



Supreme Court of Appeals State of West Virginia

News

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Supreme Court Budget Request Is Less Than Five Years Ago

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CHARLESTON, W.Va. – The West Virginia judicial system budget request for the 2021-22 fiscal year is less than the fiscal year 2017 budget, Supreme Court Chief Justice Evan Jenkins told the House Finance Committee in a meeting Friday.

“The Supreme Court is committed to operating a judicial system that is fiscally responsible, transparent, and accountable,” he said. “I am putting a special emphasis during my year as Chief Justice to engage the public on the important work we do to guarantee a judicial system that is fair, accessible, and without bias. A civil society depends on it.”

The budget request of \$139,400,000 is \$2,359,670 less than the budget for fiscal year 2017 and less than 3 percent of total state general revenue spending.

The fiscal year 2022 request will operate the entire West Virginia judicial branch of government, including 1,520 employees in circuit courts, family courts, magistrate courts, and probation offices in every county. Personal services and employee benefits account for \$115,126,000, or 83 percent, of the budget. A little over \$20 million, or 15 percent, goes to current operating expenses.

The largest amount of the budget, 24 percent, goes to operating circuit courts. Another 23 percent is to operate magistrate courts and 21.4 percent is for probation. Only 5.4 percent of the request is to fund the operations of the Supreme Court, including the Clerk’s Office, Office of Counsel, the Justices’ staff, and the employees in the Administrative Office.

“We have 300 probation officers who supervise about 10,000 people on probation. They protect the public by ensuring probationers are following the terms of their probation. Drug testing, home visits, pre-sentencing reports, and supervising hundreds of high-risk probationers such as sex offenders, is all in a day’s work for these front line, public safety employees,” Chief Justice Jenkins said.

He also highlighted the work of the West Virginia treatment courts, which are supervised by drug court judges and staffed by probation officers. There are 29 Adult Drug Courts covering 46 counties and 15 Juvenile Drug Courts covering 17 counties. Wood, Harrison, Raleigh, Logan, and Ohio Counties have Veterans Treatment Courts within their Adult Drug Courts.

West Virginia has eight family treatment courts covering nine counties, and, so far, 152 individuals have been assessed, 101 accepted, and 129 children have or are being served. Family

Treatment Courts currently serve Boone, Braxton, Calhoun, Logan, McDowell, Nicholas, Ohio, Randolph and Roane counties. Three more family treatment courts are expected to open this year in Fayette, Wetzel and Wood counties.

The treatment courts as well as magistrate, family and circuit courts and the Supreme Court have continued to operate during the COVID pandemic.

Simply shutting down courts, sending everybody home, and letting the work pile up was not an option, he said. The West Virginia Constitution mandates that ‘the Courts of this state shall be open’ and that ‘justice shall be administered without delay.’ Victims of domestic violence and a child being abused must have access to the courts. The Court wanted to make sure those in crisis could be served, said Chief Justice Jenkins.

The Supreme Court authorized the purchase of laptops and computer equipment for “COVID Kits” that could be dispatched to county courthouses when there was a COVID outbreak to help employees operate remotely. The Court also authorized the installation of all the network connections, equipment, and video links to the regional jails and the purchase of cell phones with a common platform and secure video apps for every magistrate in the state. “This enabled them to conduct remote proceedings, issue arrest warrants, and set bond -- just to mention a few of their everyday tasks -- in a safe, secure way,” Chief Justice Jenkins said.

Since 2018, the Court has adopted policies to ensure problems of the past never happen again. The Court has adopted a Travel Policy, P-Card Policy, Accounting Policy, Asset Management Policy, Procurement Policy, Acceptable Use of Information Systems Policy, and a rewritten Employee Handbook. The Legislative Auditor commended the Court for its action to “establish thorough and well-researched controls.”