

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

GREGG MOUSLEY
Chief of Finance and Administration
Gregg.Mousley@vtcourts.gov



Mailing Address
Office of the Court Administrator
109 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05609-0701
Telephone (802) 917-3691

www.vermontjudiciary.org

TO: Senator Andrew Perchlik, Chair, Senate Committee on Appropriations

FROM: Teri Corsones, State Court Administrator
Gregg Mousley, Chief, Finance and Administration

DATE: April 7, 2026

RE: Judiciary Comments Regarding FY27 Budget

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the practical effect of the current version of the FY27 Budget as detailed in H. 951.

There are three areas of the current version of the FY27 Budget that amount to a deficit of \$766,142. This will adversely impact the Judiciary's ability to provide court services. Below is a brief description of each of the three areas at issue.

Vacancy Savings Note - \$285,169

In a departure from past practice, the Executive Branch made adjustments to the vacancy savings line item in the Judiciary's proposed budget. It increased the vacancy savings line item by \$285,169, which is effectively a budget cut in the same amount. We would strongly prefer to continue to have control over vacancy savings decisions, given how critical vacancy savings considerations are to court operations. By way of example, unless there is a vacancy in a judge position for an extended period of time, or a vacancy in several judge positions at one time, it is unlikely that we could achieve vacancy savings in the amount that has been imposed. Alternatively, we would need to refrain from filling multiple court personnel positions when they become vacant due to court personnel retirements or other attrition in order to achieve the proposed vacancy savings. Court operations, employee morale and the considerable progress that we have made to address the pandemic backlog and to improve disposition timelines would immediately suffer if we were precluded from filling court personnel vacancies in order to meet the imposed vacancy savings figure. Whether vacancy savings are connected to judge vacancies or court personnel vacancies, we lack control over when they occur and in the case of judge

vacancies, over when appointments are ultimately made. We have historically overseen our own vacancy savings and have not had a vacancy savings figure imposed. We would request no increase in the vacancy savings line item.

Fee for Space Note - \$218,117

The Judiciary pays BGS a “fee for space” expense in order to occupy state courthouses, based on the number of square feet being utilized. (The Judiciary occupies county courthouses rent-free.) BGS increased the fee for space expense for FY27 in the amount of \$427,576. No additional space is being utilized in connection with that increase; it is simply a percentage increase over last year’s fee for space expense. The FY27 Budget does not cover the full increase however, resulting in a shortfall of \$218,117. We would request full funding of the fee for space expense.

Contracted Security Costs Note - \$338,566

Sheriff deputies provide the backbone of the court security system. Of the 80 FTEs of security across the state’s courthouses, 40 FTEs have been sheriff deputies. Having at least one armed law enforcement officer in each courthouse has been the standard for the Judiciary. This past year, it was necessary to increase the sheriffs’ hourly rate from \$53 per hour to \$57 per hour in order to reach a contractual agreement with the sheriffs. The FY27 Budget includes an increase of \$250,000 towards sheriff security costs. This increase does not provide enough funding to support the current sheriff rate of \$57 per hour. The deficit is \$338,566. We would request full funding of the current cost for sheriff security at courthouses.

Practical Effect:

The budget shortfalls in these three areas total \$766,142. As a practical matter, the Judiciary would have to cut \$766,142 to balance our budget. The bulk of our budget covers fixed costs (salaries, fee for space, security contracts and IT) and the balance of our budget amounts to less than 7% of the total budget. That balance covers court services such as interpreters, GAL expenses, juror pay and mediators, as well as security systems and training. Court services would need to be substantially curtailed to achieve the necessary savings.

The FY27 Budget does not include any of the four new training positions, the one new HelpDesk position or the Mental Health and the Courts contract position that the Judiciary requested. We understand the budget challenges this year regarding new positions but respectfully request that the FY27 Budget cover, at a minimum, the Judiciary’s base operations expenses. The provision of court services will otherwise undoubtedly suffer.

