

**FIRST JUDICIAL DISTRICT  
FISCAL YEAR 2025 BUDGET TESTIMONY  
APRIL 17, 2024**

**INTRODUCTION**

Good Morning, President Johnson and Members of City Council. I am Judge Nina Wright Padilla, President Judge, Court of Common Pleas and Chair, Administrative Governing Board. I am pleased to provide testimony on the First Judicial District’s Fiscal Year 2025 Operating Budget. Joining me today are Richard T. McSorley, esq., District Court Administrator and Christopher A. Waters, Deputy Court Administrator.

**DEPARTMENT MISSION & PLANS**

**Mission:** Pursuant to the Pennsylvania Constitution creating the unified judicial system under the authority of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, the courts of the First Judicial District of Pennsylvania (FJD) serve the county and City of Philadelphia. A strong and independent judiciary is a founding premise of our democratic form of government. Functioning separate and apart from the legislative and executive divisions, the judicial branch is fundamentally responsible for providing an impartial forum for the resolution of disputes, ensuring the rule of law, and the protection of individual rights. The FJD adheres to these principles by guaranteeing access to the court process for all who seek it, by promoting transparency, and by the timely and fair disposition of cases filed. The judiciary is by necessity deliberative. While efficiency of government is laudable, the unique nature of our courts’ responsibilities dictate that our primary focus must be in taking considered and thoughtful steps to ensure justice, guarantee liberty, resolve disputes, maintain the rule of law, provide equal protection, and ensure due process, thus formulating the foundation of public trust and confidence in our democracy.

**Plans for Fiscal Year 2025:**

As has been stated in previous testimony, the FJD remains committed to providing the delivery of fair, timely, and accessible justice to the City and County of Philadelphia. Included in this commitment is the continued effort by the FJD to promote racial equity for our employees and the public we serve. Since creating the FJD’s Office of DEI, the FJD has provided DEI training to all supervisors and managers across all divisions. Additionally, all newly onboarded staff are provided with DEI training during their orientation period.

Training topics for all employees include:

- Unconscious bias
- Microaggressions
- Equity and Inclusion
- Dimensions of Diversity

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The FJD is also developing a training program for all front-line staff to promote Autism awareness. This initiative is part of a statewide movement focused on reducing trauma and supporting individuals in the court system with an autism spectrum disorder. We are committed to ensuring that all court employees are prepared to recognize, accept, and meet the needs of all court users now and in future years.

As part of our commitment to meeting the needs of all court users, we have asked for an increase in funding to help offset increasing expenses for Court Interpreters and Information Technology enhancements.

### **Court Interpreter Increase Request**

In order to comply with the Pennsylvania Supreme Court mandates, the FJD requests a \$200,000 increase to the General Fund to cover the increase in costs for qualified Court Interpreters. In an increasingly diverse city, equal access to the Court is fundamental to the legitimacy of our system of justice and the trust and confidence of the public in our Courts. For FY24, the City provided \$457,800 for expenses related to Court Interpreters; however, total expenses are estimated to be over \$1 million by the close of this fiscal year. This increase will help offset the total expense for this much-needed court service.

The FJD is committed to ensuring equal and meaningful access to justice for all Limited-English Proficient (LEP) and deaf or hard of hearing (DHH) individuals. All individuals have a right to effective language access and Interpreters play an essential role in providing that access. Quality interpreting services ensure access to vital services of the LEP and DHH population and that their rights are protected. This past year, the FJD has provided interpreter services for 7,600 requests in over 70 languages.

Additional funding for the Pennsylvania Supreme Court mandated fee increase would allow the FJD to remain competitive with our neighboring states and counties and allow us to appropriately compensate Interpreters for their services and encourage Interpreters to prioritize accepting assignments in Philadelphia County.

