

AOPC^{CONNECTED}



Issue 1, 2026

In this issue

In this issue, read about this year's Judicial Budget Statement, county court news, ongoing civics education efforts, recent recognitions around the judiciary and more.

County Court Leadership Transitions

Erie County

Judge **John Mead** was elected to the position, following the end of former President Judge **Joseph Walsh's** term.

Lackawanna County

Judge **James Gibbons** assumed the role of president judge, following the retirement of former President Judge **Patricia Corbett** in February of last year.

Forest/Warren County

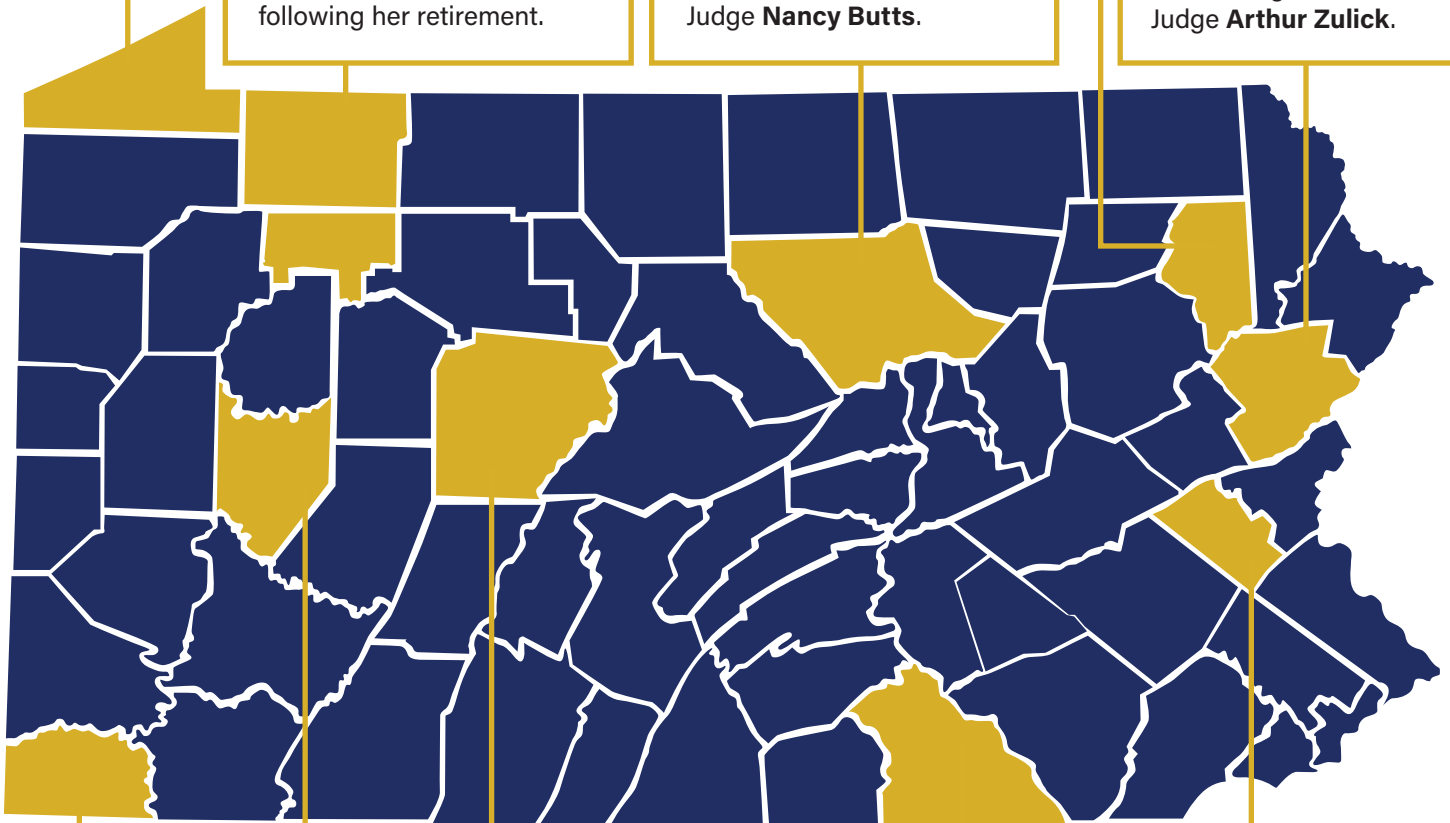
Judge **Gregory Hammond** succeeded former President Judge **Maureen Skerda** following her retirement.

Lycoming County

Judge **Eric Linhardt** was elected as president judge, succeeding former President Judge **Nancy Butts**.

Monroe County

Judge **Jonathan Mark** became president judge, succeeding former President Judge **Arthur Zulick**.



Greene County

Judge **Jeffry Grimes** succeeded former President Judge **Louis Dayich** as the county's president judge upon his retirement.

Clearfield County

Following the retirement of former President Judge **Fredric Ammerman**, Judge **Paul Cherry** became the county's president judge.

Lehigh County

Judge **Douglas Reichley** became the county's president judge after the retirement of former President Judge **J. Brian Johnson**.

Armstrong County

Judge **Chase McClister** assumed the role of president judge, succeeding President Judge **James Panchik**.

York County

Judge **Michael Flannelly** was elected to replace former President Judge **Maria Musti Cook**, who retired at the end of 2025.

Superior Court Earns Recognition for Excellence in Data Reporting



The Pennsylvania Superior Court was honored in December at the National Center of State Courts (NCSC) Conference of State Court Administrators for its exceptional work in court data reporting.

For over a decade, the Superior Court has submitted annual data to the NCSC Court Statistics Project, and this year enhanced its reporting with publishable data on original proceedings and self-represented litigants.

The court's data team also revised previous years' submissions to reflect these updates, helping ensure that the Court's data remains accurate and reliable.

"I am thrilled that the hard work of both our Prothonotary's and Reporter's offices is being recognized," said Superior Court President Judge **Anne Lazarus**. "The staff of the Superior Court works very hard and it is so rewarding to be able to document each of the steps that goes into our processes."

Erie County Treatment Court Partners with Community College

Erie County Treatment Court is developing a new partnership with Erie County Community College to expand educational and career opportunities for individuals participating in treatment court programs.

Through this collaboration, defendants on probation will have the option to voluntarily enroll in college courses as part of their treatment court journey.

The opportunity is designed to help participants build practical skills that support long-term recovery, employment and personal stability, while reinforcing the connection between treatment, accountability and education.

As part of the program, course fees are minimal, and financial assistance is available for those who qualify.

"We are excited to add this valuable resource to our treatment court initiative," said District Court Administrator **Robert Catalde**.

"The opportunity for participants to improve their education while overcoming other challenges will help set them up for future success. We are grateful for this partnership with the Community College, which we hope will serve as a model for future collaborations between government and community resources."

With strong support from local leadership, this initiative aims to provide participants with additional tools to support success beyond program completion, strengthen community reintegration and reduce the likelihood of recidivism.

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Supreme Court of Pennsylvania

Debra Todd
Chief Justice of Pennsylvania

Christine Donohue
Justice

Kevin M. Dougherty
Justice

David N. Wecht
Justice

Sallie Updyke Mundy
Justice

P. Kevin Brobson
Justice

Daniel D. McCaffery
Justice



Mock Trial Brings History to Life in Supreme Court Courtroom

On March 6, middle school students from Masterman School stepped into the historic Supreme Court Courtroom at Philadelphia City Hall to participate in a mock trial centered on the famous duel between Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr.

Justice **Kevin Dougherty** presided over the proceedings, giving students the unique opportunity to experience

the judicial process in an authentic courtroom setting.

The mock trial was the culmination of months of research, writing and preparation by the students, who are members of the school's Mock Trial Club.

