

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

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**TO:** Senator Wendy Harrison, Chair  
Senate Committee on Institutions

**FROM:** Gregg Mousley  
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**DATE:** April 15, 2025

**RE:** Judiciary Capital Budget Request

The Judiciary appreciates the opportunity to testify regarding Section 14 of the Governor's Recommended FY26-27 Capital Budget. The Judiciary operates twenty-three courthouses across Vermont. Twelve of the courthouses are owned by counties and eleven of the courthouses are owned by the state. The counties do not charge rent for the use of the county courthouses. The state-owned courthouses are managed by Buildings and General Services (BGS) and they charge a fee for space for the use of the state-owned courthouses.

**Section 14: Judiciary**

**Line 114 – Woodstock Courthouse Purchase and Installation of Power Backup - \$100,000**

The Windsor County Courthouse in Woodstock currently has a three-phase battery back-up system that has the capacity to provide emergency lighting, only, for several hours in the event of a power outage. The power backup system is not equipped to cover the technology associated with electronic case management systems, electronic filing or remote hearings. As a result, court operations are brought to a halt when power outages occur. This is particularly problematic at this time because in addition to the civil and probate hearings that typically take place at the Woodstock County Courthouse, criminal and family hearings are also being held at the courthouse while extensive renovations are taking place at the Windsor Criminal and Family Courthouse in White River Junction. This appropriation would fund a back-up power system to ensure continuous operation at the Windsor County Courthouse in Woodstock.

### **Line 115 -White River Junction Courthouse Renovation - \$8,000,000 Cash Fund**

The Windsor Criminal and Family Courthouse in White River Junction was constructed in 1987 as a District Courthouse and for many years saw minimal capital upgrades. \$6 million was appropriated in the FY24-FY25 capital budget for sitework and to begin significant renovations to improve the building's HVAC systems, energy efficiency, security and life safety systems, and make modifications to several interior spaces to better suit the Judiciary's programmatic needs. This appropriation funds the remainder of this project, which is due for completion during the 2026 construction season.

### **Line 116 – Essex County Courthouse Connector and Security Upgrades - \$3,685,910**

The Essex County Courthouse in Guildhall, Vermont has several security, structural and programmatic issues that could be resolved through the addition of a connecting space between the courthouse and an adjoining Meeting House, as well as improvements to the existing courthouse space. This appropriation would fund a project to drastically improve security features at the courthouse by adding a holding cell and separating public space from non-public judge, court staff and jury space, minimize the possibility of a mistrial due to juror interaction with the public, and support the smooth and continuous operations of this important regional judicial institution. This project has enjoyed input and support from a variety of local community and law enforcement stakeholders. Design documents for the project have been completed. This appropriation would fund the construction. A blueprint of the proposed improvements is at [Essex County Connector Project 20240906.Essex Courthouse-Scheme B.ProgressSet.pdf](#)

### **Line 117 – Newport Courthouse Replacement Planning & Design - \$1,000,000**

**This item was removed by the House since a final decision on site location has yet to be made.**

The Vermont Superior Court of Orleans County currently functions in two adjacent buildings, the Orleans County Courthouse (county-owned) at 247 Main Street in Newport and the 21,854 sq ft Orleans Criminal Courthouse (state-owned) at 217 Main Street in Newport. When completed in 1904, the building at 217 Main Street housed all the federal facilities in Newport, including courtrooms, a post office, and customs offices. It now houses the Orleans Criminal Courthouse. Both courthouses suffer from significant programmatic inadequacies, functional obsolescence, security challenges, and life safety concerns. \$750,000 was appropriated in the FY24-FY25 capital budget for potential land acquisition and the initial design of a new courthouse. A land search has been ongoing, as have been conversations with local officials about the future of the existing buildings.

### **Line 118 - Lamoille County Courthouse Purchase and Installation of Backup Power System - \$190,000**

This capital budget request is to install a generator in the courthouse to support continuous operations during power outages.

The Lamoille County Courthouse was built in 1912 at 154 Main Street in Hyde Park, the shire town of Lamoille County, Vermont. The courthouse was modernized and underwent significant renovations in 2016 as a joint county and state collaborative project. In the fall of 2023, four intense storms caused extended power outages in Hyde Park and courthouse operations were immediately halted. Besides the consequence of cancelled court hearings, if a power outage were to last for any length of time during cold weather, there is the risk that pipes could burst and court records, historical documents, computer systems, and the entire renovated courthouse and its relatively new furnishings could be destroyed. There is no alternative courthouse in Lamoille County that could absorb court activities if it were inoperable due to repeated or extended power outages or water damage.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify and please let us know if you have any questions or require any additional detail. We have invited the assistant judges for Windsor, Essex and Lamoille Counties, respectively, to attend remotely in the event there are questions unique to their budgets and/or capital reserve funds.

cc: Sen. Robert Plunkett, Vice-Chair  
Sen. Russ Ingalls  
Sen. Joseph Major  
Sen. Samuel Douglass, Clerk