

SUPREME COURT OF VERMONT
OFFICE OF THE COURT ADMINISTRATOR

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

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

DATE: February 20, 2026

RE: FY27 Budget Request

Thank you for the opportunity to present the Judiciary's FY27 Budget Request. The first part of the presentation will compare the Governor's Recommend (with a 4.2% increase over the Judiciary's FY26 Appropriation) with the Judiciary's FY27 Budget Request (with a 5.6% increase over the Judiciary's FY26 Appropriation). The difference in the two amounts is \$1,114,533.

Judiciary FY26 Appropriation	\$78,499,456
Governor's Recommend for FY27 Budget (4.2% increase)	\$81,840,266

- includes \$285,169 more than presently expected in vacancy savings
- includes "fee for space" shortfall of \$218,117
- includes the Pay Act annualization and IT related cost increases

Vacancy Savings Note - \$285,169: In a departure from past practice, the Executive Branch made adjustments to the vacancy savings line item in the budget submitted by the Judiciary. This is the first time that our base budget has been adjusted to fit into the Governor's budget guidelines. We would prefer to have control over vacancy savings decisions, given how critical vacancy savings considerations are to court operations. The vacancy savings "cost" is \$285,169.

Fee for Space Note - \$218,117: The Judiciary pays BGS a "fee for space" expense in order to occupy state courthouses. (The Judiciary occupies county courthouses rent-free.) The fee for

space expense for FY27 increased by \$427,576. The Governor’s Recommend for the fee for space expense was only \$209,459, resulting in a shortfall of \$218,117.

The vacancy savings and fee for space items have put significant pressure on the Judiciary by underfunding our base budget by a total of \$427,576. The Governor’s Recommend did include funding for two increases in current services listed below, which we appreciate:

Increase in IT Expenses - \$357,180. The Judiciary’s IT environment expenses include annual subscriptions and/or annual support & maintenance agreements for the existing hardware, software, and IT professional services contracts such as a 24/7 Security Operations Center. In addition to inflationary annual increases across most line items, a few line-items were prepaid in FY26 but are up for renewal again in FY27.

Cybersecurity Software Addition – \$190,000. This fills a gap in our cybersecurity protections by expanding our Palo Alto Networks Cortex platform to include Cortex Cloud to secure our Microsoft Azure cloud infrastructure and runtime, including scanning our in-house developed code for vulnerabilities. This expansion integrates seamlessly with our existing Cortex platform products which protect our on-premises infrastructure.

Judiciary FY27 Budget Request (5.6% increase)	\$82,954,799
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Difference between Governor’s Recommend and Judiciary Request	\$1,114,533
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New Costs in the FY27 Budget Request

HelpDesk Analyst	\$ 92,471
Judicial Assistants Dedicated to Training - Criminal Division	\$ 107,694
- Civil/Probate Divisions	\$ 107,694
- Family Division	\$ 107,694
- Juvenile/Mental Health Dockets	\$ 107,694
Mental Health and the Courts Director (contracted)	\$ 88,000
Convert FY24 Appropriation Ltd Serv Positions to Permanent Positions	<u>\$ 0</u>
Total	\$ 611,247

Sheriff Contracts (\$75/hr) (pass through)	<u>\$1,929,637</u>
Total	\$2,540,884

IT HelpDesk Analyst - \$92,471

The Judiciary’s Technology Service Center (TSC) processes helpdesk tickets that are related to IT (technology) and our applications (Enterprise Justice E-Filing and Case Management System

and the Vermont Digital Evidence Portal). Tickets can be entered by end users directly with an email or via a phone call to the IT Helpdesk which acts as a triage for all incoming help calls regardless of where they end up being directed, so that the users don't have to navigate a complicated phone tree, or a directory of different phone numbers.

The Judiciary processes between 11,000 – 12,000 tickets per year. Presently there are two HelpDesk Analysts who answer the HelpDesk phones and process the tickets that involve IT issues (which account for 50% of the tickets), as well as route the tickets that involve application support issues (that account for 25% of the tickets) to the two application support analysts and route the remaining 25% of the tickets that involve Information Center and Central Review issues to those experts.

Answering the phone to triage and creating new tickets as well as processing over 6,000 technology-related tickets per year has been problematic with only two IT Helpdesk Analysts. The industry standard for the number of tickets processed annually per helpdesk analyst is 2,000. Three HelpDesk Analysts are needed to process the 6,000 plus average number of IT-focused tickets per year.