Their interest in the program began last year when they participated

in The Rendell Center's Mock Trial Program and inspired by that experience, the students formed their own lunchtime club to continue developing trials and sharpening their courtroom skills.

As part of the event, students argued the case, examined witnesses and presented evidence while learning firsthand how courts operate.

Beaver County Takes an Upstream Leap Forward

By Angela Cerilli Sager, senior court management consultant, National Center for State Courts

This past October, Beaver County took an important step toward strengthening its support for children and families by hosting an [Upstream](#) Community Mapping Event. This gathering brought together leaders from the Beaver County Courts, Children and Youth Services, Juvenile Services, the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) and a wide network of community organizations and service providers dedicated to supporting children, families and their community.



What Is Upstream?

Upstream is a national movement aimed at bringing courts, child welfare and juvenile justice systems, and community organizations together to identify local strengths, fill service gaps and develop practical strategies that prioritize early intervention and prevention for families at risk of entering the court system. The overarching goal is to reduce maltreatment, limit the need for out-of-home placements, minimize court involvement and help families access the resources they need long before a crisis escalates to legal action.

Ahead of the Beaver County Mapping Workshop, nearly 100 community members shared their top community challenges. The most frequently mentioned issues included mental health, housing, lack of resources, substance use, transportation, difficulty meeting basic needs, poverty and family/community violence.

Over a day and a half, 65 participants representing a broad range of agencies that serve children and families convened to share perspectives, examine available resources and develop a unified vision for Beaver County's future. While the county already benefits from strong services, the event reaffirmed a commitment to improve access and coordinate those efforts even further.

Beaver County's Key Priorities

The group identified several areas of focus for its action plan:

- Broadening access to prosocial activities for youth
- Enhancing availability of affordable housing
- Strengthening youth substance-use prevention initiatives
- Increasing access to mental health supports

These plans are being advanced under the leadership of Beaver County Judges **Mitchell Shahn** and **Deborah Lancos DeCostro**, along with CYS Administrator Joshua Edenhofer and Director of Juvenile Services Charles Rossi. Progress will be monitored through ongoing Beaver County Roundtables.

"Upstream transformed Beaver County's family care system from an array of individual instruments, each playing its own pleasant tune, into a powerful, emotional orchestral masterpiece where every note complements the other. Through its interactive approach, Upstream brought harmony and collaboration to services, creating a unified symphony that supports families and children at the most critical times. By engaging in Upstream and its action planning, judges can step beyond the bench and help lead this orchestra, inspiring community members to join in preventing court involvement." – Judge Mitchell Shahn

A Growing Movement in Pennsylvania and Beyond

Beaver County is the second Pennsylvania county to partner with NCSC for Upstream, following Snyder County's mapping event in April 2024. Similar efforts have also taken place in states including Massachusetts, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Nebraska and Kentucky. Community Mappings similar to Upstream focused on other case types, like adult guardianship, are currently in pilot phases and will be ready to implement this year.

To learn more, visit NCSC's Upstream webpage or contact Angela Sager at asager@ncsc.org.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH: Spotlight Videos

In recognition of Black History Month, the AOPC produced a series of short video features recognizing leadership, service and progress within the judiciary.

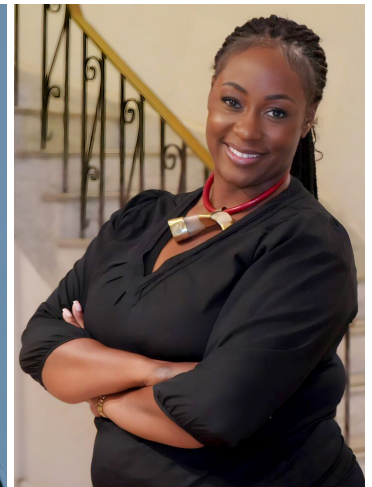
Dauphin County Common Pleas Judge **LaTasha D. Williams** and Bucks County Common Pleas Judge **Tiffany Thomas-Smith** – both of whom were recently elected as the first Black woman judges in their counties – were interviewed for this series.

In their conversations, each judge reflects on her journey to the bench and the significance of representation within the judiciary, while also sharing words of advice for young people interested in pursuing careers in public service.

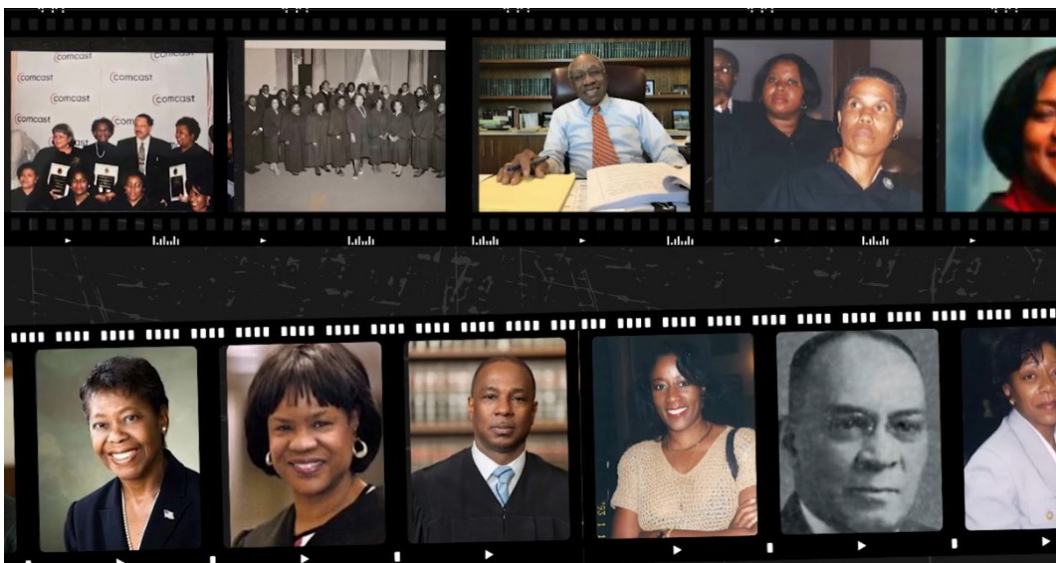
Watch the interviews on the PA Courts YouTube Page:
Judge Thomas-Smith – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y1-FNPdfvjQ>
Judge Williams – <https://youtu.be/7trOKIWzMRy>



Judge Tiffany Thomas-Smith



Judge LaTasha Williams



The AOPC produced another video recognizing the **National Bar Association Judicial Council: Clifford Scott Green Chapter** for its continued commitment to advancing equity and leadership within the judiciary. The tribute video honors the chapter's impact and ongoing work to support Black judges and judicial leaders.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qexQNL2LiBk&t=1s>

A final video features (l to r) Superior Court Judge **Carolyn Nichols**, Commonwealth Court Judge **Lori Dumas** and Superior Court Judge **Timika Lane** as they share reflections on their journeys to the bench, the challenges they have faced and advice to students interested in a career in law or public service.

<https://vimeo.com/1174472377?fl=pl&fe=sh>



Allegheny County Judge Honored with Drum Major for Justice Award

Judge **Nicola Henry-Taylor** of the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas was honored with the Drum Major for Justice Award at the 27th Annual Martin Luther King Jr. Prayer Breakfast in January.

The prestigious award was presented by the Homer S. Brown Division of the Allegheny County Bar Association (ACBA) in recognition of individuals who demonstrate outstanding dedication to justice, community service and leadership.

Judge Henry-Taylor has made a significant impact within the ACBA. She co-founded the ACBA Diversity Collaborative, now the Committee for Diversity and Inclusion, and launched the Pathways to Leadership Program to mentor and support attorneys from underrepresented communities. She has also chaired the ACBA Judiciary Committee and the Women in the Law Division, creating opportunities for professional growth and community engagement.

