

SUPREME COURT OF VERMONT
OFFICE OF THE COURT ADMINISTRATOR

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TO: Sen. Andrew Perchlik, Chair
Sen. Patrick "Pat" Brennan, Vice-Chair, Clerk
Sen. Richard Westman
Sen. Virginia "Ginny" Lyons
Sen. Philip Baruth
Sen. Anne Watson
Sen. Robert Norris

FROM: Gregg Mousley, Chief, Finance and Administration

DATE: February 25, 2025

RE: FY26 Budget Request

FY26 Budget Request

Statewide Expenses:

Annualization of FY25 Pay Act	\$3,293,105
FY26 Benefit Increases	\$1,746,577
<u>Internal Service Funds/other allocated</u>	<u>\$ 457,063</u>
Subtotal	\$5,496,745

Additional Judicial Pressures: If BAA Passed

Tech Fund Revenue Replacement	\$3,489,763	\$1,328,522
<u>Security Services COLA</u>	<u>\$ 200,522</u>	<u>\$ 200,522</u>
Subtotal	\$3,690,285	\$1,529,044

Total Increase **\$9,187,030** **\$7,025,789**

Budget Adjustment

Please note that both expenses in the Judiciary's budget request – IT expenses and security COLA – are also in the FY25 Budget Adjustment Act. If enacted, the Judiciary will be appropriated \$2,161,576 in IT expenses and \$388,704 for the FY25 security COLA.

Judicial Pressures

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

The Judiciary contracts with 12 County Sheriff's Departments and one private security firm to provide the primary security services in our 23 courthouses. The FY25 hourly rate for a sheriff's deputy is \$53.00. A 3.5% increase would bring that hourly rate to \$54.86. This would increase the expenses by \$200,522 over FY25. It should be noted that the \$53/hr rate for FY25 is not yet funded in the Judiciary's base budget and is part of the Budget Adjustment request.