Another rule of thumb in the industry is that there should be one HelpDesk Analyst per 75 users. We support 460 Judiciary employees, plus 150 or so Judiciary partners, plus 300 volunteer GALs for a total of over 900 users. This doesn't even include the thousands of members of the public who are court users. Considering the 460 Judiciary employees alone, we should have six HelpDesk Analysts and we currently have two IT HelpDesk Analysts and two Application Support Analysts.

We respectfully request one additional IT HelpDesk Analyst position.

Four Judicial Assistants Dedicated to Training - \$430,776

The Judiciary conducts an annual Workplace Engagement Survey to gather feedback from court personnel on a variety of topics. The need for improved training is consistently highlighted in survey responses. Different training measures have been implemented as a result.

Coupled with the need for improved training has been a higher than usual turnover rate, which has driven up the number of trainings needed for new employees. Training of new staff typically falls on the shoulders of more experienced staff, which takes them away from their usual responsibilities. A recommendation that has emerged from these patterns is the concept of creating a position for experienced personnel who would be dedicated to training new staff state-wide in a particular docket. This would allow court staff otherwise tapped to train new employees to continue their work uninterrupted. It would also result in standardized training by an individual familiar with best practices and the most up to date information in a specific docket.

Given the breakdown of the average numbers of new staff hired state-wide per division, the request is for one Judicial Assistant for the Criminal Division, one for the Civil and Probate

Divisions, one for the Family Division and one for the Juvenile and the Mental Health Dockets. As new employees are hired in a particular division, the dedicated trainer for that division would provide the necessary basics either in-person or remotely depending on the number of new staff in that division at the time. The dedicated trainer would also be responsible for continual review and updating of the manuals specific to their division and could serve as a resource to the oversight and rules committees that pertain to each division. In the event that there are any occasions when there isn't a new staff person in a specific division to be trained, the dedicated trainer for that division could provide court staff assistance when needed if a court is temporarily short-staffed due to vacancies or medical leaves.

We respectfully request four Judicial Assistant positions dedicated to training needs in specific divisions.

Mental Health and the Courts Project Director - \$88,000

The Vermont Supreme Court established the Judiciary Commission on Mental Health and the Courts in 2022 as a Tri-Branch effort to examine the interactions between the judicial and mental health systems and to propose measures to better respond to the needs of court-involved individuals with mental health issues.

In 2023 the Court applied for and received a State Crisis Intervention program (SCIP) grant to support the Commission, including funds to hire a Mental Health and the Courts Project Director to coordinate the Commission's work, including convening an Annual Summit on Mental Health and the Courts at the statehouse and conducting Sequential Intercept Model (SIM) Workshops around the state to survey on-the-ground stakeholders about collaboration and capacity building access to relevant resources in the region, including trial courts and court services programs, and how the region could best create plans to effectively address substance abuse and mental health challenges for court users. The Project Director's most recent work involves connecting providers to litigants at the courts, a key component of the "accountability courts" initiative in Chittenden County that's being replicated throughout the state.

Funding under the original SCIP grant for the Project Director's position is due to expire at the end of September 2026. The Commission intended to apply for a continuation of the SCIP grant this year but like many other federal grants the solicitation has been delayed. So as not to discontinue the important work of the Project Director, especially given the work connected with the accountability courts, a request is being made to contract with the Director for one year. Ideally a SCIP (or similar) grant solicitation will be published during the year in which case the Commission will apply for a renewal grant.

We respectfully request funding to contract for the Mental Health and the Courts Project Director for one year.

Conversion of FY24 Appropriation Limited-Service Positions to Permanent Positions - \$0

In FY24, the Judiciary requested 26 positions in a variety of roles. The Legislature approved the positions and funded them in the base budget with General Funds. They termed the positions “limited-service” even though the positions were funded in our base budget. Unlike the pandemic funded limited-service positions anticipated for a temporary duration, the need for these positions is permanent. It was suggested at the time of the base budget funding that we treat the limited-service positions as “extended” limited service and to return to the Legislature before the extended service periods ended to convert the positions to permanent. No monetary impact is involved since the positions are already included in the base budget.