Before joining the bench in 2021, Judge Henry-Taylor served as a prosecutor in the Allegheny County District Attorney's Office and practiced privately. She also served as Diversity Director at Duquesne University Thomas R. Kline School of

Law, where she represented the law school within the Pittsburgh Legal Diversity and Inclusion Coalition, connected students with affinity groups in the legal community and advised the dean on diversity initiatives. She has further advanced equity through leadership positions with the Allegheny County Human Relations Commission and the Pennsylvania Commission for Fairness and Justice.

At the prayer breakfast, speakers highlighted Judge Henry-Taylor's dedication to mentorship. Former Allegheny County President Judge **Kim Berkeley Clark** noted that she is often seen guiding young lawyers, particularly women and attorneys of color, reflecting her commitment to nurturing the next generation of legal leaders.

In her acceptance speech, Judge Henry-Taylor said, "As a Black woman in the legal profession, and as a judge, this award carries deep personal significance." She acknowledged that judicial office does not shield one from bias or erase longstanding inequities. Even from the bench, she noted that women, especially women of color, may still be perceived and treated differently. The judge stated "Expectations are not always



Judge Nicola Henry-Taylor

the same, and grace is not always extended equally," emphasizing that she shares this not to dwell on challenges, but to speak honestly about the work that remains.

Through her leadership and service, Judge Henry-Taylor continues to model excellence while advancing equity and expanding opportunities for women of color and those who follow.

The Drum Major for Justice Award honors the legacy of Homer S. Brown, Pittsburgh's first African American judge, widely regarded as a distinguished civil rights leader. He devoted more than fifty years to public service - serving in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, advancing fair housing reforms, challenging discriminatory hiring practices and authoring the 1945 bill that became Pennsylvania's Fair Employment Practices Act.

Student Artwork Brings Life to Montgomery County Courthouse

Montgomery County's new Criminal Justice Center in Norristown will feature original artwork created by local students, designed to make the courthouse more welcoming and reflective of the community as it prepares to open next October.

Organized with the nonprofit *Fresh Artists*, the project gives students,

especially those from under-resourced areas, the opportunity to see their work displayed in a prominent public building.

Pieces range from a digital interpretation of the courthouse dome to murals inspired by the local landscape, placed throughout hallways, courtrooms and common areas.



Photo courtesy of WHYY / Ben Volta

With strong support from county officials, collaborations like this

illustrate how creativity, community and civic life can go hand in hand.

Commonwealth Court Administrator Honored as 2026 Trailblazer and Trendsetter

Nichole Smith of the Commonwealth Court's Office of Chief Legal Counsel (OCLC) was recently named a 2026 Trailblazer and Trendsetter as part of PennLive's Black History Month feature recognizing Black leaders whose achievements make a lasting impact on the region.

Nichole began her 35-year Commonwealth Court career in 1992 in the Chief Clerk's Office, later serving in the Court Reporter's Office and chambers for now-retired Judges **Doris A. Smith-Ribner** and **Keith B. Quigley** as well as then-judge **P. Kevin Brobson**.

Beginning in 2012, she served in the Court's Prothonotary's Office, which transitioned to the Office of Chief Legal Counsel in 2019, as an administrative assistant. In 2025, she advanced to her current role as administrative coordinator, where



Photo credit: Sean Simmers/PennLive

she supervises four administrative assistants and supports the Court's work in processing orders, election nomination objections and coordinating duty week responsibilities.

Throughout her tenure, Nichole has been instrumental in advancing the Court's technology, serving on multiple PACMS committees, while training new hires and judicial secretaries.

Over the decades, she has developed deep institutional knowledge that has made her an invaluable resource across chambers and administrative offices.

Beyond her professional accomplishments, Nichole's leadership has been grounded in service. Diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 2004, she has approached her journey with resilience and faith, using her experience to encourage and guide others facing similar diagnoses. While working full time, she earned a master's degree in Christian Leadership in 2021, was licensed to preach that same year and was ordained a local deacon in 2024. She now serves as pastor of Bethel AME Church in Greencastle, Pennsylvania.

As she approaches her retirement next spring, this nomination reflects not only her decades of commitment to the Commonwealth Court, but also her enduring impact on colleagues, community members and all those she has mentored and supported throughout her career.



Pa. Supreme Court Historical Commission Launches Student Contests

As the nation marks America's 250th birthday, Pennsylvania students are invited to join the celebration while learning about the work and role of the courts.

Through its focus on the importance of civics education, the Supreme Court Historical Society has launched a series of contest opportunities for students, aimed at helping students expand their knowledge about the work



and the role of the state court system.

Beginning on March 9, students have the opportunity to participate in essay and coloring



contests with winners honored during the Supreme Court's May oral argument session at the Capitol.

"Civics education is the

foundation of an informed and engaged citizenry. When students take part in opportunities focused on our courts, they gain a deeper understanding of the judicial branch and the role the courts play in protecting constitutional rights," said Justice **Sallie Updyke Mundy**. "The Pennsylvania Historical Commission's initiatives invite young people to explore how our justice system functions."

Pa. Courts Continue Partnership with Walnut Street Theatre



Commonwealth Court Judge **Lori Dumas**



Superior Court Judges **Carolyn Nichols** (l) and **Timika Lane** (r)

As America marks its 250th anniversary, the Pennsylvania Courts have continued partnering with the Walnut Street Theatre to give students across Philadelphia an engaging, hands-on introduction to civics and democracy through the performing arts.

Over the past two months, grades K-12 school students at Girard College, Castor Gardens Middle School and Samuel Gompers School had the opportunity to engage with performances that explored the nation's founding while examining leadership, elections and the role of responsible citizens in democracy.

Commonwealth Court Judge **Lori Dumas** emphasized the importance of introducing civic concepts early and in creative ways, as well as the broader significance of the production this year.

"As we mark America's 250th anniversary, it's an especially meaningful moment to help young people better understand how our democracy and government work. Through this ongoing partnership, we are aiming to give students a strong civic foundation and encourage them to become informed, thoughtful participants in their communities," she said.

Superior Court Judge **Timika Lane** echoed those sentiments saying, "Civics education is about helping students understand that their voices matter, and these performances are able to present government and the democratic process in a way that is accessible, inspiring, and age-appropriate."

Initiatives like this are part of the courts' broader civics education outreach, including school visits, student contests, community partnerships and classroom resources. For more information, visit pacourts.us/civics-ed.



Judge **Dumas** addresses students



(l to r) Philadelphia Senior Judge **Karen Shreeves-Johns**, Superior Court Judge **Carolyn Nichols**, Montgomery County Judge **A. Nicole Tate-Wilborn** and Superior Court Judge **Timika Lane**

Pennsylvania Supreme Court Unveils New Historical Marker

As part of their argument session in Philadelphia on March 12, 2026, the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania unveiled a new historical marker honoring the Court's centuries-long role in shaping justice and the rule of law in the Commonwealth.

"The history of the Supreme Court is the history of justice itself – the landmark decisions, the defining moments and the generations of jurists who shaped our laws and our lives," said Chief Justice of Pennsylvania **Debra Todd**.

"A historical marker is an invitation for the public to connect with the foundation of our legal system and understand how deeply the courts are woven into the history of this Commonwealth," said Justice **Sallie Updyke-**



Mundy. "When people understand that history, they understand why an independent and impartial judiciary matters."

The marker was created in collaboration with the Court's Historical Commission and the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

In recognition of this milestone moment in the Court's history, the AOPC produced a short [video](#) that is available to watch on the [PA Courts YouTube page](#).

Narcan in the Courts

The Pennsylvania Courts are partnering with the Pennsylvania Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs (DDAP) in efforts to expand access to naloxone in judicial buildings across the state.

