

STATE COURTS SYSTEM

FY 2017-18 LEGISLATIVE BUDGET REQUEST

➤ State Courts System Pay Issues (Issue #4401A80) – Judicial Branch #1 Priority

1. The judicial branch requests second-year funding of \$6,388,909 in recurring salary dollars branch wide, effective July 1, 2017, to continue addressing a wide range of staff salary issues affecting the State Courts System.

In its Fiscal Year 2014-15 legislative budget request, in order to recruit and retain highly skilled employees and to experience more equity with other government salaries, the judicial branch requested \$18,828,193 in recurring salary appropriation. However, recognizing the considerable size of such a request, the court system proposed a two-year implementation period. In 2014, the Legislature provided \$8,132,614 for first-year implementation. That funding assisted the judicial branch in making significant headway in addressing recruitment, retention, and salary equity between the branch and other governmental entities for similar positions and duties.

Although positively impacted by the 2014 funding, the branch must continue its progress in reaching its Long Range Strategic Plan goal of attracting, hiring, and retaining a qualified, ethical, and diverse workforce. Success in this regard continues to depend on the branch's ability to attract, hire, and retain highly qualified and competent employees. As Florida's economy continues to improve, the employment environment is sure to become increasingly competitive. The court system needs to be able to retain and recruit top talent in all of its elements to ensure that justice is served in the most efficient and effective manner to the people of Florida.

2. For many of the same reasons, judicial salaries also top the judicial branch list of priorities. Although a specific dollar amount is not being requested as part of this budget request, it is imperative that the State of Florida be able to recruit and retain quality judges. It only makes sense that the quality of justice for Florida citizens is directly impacted by the quality of the men and women that Florida elects or appoints as judges. In turn, competitive salaries are essential to the ability to attract a high number of highly qualified attorneys willing to run and apply for judicial openings -- or willing to stay on the bench for a full judicial career after their election or appointment. There have already been a number of qualified jurists who have left the bench early -- as well as a demonstrable drop in qualified applicants -- as salaries for Florida judges have seriously lagged behind inflation and behind attorney salaries in Florida, federal judicial salaries, and judicial salaries in comparable states.

The State Courts System respectfully requests that the Legislature implement a multi-year strategy to fully restore judicial salaries to a competitive level, while continuing to benchmark judicial salaries in Florida consistent with Florida Rule of Judicial Administration 2.244(b).

STATEWIDE PAY ISSUE TOTAL: \$6,388,909 (recurring)

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TRIAL COURTS

➤ **Trial Court Technology Comprehensive Plan (Issue #36250C0): 70.0 FTE; \$21,846,048 (\$6,001,836 non-recurring)**

To develop and maintain case management systems, refresh and maintain aging court reporting equipment, and provide a minimum level of technology services in counties across the state for the benefit of court users. This request implements a comprehensive strategy for addressing the statewide technology needs of the trial courts to: (1) provide a more consistent statewide level of court services by establishing and funding a minimum level of technology to support all elements of the State Courts System; (2) implement best practices for funding by incorporating full life cycle costs of all trial court technology which ensures long-range functionality and return on investment; and (3) sustain the systems and applications in the trial courts by ensuring courts have appropriate staffing levels available to support technology demands and improving training and education for staff.

➤ **Comprehensive Court Interpreting Resources (Issue #36344C0): 7.0 FTE; \$6,288,545 (\$2,412,526 non-recurring)**

To foster the quality and availability of court interpreting services provided in the trial courts amid growth in the non-English speaking population. Elements of this comprehensive funding request include: (1) expanding the use of remote interpreting technology to allow access to qualified interpreters over a broader geographic area, based on the success of a recent pilot project; (2) providing additional staff resources and contractual resources in response to market forces causing difficulties in securing qualified court interpreters and increased contractual costs; and (3) adjusting the salaries of court interpreter employees to foster recruitment, retention, and equity with other employers competing for these critical skills.

➤ **Case Management Resources (Issue #3001600): 50.0 FTE; \$3,336,380 (\$119,950 non-recurring)**

To assist in the effective and efficient processing and management of cases through the judicial system. Case managers perform intake, screening, evaluation, monitoring, tracking, coordinating, scheduling, and referral activities, which guide cases to disposition. Case managers help reduce delays and provide certainty and predictability in how a case is progressing through the system.

This issue was partially funded in FY 2015-16 in the amount of \$2 million, which funded 38 case management positions; however, there still exists a need for additional case managers in order to provide an adequate level of services throughout the state.

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➤ **Staff Attorney Resources (Issue #3001800): 39.5 FTE; \$3,123,415 (\$95,960 non-recurring)**

To assist in the effective and efficient processing and management of cases through the judicial system. Staff attorneys provide legal research assistance to judges and judicial offices, including the preparation of legal memoranda and court orders. Their work enhances the adjudication of cases and improves the quality of judicial decisions by identifying and analyzing relevant laws and cases before the court.

**TRIAL COURTS TOTAL: 166.5 FTE; \$34,594,388
(\$8,630,272 non-recurring)
General Revenue**

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OFFICE OF THE STATE COURTS ADMINISTRATOR

➤ **Data Management (36315C0): \$418,701 (\$337,340 non-recurring)**

To improve data management and reporting capabilities of the court system by installing regional servers and taking other steps that will enable the capture of significantly more case activity information from clerks of court. This data is vital to provide judges and court staff with information to improve operations statewide for the benefit of court users and to provide policymakers with state-level information on existing and emerging court-related matters.

In addition, this request is to support expansion and enhancement of an existing case management information system that contains valuable data on drug courts, mental health courts, and veterans courts. The system is vital for managing client information from intake to program completion and monitoring and evaluating problem-solving courts.

**OFFICE OF THE STATE COURTS ADMINISTRATOR: \$418,701
(\$337,340 non-recurring)
General Revenue**

**STATE COURTS SYSTEM
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CERTIFICATION OF NEED FOR ADDITIONAL JUDGES

➤ **Certification of Need for Additional Judges (Issue #3009310):
\$7,232,783 (\$122,349 non-recurring)**

This issue is submitted as a placeholder, pending the release of the supreme court opinion to certify the need for additional judges for Fiscal Year 2017-18.

The Supreme Court of Florida Opinion No. SC15-1991, *In re: Certification of Need for Additional Judges* (November 19, 2015), certified the need for 24 additional circuit and county judges for FY 2016-17, as follows:

- Circuit Court – 1 circuit judge (5th Judicial Circuit)
- County Court – 23 county judges (seven in Miami-Dade County; seven in Hillsborough County; four in Broward County; two in Palm Beach County; and one in Duval, Lee, and Orange counties).
- Executive Direction – The Florida Cases Southern 2nd Reporter request is based on the total number of judges certified.

**TOTAL: \$7,232,783
(\$122,349 non-recurring)
General Revenue**