Sheriff Association Proposed Rate - \$1,929,637

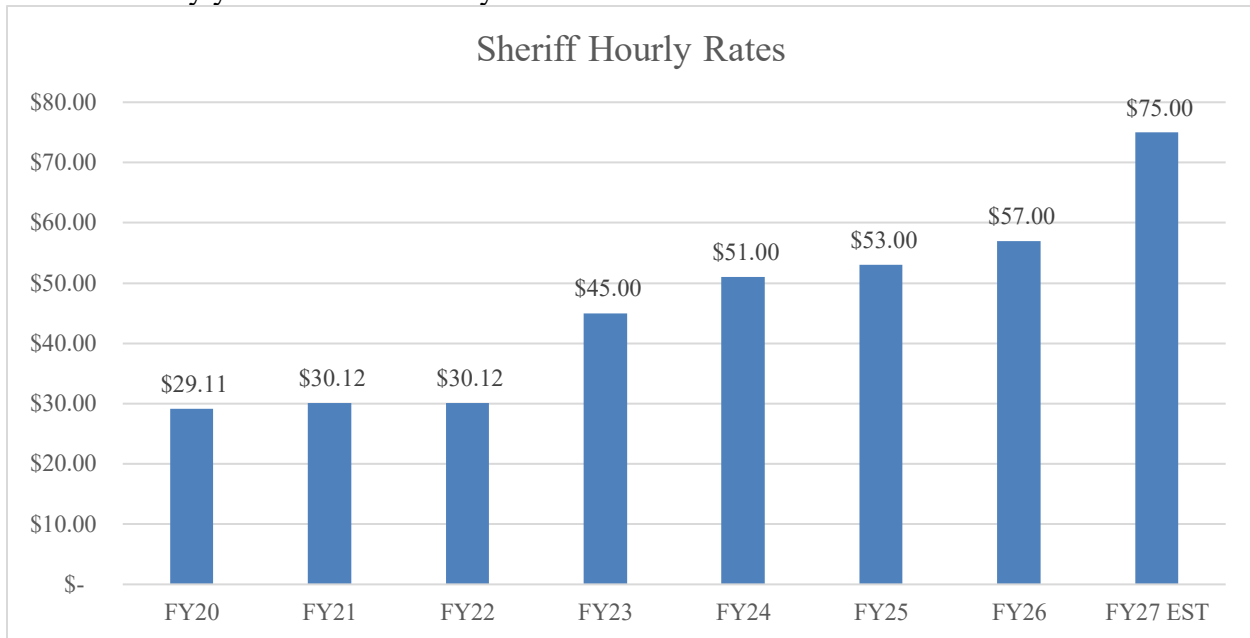
We also note that the Sheriff’s Association is requesting an increase in the hourly sheriff rate of \$57 per hour to the Executive Branch rate of \$75 per hour. The chart below provides more detail regarding sheriff rates. The increase in total cost for the proposed rate of \$75 per hour is

\$1,929,637. Although sheriff costs for courthouse security are included in the Judiciary budget, it is a pass-through cost to the sheriffs. The Vermont Sheriffs' Association has described its reasons for the increase in the attached Memo.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment.

Potential Sheriff rate costs		New Funding Needed	Comments
\$53/hr	\$ 5,194,004		(Current base funding level)
\$55/hr	\$ 5,444,004	\$ 250,000	House funding level
\$57/hr (current rate)	\$ 5,782,570	\$ 588,566	requested and granted in FY26 BAA, but not in base budget
\$60/hr	\$ 5,920,405	\$ 726,401	5.26% increase from current rate
\$65/hr	\$ 6,323,775	\$ 1,129,771	14.04% increase from current rate
\$70/hr	\$ 6,727,145	\$ 1,533,141	22.81% increase from current rate
\$75/hr	\$ 7,123,641	\$ 1,929,637	31.58% increase from current rate

Sheriff rates by year for court security:



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