The new "Narcan in Courts" initiative will place Narcan kits in courthouses and other judicial facilities open to the public so that the medication is available if someone experiences an opioid overdose.

Through its Overdose Prevention Program, DDAP will provide 600 Narcan kits to the AOPC for distribution. The voluntary initiative aims to place one kit in each of the state's 512 magisterial district court offices and all 67

county courthouses, typically in locations near automated external defibrillators (AEDs).



In addition to distributing the kits, the AOPC will provide instructions, educational materials and training resources to help court staff recognize and respond to an overdose emergency.

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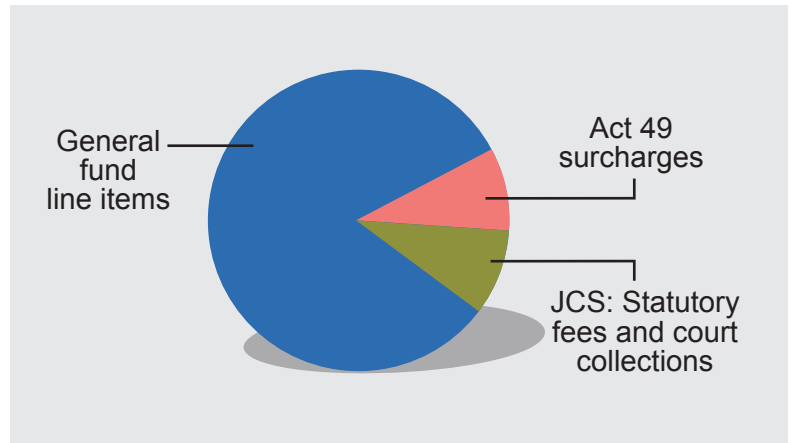
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Budget Statement of the Unified Judicial System (UJS) 2026-27

The UJS Budget Explained

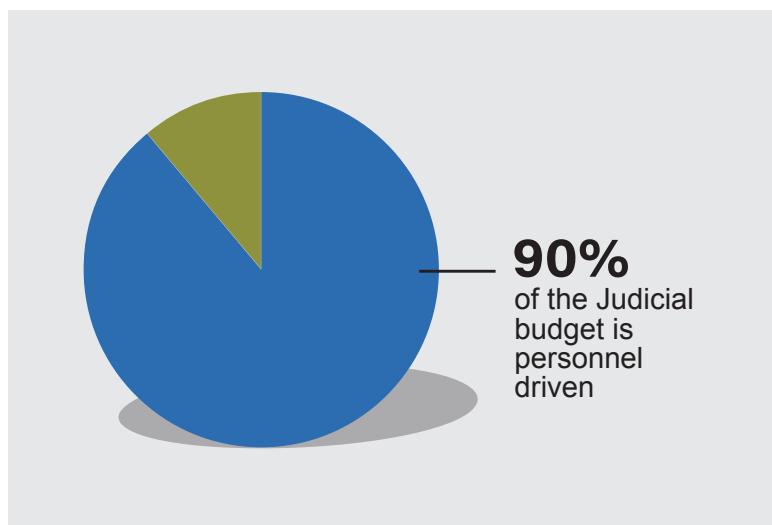
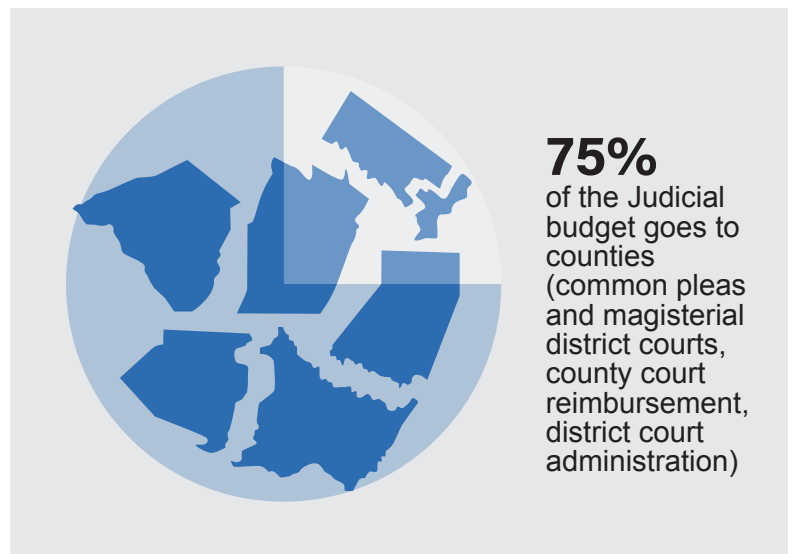
The UJS budget has three components:

- General Fund line items
- "Act 49" augmenting revenue
- Judicial Computer System (JCS) funding derived from statutory fees and court collections.



General Fund

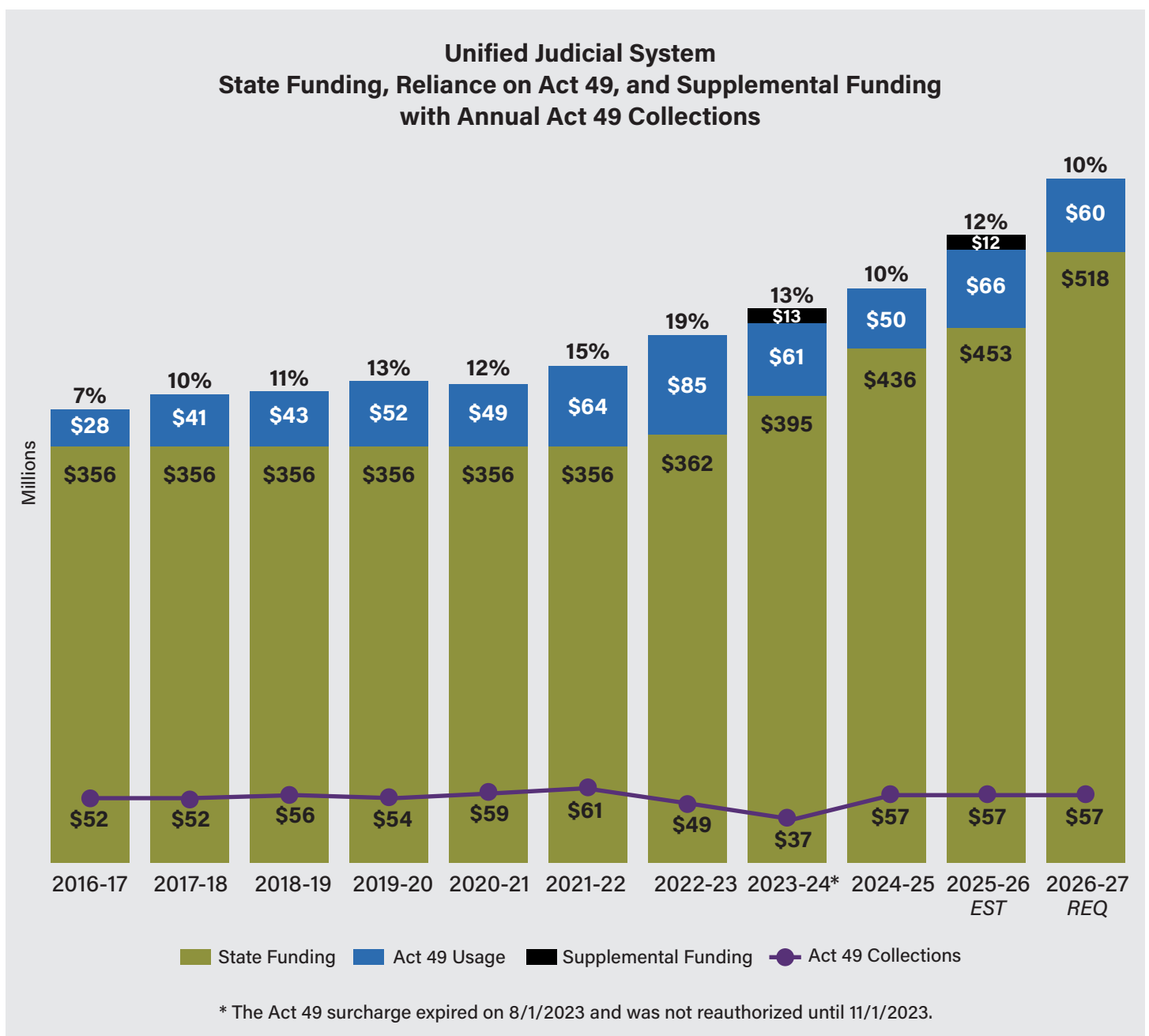
The General Fund provides funding: to all state courts; state-level and district-court administration and operations; and the AOPC, including court management/ judicial education, problem-solving courts, and the Office of Elder Justice in the Courts. Additionally, the line items support several statutory grants for county court expenses and juror costs.



