

Supreme Court of Pennsylvania
Senate Appropriations Committee Hearing Statement
February 27, 2018

Mr. Chairman and committee members, on behalf of Chief Justice Tom Saylor, our Supreme Court colleagues and the jurists and staff of the Unified Judicial System (UJS) we appreciate the opportunity to discuss the work and the positive impact of the Unified Judicial System during 2017-18.

Through the years, the mission and responsibilities of courts have evolved. We work to ensure equal access to justice for all while also supporting the needs of our most vulnerable -- and we plan for the future needs of the system by controlling costs and strengthening our efforts to educate the public and jurists.

As you are aware, the Judiciary's appropriation, like the Legislature's, represents approximately one-half of one percent of the overall state budget. Also, similar to the legislative branch, our budget is largely personnel-driven -- approximately 89 percent, two-thirds of which funds judicial compensation prescribed by law and constitutional mandate.

Of the remainder, nearly seven percent funds grants (largely statutory pass-through county grants) and just four percent funds operating costs.

However, we are pleased to tell you today that with the assistance of the General Assembly and the governor and our continued efforts to manage soundly and efficiently, the judiciary's budget request this year seeks no new state dollars for its appropriation. For example, in Fiscal Year 2017-18 we have achieved more than \$10 million in savings from the following:

- Realignment of magisterial judicial districts, resulting in a \$5.1 million annual savings;
- Ongoing savings from benefits changes and a reduced staff COLA providing \$4.3 million in annual savings; and
- Ongoing savings from contracts achieving \$600,000 this year.

We remain committed to being good stewards of taxpayer dollars and will continue to evaluate opportunities for savings in the future.

For example, the Judiciary's Judicial Needs Assessment (JNA) is complete. The JNA is an evidence-based, weighted caseload study, along with other data, designed to help ensure that the number of trial judges is appropriate to need in each county, to assist in similarly determining senior judge usage, and to assist president judges in effectively managing their courts.

Some of you are aware that Pennsylvania courts collect more in fines, fees, costs and restitution annually than is appropriated to the judiciary. This year is no different: \$465 million was collected, including a record \$114 million paid online through **PAePay®**, raising the total collected during the last 10 years to \$4.6 billion.

Most of the funds collected by the courts is sent to state and local governments and victims of crime. Moving forward, the Supreme Court is developing a statewide means that we hope will assist counties in the collection of outstanding court-ordered obligations. We look forward to providing you with an update in the coming months.

In addition, responsive to the General Assembly's statutory action, the UJS is collaborating with the Department of Revenue to implement the lottery intercept process that will collect outstanding court-ordered obligations, including restitution. This complements the already-developed income tax intercept process.

The Supreme Court remains focused on the importance of judicial education. During the past year, the Court mandated that all trial and appellate court jurists must earn 12 hours of continuing judicial education each year. Magisterial District Judges continue to participate in a separate, strong continuing education program.

In 2017-18, the UJS renewed its commitment to focus on the needs of the most vulnerable through our work with problem-solving courts, elder justice and dependency courts.

Of particular interest, we know, are problem-solving courts. Currently 116 such courts exist assisting veterans, those with substance abuse disorders, those charged with DUI offenses and those living with mental illness.

Work continues to establish regional drug courts in areas where a demonstrated need exists but where pooling some resources is required to facilitate a workable program. With use of a senior judge, these courts are beginning to serve as a model for the establishment of other regional courts, including regional veterans courts.

As partners in the battle against the opioid epidemic, we are working to pilot a program linking those coming in through the justice system with the full spectrum of treatment resources in the community and beyond. We look forward to providing you with updates as we move toward a full pilot of this program.

Focused on the needs of older Pennsylvanians, the Office of Elder Justice in the Courts is working to address issues related to guardianship, elder abuse, access to justice and fostering collaborations with elder justice entities. In addition, the Office of Children and Families in the Courts continues to do significant work around limiting trauma to children in the courtroom, making a lasting, positive impact in the lives of children and saving \$55 million.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. We understand and respect the difficulty of the task before the Legislature and on behalf of the Supreme Court and our judicial colleagues and staff, look forward to discussing the work and the positive impact of the Unified Judicial System.

Thank you Mr. Chairman