices Christine Donohue and P. Kevin Brobson
State Court Administrator Andrea B. Tuominen
Wednesday, February 26, 2025

Good afternoon, Chairmen Harris and Struzzi, Judiciary Chairmen Briggs and Kauffman, members of the Appropriations Committee, and members of the Judiciary Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear today to discuss the 2025-26 judicial budget request. First, allow us to recognize and thank members for the bipartisan passage of the current fiscal year budget, as well as the 2023-24 budget. These measures have put the Judicial Branch back on the path of fiscal stability after years of flat funding and revenue diversions by providing vital funding increases, reauthorizing statutory surcharges critical to the judicial budget, and pausing the diversion of funding from the Judicial Computer System Augmentation Account (JCSAA).

As we stress each year, adequate funding for Pennsylvania's Unified Judicial System is essential to our constitutional democracy. Rest assured that our colleagues on the Supreme Court, and jurists on all levels, understand and appreciate the budgetary difficulties the General Assembly faces each year.

Seventy-five percent of the judicial budget supports courts at the county level – common pleas, magisterial district, and municipal – those courts closest to, and likely to have direct impact on the daily lives of, your constituents. It is imperative that these courts, as well as the entirety of the judicial system, is adequately funded to ensure that the following constitutional mandate is fulfilled: “All courts shall be open; and every [person] for an injury done ... shall have remedy by due course of law, and right and justice administered without sale, denial or delay.”

Like the legislature, the judicial budget is not program driven – 89% is personnel. Also like the legislature, state funding for the court budget is less than one percent of the entire state budget.

The Judiciary has been a good steward of taxpayer dollars and remains committed to conserve those limited resources. Judicial efficiency – making sure judicial resources are utilized where the workload dictates – is key to controlling costs. For example, the decennial magisterial district court reestablishment facilitates a review of current and future judicial needs to ensure a judicial district has the correct number of judges to effectively manage the caseload and provide access to justice. By way of further example, senior judge utilization is now better aligned with need, and the number of compensable hours for senior judges has been lowered. Finally, this fiscal year brought changes to the Judiciary's prescription drug plan, saving a significant amount of money.

Before answering committee members' questions, allow us to briefly outline the three budgetary requests for the judicial branch. They include:

1. A General Fund increase of 7% – \$30.5 million.
2. Reauthorization of "Act 49" which expires on July 31 and is critical to providing operating revenue to augment the General Fund line items.
3. Statutory amendments or other modifications to provide for adjustments to the JCSAA funding stream, without levying a new fee or increasing an existing fee.

Again, thank you for the bipartisan work over the last two fiscal years to provide the judicial branch with funding to ensure that it can uphold its constitutional mandates, the judicial process and equal justice under law. We appreciate the difficult task ahead of you for 2025-26 and look forward to answering your questions today and going forward, in an effort to make our small piece of the budget as transparent as possible.