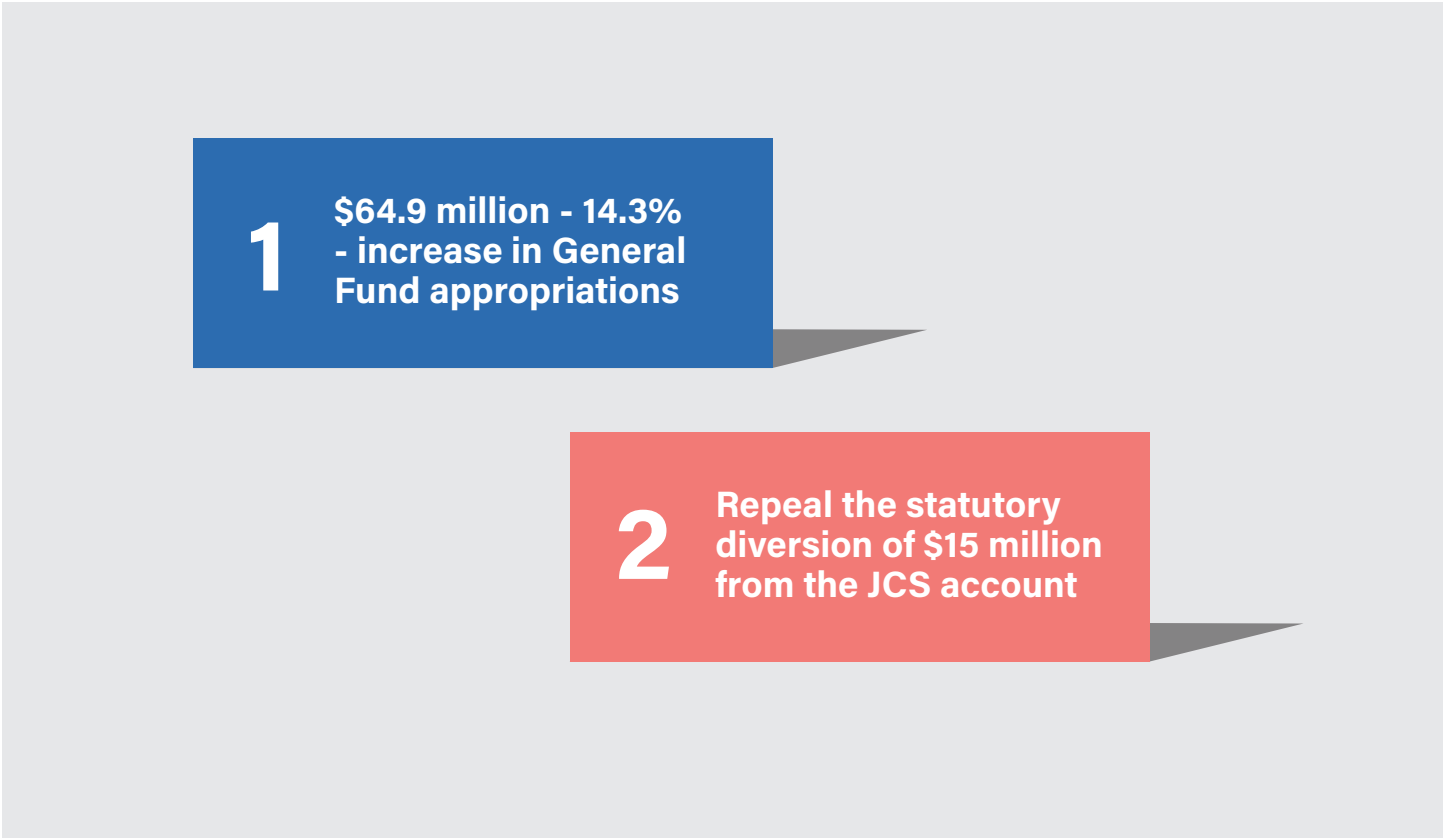
Act 49 Augmenting Revenue

Beginning in FY 2009-10, the General Assembly annually augmented General Fund appropriations with "Act 49." Reliance steadily increased from seven percent in 2016-17 to 19 percent in 2022-23. State funding increases in 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 resulted in a decreased reliance on Act 49 to an amount more in line with actual collections. In the proposed 2026-27 budget, \$60 million in Act 49 funding will be necessary, accounting for 10 percent of the UJS budget.

While Act 49 was intended and has been used to augment the general operation funding of the Judicial Branch, the account balance at the end of 2024-25 was only \$17 million. It is estimated the balance will be even lower - \$8.2 million - as of June 30, 2026. The reason for the marked decrease is simple - if the requested state appropriation is not received, the higher the reliance on Act 49. As the Act 49 balance decreases, however, it limits the amount of augmenting funds that can be applied, resulting in a cascading effect on subsequent budgets.



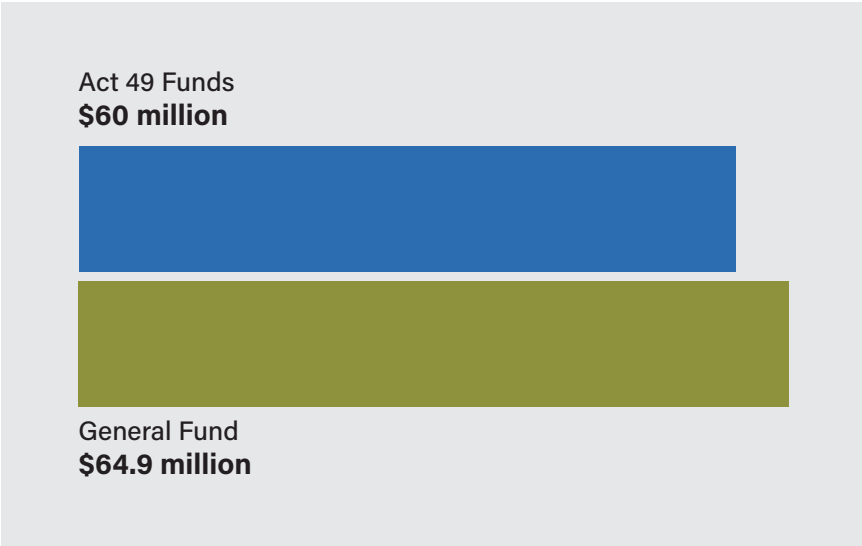
UJS Budget Request FY 2026-27



General Fund and Act 49

Until FY 2021-22, Act 49 funds were generally sufficient or greater than necessary to bridge the gap between the General Fund appropriation and the overall funding needs of the Judiciary, even to the point of creating a limited amount of reserves.

