

**FIRST JUDICIAL DISTRICT
FISCAL YEAR 2027 BUDGET TESTIMONY
APRIL 28, 2026**

INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon, 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 2027 Operating Budget. Joining me today is Richard T. McSorley, esq., District 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 dictates that our primary focus 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.

The First Judicial District of Pennsylvania is organized into several divisions. In the Court of Common Pleas there are three divisions: Trial Division (Criminal and Civil Sections), Family Division (Domestic Relations and Juvenile), and the Orphans’ Court Division. The Municipal Court includes the Criminal Division, Civil Division, and the Traffic Division. The courts and judges reflect the values of Philadelphia communities and understand the challenges facing the people who appear in its courtrooms. FJD remains committed to fairness, equality, equity, promoting diversification and shortening the distance between the Court and the community.

Plans for Fiscal Year 2027:

The First Judicial District of Pennsylvania plays a central role in the daily functioning of the City of Philadelphia. As an independent branch of government, the courts are responsible for the fair, efficient, and timely administration of justice across criminal, civil, family, and traffic matters. Each year, we process hundreds of thousands of cases, ensuring due process while contributing to the overall stability of our communities.

At the same time, the FJD is a committed partner with the City in advancing shared priorities. Our work intersects directly with the City's goals for public safety and community stability. Through close coordination with justice system partners, we support initiatives that improve outcomes while preserving the integrity of the judicial process.

Over the past year, the FJD has continued to demonstrate strong operational performance and responsiveness to emerging challenges. We have taken proactive steps to enhance courtroom safety and protect the integrity of proceedings, including implementing restrictions on unauthorized recording technologies in court facilities. These actions reflect our commitment to safeguarding jurors, witnesses, and all participants in the judicial process.

We have also continued to support system-wide efforts that promote efficiency and better outcomes. Programs such as the Accelerated Misdemeanor Program (AMP) and our participation in initiatives like Neighborhood Wellness Court reflect a coordinated approach to addressing complex public health and public safety challenges, including the opioid crisis. These efforts align with the Administration's priorities for a safer, more stable city.

Sustaining this progress requires a properly supported workforce. We recognize that our employees are part of the City's broader economic ecosystem, and that competitive, equitable compensation is essential to attracting and retaining the talent needed to sustain court operations. The FJD's workforce includes more than 800 non-represented employees serving in critical operational, supervisory, and administrative roles essential to the daily functioning of the judiciary. Maintaining internal equity between represented and non-represented employees will become increasingly challenging as union wage increases outpace adjustments for non-represented staff.

To address this, the FJD is requesting FY2027 funding to support a 3 percent salary adjustment for non-represented employees, as well as continuation of the fifth salary step for eligible staff. These investments are necessary to prevent wage compression, preserve supervisory differentials, and support recruitment and retention in a competitive labor market. This request is not about expansion, but sustainability. The FJD has demonstrated that it can deliver strong outcomes with the resources it has been provided. Continued investment in our workforce will help ensure those outcomes are maintained without disruption to operations or degradation in service.

The courts remain committed to transparency, accountability, and partnership with the City, while maintaining the independence essential to our role. With continued support, the First Judicial District will remain a stable, high-performing institution advancing the shared goals of safety, fairness, and opportunity for all Philadelphians.

PROPOSED BUDGET OVERVIEW & OTHER BUDGET DRIVERS

General Fund Financial Summary by Class						
	FY25 Original Appropriations	FY25 Actual Obligations	FY26 Original Appropriations	FY26 Estimated Obligations	FY27 Proposed Appropriations	Difference: FY27 Proposed-FY26 Estimated
Class 100 - Employee Compensation	\$118,482,716	\$112,665,985	\$121,493,440	\$125,525,205	\$127,020,161	\$1,494,956
Class 200 - Purchase of Services	\$9,075,191	\$21,573,933	\$9,075,191	\$9,075,191	\$9,075,191	\$0
Class 300/400 - Materials, Supplies & Equipment	\$2,343,461	\$2,343,460	\$2,343,461	\$2,343,461	\$2,343,461	\$0
Class 500 - Contributions		\$715				\$0
	\$129,901,368	\$136,584,093	\$132,912,092	\$136,943,857	\$138,438,813	\$1,494,956

Contracts Summary (Professional Services only)				
	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26 YTD (Q1 & Q2)
Total amount of contracts	\$6,371,960	\$8,416,837	\$8,370,652	\$5,016,689
Total amount to M/W/DSBE	\$2,729,704	\$4,316,686	\$4,094,221	\$2,870,395
M/W/DSBE Participation Rate	43%	51%	49%	57%

Proposed Funding Request:

The proposed Fiscal Year 2027 General Fund budget totals \$138,438,813, an increase of \$1,494,956 over Fiscal Year 2026 estimated obligation levels. This increase is primarily due to union employee salary increases.

The proposed budget includes:

- \$127,020,161 in Class 100, a \$1,494,956 increase from FY26.
- \$9,075,191 in Class 200, level with FY26.
- \$2,343,461 in Class 300/400, level with FY26.

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STAFFING LEVELS

The FJD is requesting 2,206 budgeted positions for FY27.

* Please note that the FJD intends to fill critical vacancies throughout FY27 that may impact the final budgeted positions count.

Employment Levels (as of November 2025)			
	FY26 Budgeted	Filled as of November 2025	FY27 Proposed
Number of Full-Time Positions	2,184	2,161	2,206
Number of Exempt Positions	2,184	2,161	2,206
Number of Executive Positions (deputy level and above)	84	90	89
Average Salary of All Full-Time Positions	\$61,205	\$62,742	\$62,264
Median Salary of All Full-Time Positions	\$56,180	\$57,620	\$57,433

NEW HIRES

New Hires (from 7/1/2025 to November 2025)				
	Total Number of New Hires	Spanish	Hatian Creole	French
Black or African American	45		1	
Asian	3			
Hispanic or Latino	11	5		
White	3			1
Other	44			
Total	106	5	1	1

VACANCY RATE AND ALLOWANCE

Please note, the FJD does not operate under a fixed budgeted position complement. Funding is provided by the City as a lump-sum allocation, and staffing is managed within that allocation. As a result, vacancy rate metrics based on budgeted positions are not applicable.

CONTRACTING EXPERIENCE

The First Judicial District’s procurement is managed through a system and process separate from the City, which does not capture vendor demographic data as requested; therefore, this information is not available for the current fiscal year. S/LBE language was incorporated into the FJD’s RFP process beginning in March 2026, and the FJD is evaluating processes to capture and report participation data in the next fiscal year.