The statute that approved the 26 positions also approved 9 Department of State’s Attorneys and Sheriffs positions and provides as follows:

Sec. E.100 POSITIONS

(c) The establishment of 35 exempt limited-service positions is authorized in fiscal year 2025 as follows:

- (1) Judiciary:
 - (A) one Database Administrator;
 - (B) two IT Help Desk Analysts;
 - (C) two Centralized Service Analysts;
 - (D) 10 Judicial Assistants; and
 - (E) 11 Judicial Officer II’s
- (2) Department of State’s Attorneys and Sheriffs:
 - (A) seven Deputy State’s Attorneys;
 - (B) one Victim Advocate; and
 - (C) one Legal Assistant.

Since that appropriation, last year the nine limited-service positions at the Department of State’s Attorneys and Sheriffs were converted to permanent positions. We would request the same treatment this year and request that the 26 positions be converted to permanent positions. This will not have a budget impact since the 26 positions are all already funded in our base appropriation.

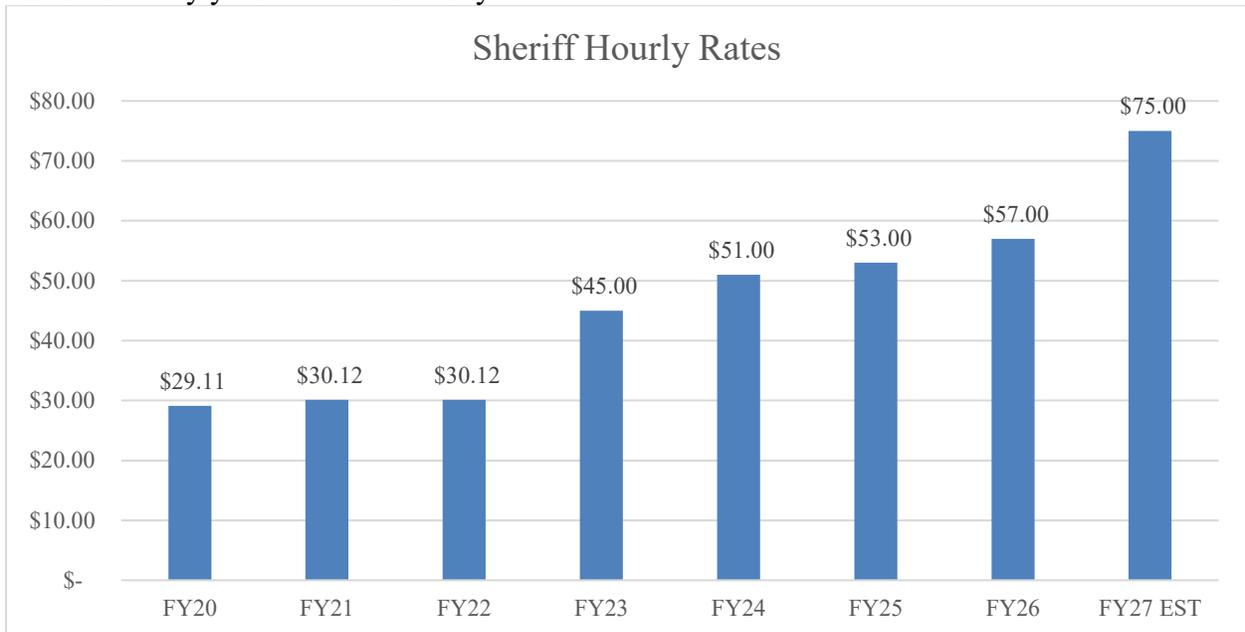
Sheriff Rate Increase - \$1,929,637

Sheriff deputies provide the backbone of the court security system. Of the 80 FTEs of security across our 23 court houses, 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 in order to reach a contractual agreement with the sheriffs. As a result, the Judiciary requested a budget adjustment of \$588,566 to cover the increase. This raised the rate from \$53/hr to \$57/hr. The Judiciary still experienced a reduction of five deputies due to retirement, turnover, and inability to recruit new deputies. The Judiciary has been filling this gap by using staffed security officers.

The sheriffs have requested in their FY27 budget that the Judiciary rate equal the Executive Branch contract rate of \$75/hr. This would increase the cost of security by \$1,929,637 – a 31% increase. The Governor’s Recommend does not include this increase even though it is a “current service.” We presume that the increase was not approved because it does not fit within the Governor’s budget guideline of a 3% increase.

Sheriff rates by year for court security:



The Vermont Sheriffs’ Association has described its reasons for the increase in the attached Memo.

We greatly appreciate your consideration of the Judiciary’s FY27 Budget Request.

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