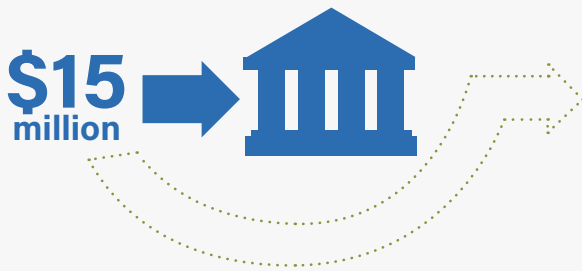
For FY 2026-27, the Judiciary projects using \$60 million in Act 49 funds, requiring a requested increase in the General Fund appropriation of \$64.9 million.



Adjustments to JCS Funding

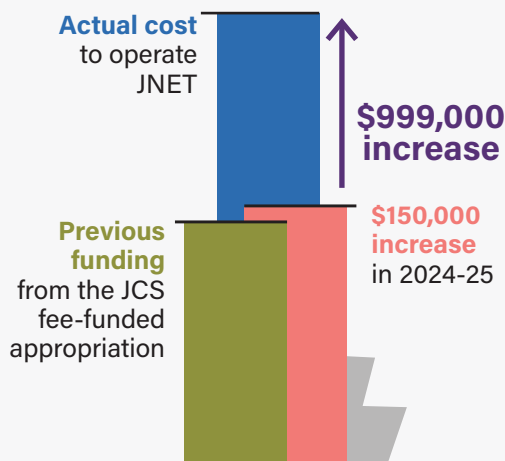
Act 1 of 2026 provided a crucial modification to the JCS funding formula for the current and next two fiscal years. This change delivers additional revenue to offset the steady decline in account revenue since 2008, aligning with a recommendation of the Judicial Computer System Financial Audit Committee (JCSFAC). The voting members of the JCSFAC - six legislative leadership appointees and a commissioned judge - recommended that "Policymakers ... continue to monitor the balance of the JCSAA and adjust accordingly [to] ensure *predictable funding to support the continued operation of the JCS*, most notably the existing case management systems."

The following items are included in the FY 2026-27 budget request to address the JCS:



Repeal of \$15 Million Diversion

Section 1795.2-E of the Fiscal Code annually diverts \$15 million from the JCS account. While this provision is currently suspended, the suspension expires on June 30, 2026. Repealing the diversion is vital to the sustainability of the JCS. Absent such repeal, the benefits of the necessary statutory modifications provided for in Act 1 of 2026 would be rendered futile and the JCS will again be in financial jeopardy.



Integrated Criminal Justice System (JNET) appropriation

\$999,000 increase in the JNET appropriation to provide 100 percent of the secure network's cost, which facilitates exchange of data to and from common pleas and magisterial district courts, previously 50 percent funded from the JCS fee-funded appropriation



Cyber Security and Disaster Recovery

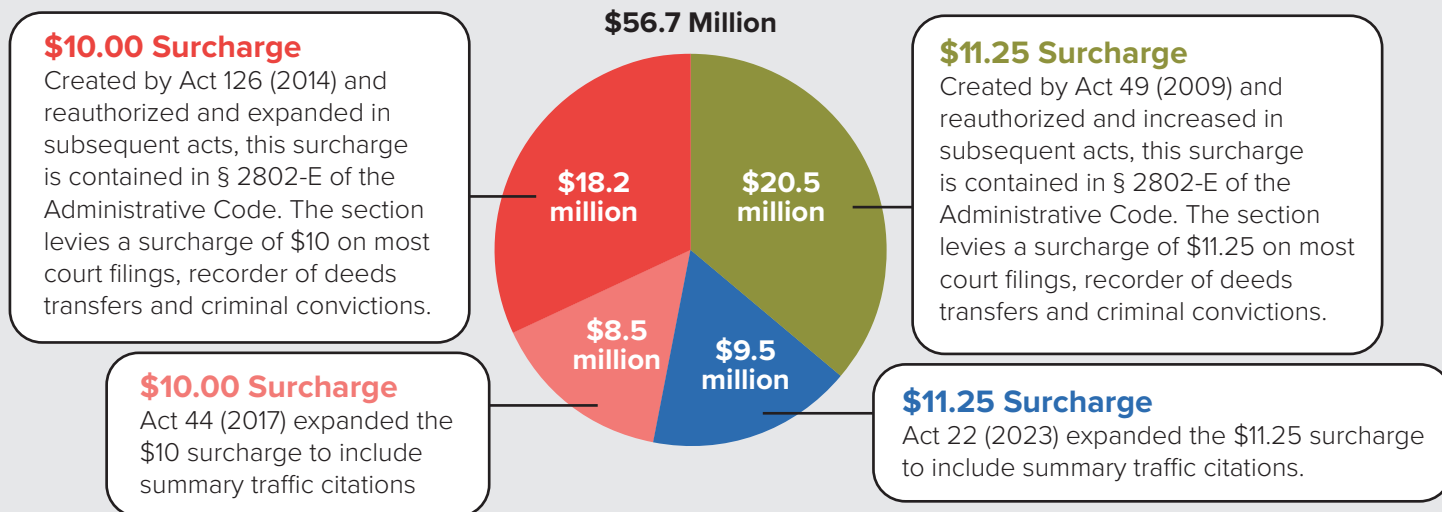
\$1.2 million increase to support Cyber Security and Disaster Recovery to protect the JCS infrastructure from increasing cyber threats, thus ensuring enhanced vigilance and readiness in response.

Judiciary Funding - RESTRICTED REVENUES

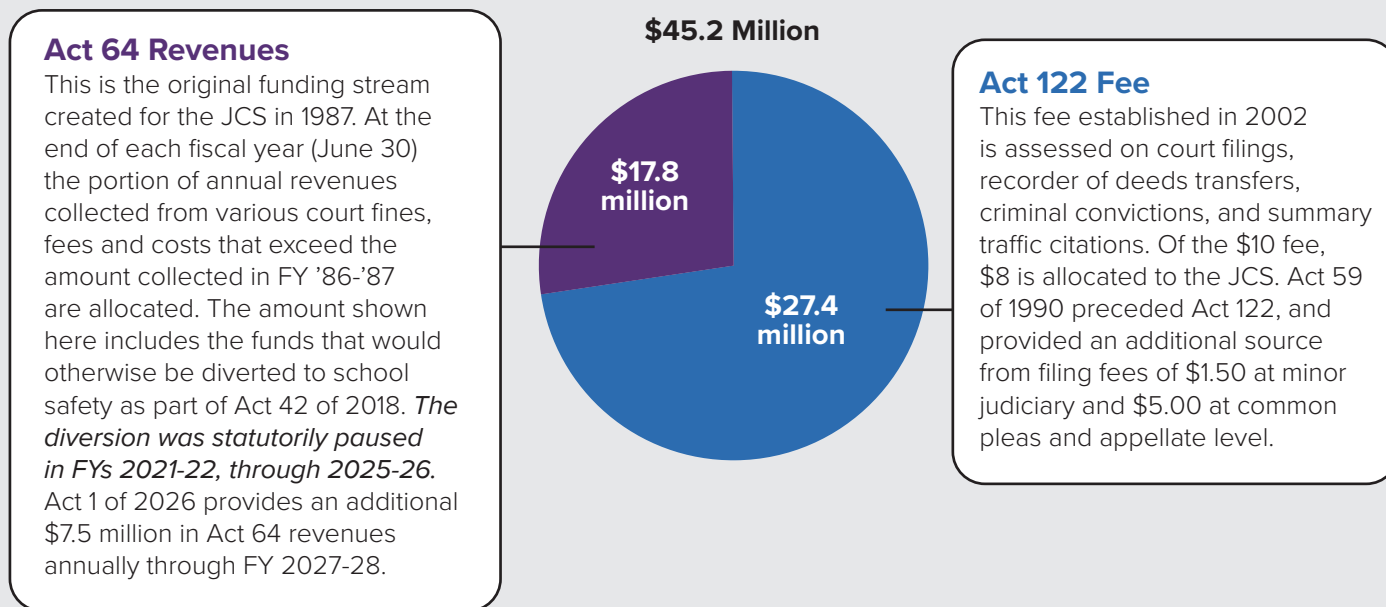
Act 49 Surcharges

Chart A:

Presently, the combined surcharge of \$21.25 is estimated to provide \$56.7 million in annual revenue to the Unified Judicial System to be used for general fund operations. We broadly refer to this combined surcharge as the “Act 49” surcharges. *All Act 49 surcharges sunset on December 31, 2027.*

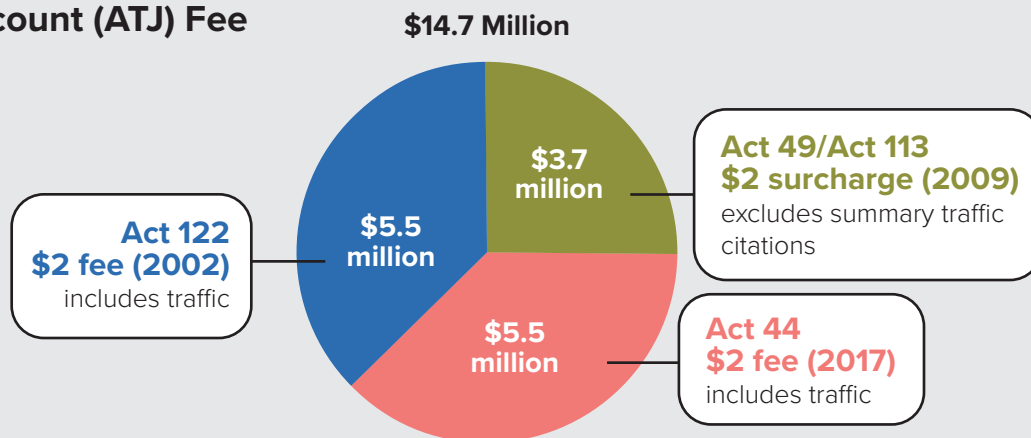


Judicial Computer System (JCS) Funding (assuming repeal of the diversion)



Access to Justice Account (ATJ) Fee

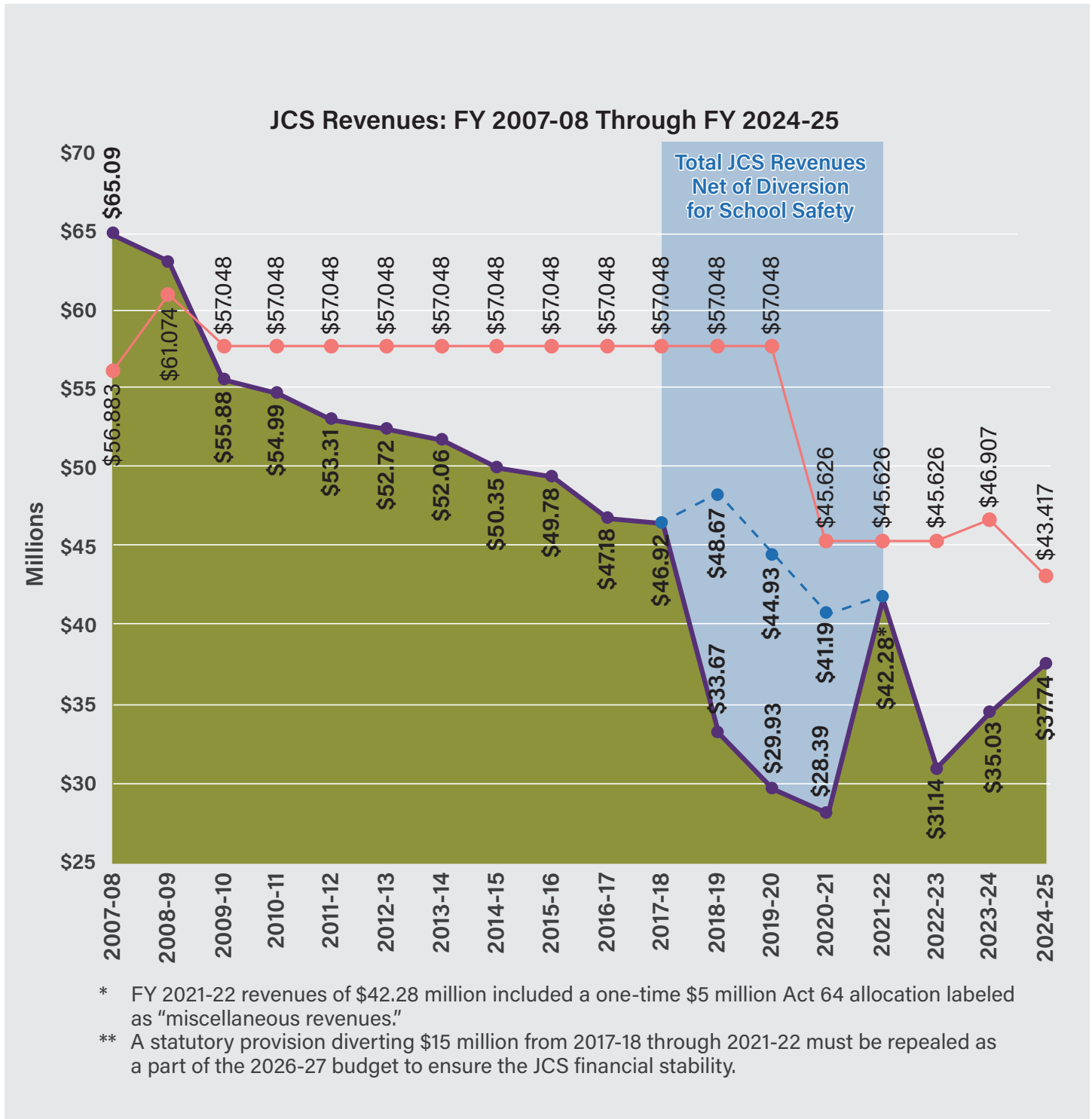
The UJS collects and distributes these fees to the Access to Justice (ATJ) account for civil legal aid. *These surcharges are permanent.*



Judicial Computer System Funding

The final component of the UJS budget is the JCS, which is funded almost exclusively through court collections and a fee. **See Chart A.** Revenue is deposited in the Judicial Computer System Augmentation Account and used for the ongoing operations of the statewide judicial computer system, funding statewide case management systems and the Guardianship Tracking System. As a result, court information is more accessible, providing crucial information to 38,000 law enforcement and public safety officials, and other users.

Act 1 of 2026 will better align revenue with the appropriation necessary to maintain and run the JCS.



Strengthening Court Leadership and Security

Effective leadership is a cornerstone of safe and well-functioning courts. Committed to this precept, AOPC's Assistant Director of Judicial District Security **Kyle Ramberger** recently completed a six-month Leadership Development Program for Pennsylvania Commonwealth employees, offered through Harrisburg University in partnership with Alvernia University.

Ramberger, who has served the AOPC for more than 20 years and in his current role for over four, participated in the program from June through December 2025.

While his career has included extensive security training, the program provided an opportunity to enhance his leadership skills. Topics included resilient leadership, effective communication, change management, conflict resolution and leadership in the digital age, including AI tools and data-driven decision-making.

"Leadership is a complex process that continues to evolve," Ramberger said. "As change occurs, we need to adapt our mindsets to new challenges, drawing on past experiences."