### **Information Technology Structural Enhancements**

The First Judicial District requests a \$713,424 budget adjustment in order to secure, update, enhance and support the FJD's IT infrastructure to mitigate future cyber threats. Due to a cyber-attack, the FJD had previously sought an increase to its General Fund Budget, which was approved by the City; however, the increase was indefinitely delayed due to the pandemic. The FJD is re-initiating this request, which is a priority, in order for the FJD to stay current with changing hardware, thus ensuring the stabilization and securing of the Court's network infrastructure against exposure to any future cyber-attacks.

The FJD has sought numerous bids for enhanced IT hardware to stabilize and secure the Court's network infrastructure. Having a fully functional court system is vital to the legal community, the City and the residents of Philadelphia, which was demonstrated when the outside attack forced our shutdown. The shutdown had an immediate impact on real estate sales as title searches and title insurance could not be obtained. Law firms have become dependent on the E-filing of court documents. Many E-filing users did not know how to manually file paper documents and due to

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the shutdown, filing deadlines were missed. Revenue was lost to the City and other entities from filings that were never refiled after the system restoration.

We believe we've entered a new era in cybersecurity. The Court's IT infrastructure is an integral part of access to justice. Recent experiences have taught us that courts and other governmental branches are in danger of cyberattacks. Such knowledge requires us to fully secure and stabilize our network infrastructure.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony today. On behalf of the Philadelphia Judiciary, Administrative Governing Board, and the employees of the FJD, we respectfully seek City Council's consideration and approval of our FY2025 General Fund and Grants Revenue budget.

**PROPOSED BUDGET OVERVIEW**

<b>General Fund Financial Summary by Class</b>						
	FY23 Original Appropriations	FY23 Actual Obligations	FY24 Original Appropriations	FY24 Estimated Obligations	FY25 Proposed Appropriations	Difference: FY25-FY24
Class 100 - Employee Compensation	\$111,144,985	\$102,223,039	\$116,833,778	\$116,833,778	\$116,833,778	\$0
Class 200 - Purchase of Services	\$8,643,039	\$17,690,618	\$9,875,191	\$9,975,191	\$9,075,191	(\$900,000)
Class 300/400 - Materials, Supplies & Equipment	\$2,231,868	\$2,567,199	\$2,343,461	\$2,343,461	\$2,343,461	\$0
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$122,019,892</b>	<b>\$122,480,856</b>	<b>\$129,052,430</b>	<b>\$129,152,430</b>	<b>\$128,252,430</b>	<b>(\$900,000)</b>

**Proposed Funding Request:**

The proposed Fiscal Year 2025 General Fund budget totals \$128,252,430, a decrease of \$900,000 over Fiscal Year 2024 estimated obligation levels. This decrease is primarily due to funding adjustments for one-time payments in Class 200 for the replacement of rugs and Mental Health inflation costs.

The proposed budget includes:

- \$116,833,778 in Class 100, level with FY24.
- \$9,075,191 in Class 200, A \$900,000 decrease from FY24.
- \$2,343,461 in Class 300/400, level with FY24.

**STAFFING LEVELS**

The department is requesting 1,710 General Fund budgeted positions for FY25. The table below shows budgeted positions across All Funds.

\* Please note that the FJD intends to fill critical vacancies throughout FY24 that may impact the budgeted positional count.

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Employment Levels (as of December 2023)		
	FY25 Budgeted	Filled as of December 2023
Number of Full-Time Positions	2,149	2,108
Number of Part-Time Positions	94	94
Number of Exempt Positions	2,149	2,108
Number of Executive Positions (deputy level and above)	74	74
Average Salary of All Full-Time Positions	\$57,817	\$57,929
Median Salary of All Full-Time Positions	\$53,538	\$53,541

**NEW HIRES**

New Hires (from 7/1/2023 to December 2023)								
	Total Number of New Hires	Spanish	Hindi	Urdu	Punjabi	Mandarin	Creole	Bengali
Black or African American	80	1					1	
Asian	8		3	2	1	1		1
Hispanic or Latino	8	3						
White	55	1						
Other	2	1						
Total	153	6	3	2	1	1	1	1