

**SUPREME COURT OF VERMONT
OFFICE OF THE COURT ADMINISTRATOR**

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FROM: Gregg Mousley
Chief, Finance and Administration

DATE: January 15, 2025

RE: FY25 Budget Adjustment Request

The Judiciary will make two requests and two reversions to the FY25 Budget Adjustment Act (BAA):

FY25 Budget Adjustments:

Information Technology	\$2,161,576
Security Services COLA	\$388,704
County HVAC Project Reversion	(\$800,000)
County Re-wiring/Security Enhance.	\$800,000
Essex Connector Project Reversion	(\$50,000)
Essex ADA Bathroom Renovation	\$50,000
Subtotal Additional Pressures	\$2,550,280

Information Technology

The Judiciary has indicated for several years now that the Tech Fund is no longer a viable funding source for the Judiciary's IT costs. The number of civil violations (primarily traffic tickets) has declined significantly while policy initiatives to restore driver's license privileges have weakened the leverage used to enforce collections. As a result, collections of ongoing revenues have steadily declined from a high of \$1.6M to approximately \$750,000 at present, with all indications that this decline is permanent and will likely continue to decline further. The Tech Fund balance has decreased as a direct result of the decrease in revenues. Additional detail is described in a [JFO Issue Brief](#) published in February 2022.

This comes at a time when the Judiciary's technology footprint has greatly expanded. To put into perspective how far technology has progressed since the Tech Fund was created in 2007, this is the same year the first iPhone was released. Over the next 17 years, the pace of advancement in technology has only accelerated. Driven by advances in technology and the increasing need for efficient, transparent, and accessible justice systems, the Vermont Judicial IT systems have undergone significant evolution:

- **Digital Case Management:** The Vermont Judiciary shifted from a paper-based system to a digital case management system. This change has streamlined the filing, tracking, and management of cases, reduced paperwork and improved efficiency.
- **E-Filing and Online Services:** The introduction of e-filing now allows lawyers and self-represented litigants to submit documents electronically. The Vermont Judiciary also provides online services for case research, online payments, and court calendar viewing.
- **Virtual Hearings and Video Conferencing:** Video conferencing tools have become integral, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic. The Vermont Judiciary, along with courts around the world, adopted virtual hearings to ensure continuity of judicial processes. This shift has also increased access to justice, particularly for those in remote areas.
- **Cybersecurity Enhancements:** As judicial systems become more digital, the importance of cybersecurity has escalated. The Vermont Judiciary has invested in robust cybersecurity measures to protect sensitive personal and legal information from cyber threats.
- **Digital Evidence Management:** The Vermont Judiciary has implemented an online digital evidence management system to safeguard the integrity of digital evidence (e.g. video) and streamline the evidence management process through the Judiciary system.
- **Migration to Independent Network:** The Vermont Judiciary has implemented an IT network that is independent of the ADS network. This new network has better cybersecurity, faster speeds, and more redundancy.

These advancements reflect a broader trend towards a more digital, accessible, secure, and efficient judicial system, leveraging technology to meet the challenges of modern justice administration.

Security Services COLA

In response to S.17 in FY25 the Judiciary submitted a comprehensive courthouse security review with several key recommendations. These recommendations included increases to state security positions, an increase in sheriff positions, and a COLA increase for the sheriffs. The Judiciary was very grateful to receive eleven state security positions in the last session, but there were no added sheriff positions and no COLA increase for the sheriffs.

The Judiciary was unable to negotiate sheriff contracts with no increase in rates. After having discussed the situation with individual sheriffs and the Sheriff's Association, contracts were agreed to with a 3.7% COLA. The new statewide hourly rate for sheriffs is \$53/hr. (up from \$51/hr.). This increases expenses by \$388,704 over the previous year.

County HVAC Project Reversion	(\$800,000)
County Re-wiring/Security Enhancements	\$800,000

The HVAC project for county courthouses is nearing its project end. There remains some work still to be done, but all systems are now functioning and what remains is mostly punch list items. The balance of the project budget is \$2.25M, of which only about \$1.4M will be needed for the punch list items. That leaves an estimated balance of \$800,000 when the HVAC project is done.

The county courthouses still need some security and network enhancements. The Judiciary is hoping to install badge reader locks and Cat 6 network wiring in all county courthouses. Last session, the Judiciary received an appropriation in the FY24 BAA of \$1.55M to start the re-wiring of courthouses. However, the cooling of data closets has caused that project to be more expensive than originally planned. The Judiciary is seeking to revert \$800,000 from the County Courthouse HVAC project to the re-wiring and security enhancements for the same buildings.

Essex Connector Project Reversion	(\$50,000)
Essex ADA Bathrooms	\$50,000

Last session the Legislature provided \$300,000 in the FY24 BAA for the purpose of planning and design of the Essex Connector Project. Much of the design work has been completed and only a small part of that original amount, less than \$50,000, will be spent on the planning and design, leaving a project budget of about \$250,000. The Judiciary seeks to revert \$50,000 of that funding for the purpose of installing two ADA accessible bathrooms in the meeting house space in Guildhall. This is the building that may eventually be connected to the courthouse (pending Capital Bill approval). With this funding, two accessible bathrooms will be installed in the meeting house, making it usable by the Judiciary for larger juror events such as juror draws. Currently, the Judiciary uses another building in Guildhall for this purpose and it requires that

jurors walk more than 100 yards outside to get to the courthouse. This practice creates a security risk for potential jurors and is very inconvenient in inclement weather.