*Assistant Director of Judicial District Security
Kyle Ramberger*

Montgomery County Judge Recognized for Leadership in Family Court

Montgomery County Court of Common Pleas Judge **Dan Clifford** was recognized as the 2026 recipient of the Eric Turner Award by the Pennsylvania Bar Association's Family Law Section at the Section's Conference in Philadelphia on January 17th.

The Award has been presented since 2000 and honors someone who is considered a mentor, teacher and leader who holds the respect of the Section and the legal community.

The Award is accompanied by a \$1,000 donation that Judge Clifford designated to the Montgomery County Advocacy Project (MCAP) which provides guardian ad litem representation to children.

Elected in 2015, Judge Clifford serves as the Administrative Judge of the

Family Division in Montgomery County. Active in the Pennsylvania Conference of State Trial Judges (PCSTJ), he currently serves as Treasurer having after previously serving as Chair of the Family Court Section for five years.

Since taking the bench, Judge Clifford has served as Chair of the Joint State Government Commission Advisory Committee on Domestic Relations, advising Pennsylvania's General Assembly on legislation, as well as Chair of the Supreme Court's Domestic Relations Procedural Rules Committee.

A recognized leader in family court initiatives prior to his election to the Bench, Judge Clifford spearheaded the "Judicial Interview of the Child" video project and the enactment



Judge Daniel J. Clifford

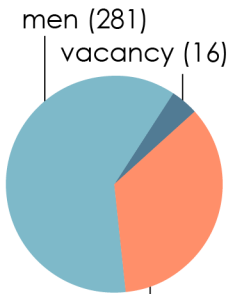
of Act 102, which provides closure to families by streamlining contested divorce actions from two years to one.

The AOPC congratulates Judge Clifford on this well-deserved recognition.

As of February 2026 . . .

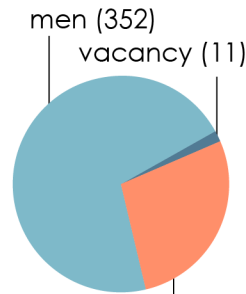
34% of Pennsylvania's commissioned judges are women.

Common Pleas Courts



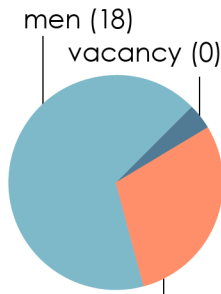
37%
women (171)

Magisterial District Courts



28%
women (138)

Philadelphia Municipal Court



38%
women (11)

There are three women serving on the seven-member Pennsylvania Supreme Court:



Chief Justice Debra Todd
Justice Christine Donohue
Justice Sallie Updyke Mundy

Chief Justice Debra Todd is the first woman in the Pa Supreme Court's 300+ year history to serve as chief justice.

The majority of Superior and Commonwealth Court judges are women:

Superior Court

The president judge of Superior Court is **Anne E. Lazarus**.



12 women



3 men

Commonwealth Court

The president judge of Commonwealth Court is **Renée Cohn Jubelirer**.



7 women



2 men



15 women serve as president judges in Courts of Common Pleas.

Women Trailblazers of the Pa. Courts

In 1930, **Hon. Sara M. Soffel** became the first woman appointed as a judge in Pennsylvania (Allegheny County).

Appointed in 1961, **Hon. Anne X. Alpern** was the first female justice to serve on the Pennsylvania Supreme Court.

In 1972, **Hon. Genevieve Blatt** was the first woman judge appointed to the Commonwealth Court.

In 1981, **Hon. Phyllis Beck** was the first woman appointed to serve on the Pennsylvania Superior Court.

In 1987, **Hon. Doris Smith-Ribner** was the first African American woman elected to serve on the Commonwealth Court.

Appointed in 1988, **Hon. Juanita Kidd Stout** was the first African American female judge to serve on any state supreme court.

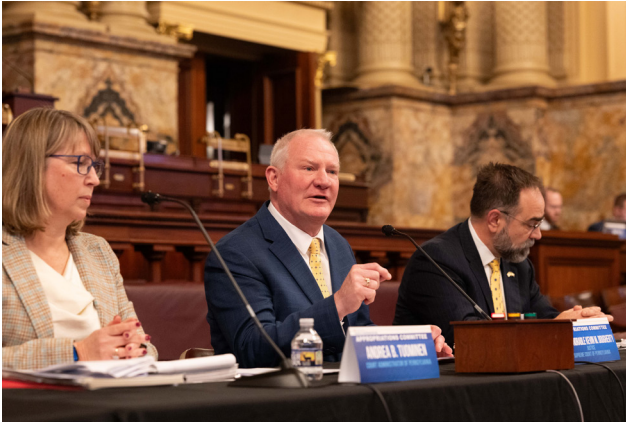
In 1995, **Hon. Sandra Schultz Newman** was the first female justice elected to serve on the Pennsylvania Supreme Court.

In 2008, **Hon. Cheryl Allen** was the first African American woman elected to serve on the Pennsylvania Superior Court.

In 2022, **Hon. Debra Todd** became the first woman to serve as chief justice of Pennsylvania.

Appointed by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court in 2023, **Andrea Tuominen** became the first woman attorney to hold the position of state court administrator.

Around the Judiciary



The Pa. House Judicial Budget 2026 hearing was held on March 2.



Judge **Stella Tasi** was ceremoniously sworn in to the Pennsylvania Commonwealth Court in Philadelphia on Feb. 5.



Justice **P. Kevin Brobson** presented awards to Berks County Judge **Eleni Dimitriou Geishauer** and Montgomery Judge **Steven O'Neill** during the Treatment Courts section meeting at the Trial Judges Conference on Feb. 25.



On Feb. 18, Commonwealth Court Judge **Lori Dumas** joined a distinguished panel for a Black History Month event hosted by the Black Law Student Association at Temple University Beasley School of Law, sharing her insights on the legal profession, leadership and the importance of representation in the judiciary.



(l to r) **Christy Beane, Diane Bowser, Geri St. Joseph**

Congratulations to Judicial Assignments Administrator Diane Bowser, who celebrated her retirement on March 24 after 40 years of dedicated service with the AOPC.



(l to r) Judge **Richard Knecht**, Treatment Court Administrator **Barbara Warunek**, Treatment Court Senior Judge **Thomas James**, **John Dillon**, President Judge **Gary Norton**.

The Columbia/Montour Treatment Court held a graduation ceremony in December where singer-songwriter John Dillon inspired graduates and attendees with his recovery journey through words and music.



On March 19, 11th grade students at Bensalem High School explored the role of courts in our democracy during a civics education assembly, where they participated in a Q&A session with a judicial panel featuring Kadida Kenner (CEO of New Project PA), Superior Court Judge **Timika Lane**, Commonwealth Court Judge **Stella Tsai**, Philadelphia County Common Pleas Judge **Sierra Thomas Street** and Bucks County Common Pleas Judge **Tiffany Thomas-Smith**.



At the Conference of County Bar Leaders on Feb. 28, Superior Court Judge **Mary Jane Bowes** spoke on the importance of attorneys and bar leaders using their voices to support and protect judicial independence.



On March 24, Commonwealth Court President Judge **Renee Cohn-Jubelirer** met with seniors from Sen. Marty Flynn's Student Ambassador Program at the Capitol. As part of the program, 26 students spent 6 months studying government, crafting legislation, and presenting proposals – one of which will be introduced as a real Senate bill.



Employees celebrate National Hot Chocolate Day at the Pennsylvania Judicial Center.



Franklin County President Judge **Shawn D. Meyers** visited a local elementary school during National Read Across America Week on March 6. Students had a great time listening to him read and meeting the courthouse's facility dog, **Dudley**.



On March 4, the PJC hosted an employee event "MVP Arena" where staff had fun playing trivia and bingo, and participating in an appetizer cook-off contest.

