

**The Supreme Court of Montana
Office of the Court Administrator**

**Dave McAlpin
Court Administrator**



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MEMORANDUM

TO: Law and Justice Interim Committee
FROM: Dave McAlpin, Administrator, Office of the Court Administrator
RE: Judicial Branch fiscal costs of Courts
DATE: January 5, 2026

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "JLM", is written over the "FROM:" line of the memorandum.

The committee has asked for information related to the costs associated with running courtrooms and conducting trials.

In perspective, the Judicial budget as a subset of the entire state general fund budget is less than 2.6%. For all HB2 funding, the Judicial budget is .84% (less than 1%). Since 2001, the counties have provided courtrooms and office space across Montana for the court system. The remaining costs for personnel and operations/IT are funded via the state general fund budget.

Provided below is some background information that should help the committee understand the funding in Judicial Branch budget program four, District Court Operations. I believe the committee wants to examine the expenditures below which cover variable costs that cannot be predicted in advance, for example the cost of jury trial reimbursements, transcripts, medical/psychological evaluations, CASA/GALs appointed, interpreters, relief court reporters, and presentence investigation reports. It does not cover the fixed predictable costs of staff salaries and benefits, or the costs of IT hardware and software such as case management or e-filing systems.

Those variable totals are:

FY22	\$2,050,298
FY23	\$2,055,964
FY24	\$2,084,633
FY25	\$2,210,530.

Requests for new funding of district court personnel and operations are driven by an annual workload study the Office of Court Administrator (OCA) has been facilitating since 2006. This study was developed with assistance from the National Center for State Courts. The weighted values for the use of judges' time spent on cases yields an estimate of relative needs for resources in the 22 judicial districts in Montana. The 2023 study documented the need for three new judges in the 13th Judicial District Court of Yellowstone County, of which the 2025 Legislature appropriated for the cost of two new judges and their staff. They took the bench in early January.

Challenges for the Judicial Branch in providing the necessary services to Montanans include;

- lagging salaries for positions such as law clerks and court reporters;
- high cost of housing and in high growth counties like Flathead and Gallatin;
- increasing caseloads that come with the population growth in these communities and;
- the Judicial Branch is also working with the Interim Budget Committee to predict the cost of replacing end-of-life software systems in the coming years.

The 2025 workload study will be available at the next meeting of this committee. The Office of Court Administrator will be happy to provide additional information at the request of the committee.

Thank you for your interest.

END