



**Budget Testimony
on behalf of the Ohio Court of Claims**

before the

Ohio Senate Higher Education Committee

Tuesday, May 7, 2019

Chairwoman Kunze, Ranking Member Williams, and Members of the Committee:

Good morning, I am Anderson Renick, Clerk of the Court of Claims of Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this proposed budget for the Court of Claims. Also here with me today is Jennie Parks, who is the Director of Operations and Chief Fiscal Officer for the Court of Claims.

The Court of Claims is the only statutory trial court with statewide jurisdiction. Prior to its creation, there was no forum for civil actions filed against the state of Ohio. The Court of Claims' principle duties include:

1. Adjudicating civil actions filed against the state;
2. Hearing appeals from decisions made by the Attorney General on claims allowed under the Victims of Crime Act;
3. Acting as the state's fiduciary agent for processing claims of wrongful imprisonment, and

4. Serving as an alternative forum for the resolution of disputes regarding access to public records.

For the upcoming biennium, the Court has submitted a budget that proposes adding two FTE staff to assist with the Court's public records program. Otherwise, the budget is largely flat with the exception of increases to accommodate statutory payroll adjustments to cover increased costs of employee benefits and other program charge-backs as required by the Department of Administrative Services or the Office of Budget and Management.

For FY2020, the Court is requesting a total appropriation (\$4,087,539) which represents an increase of just over \$417,000 or 11.4%, from FY2019. It is important to note that this figure reflects only a 7 ½% (\$280,000) increase when adjusted for the additional 27th pay period) and for FY2021, an increase of less than 1% (0.8%) from FY2020.

The budget breakdown is as follows:

- 85% Payroll (includes staff, special masters, magistrates & judges)
- 9 % Supplies & Maintenance (includes hosting services for case management & e-filing systems)
- 2 % Purchased Services (court reporters, assigned referees, & IT support)
- 2 % Equipment (IT & courtroom audio/video technology systems)

Since the last budget was passed, the Court has continued to modernize and improve its service to the public in several areas, including the following:

- In February 2018, the court implemented a new case management system.
- The new system now accepts electronic filings for all case types and allows all filing fees to be paid electronically.
- The new system also provides more detailed reports for both state agencies and the public.

- The court has fully implemented the expedited dispute resolution process for public records requests which was instituted by legislation in September 2016.
- The court's public records program has received positive attention from the news media.

This budget will allow the court to keep pace with the expedited public records program by expanding its dispute resolution service:

- The court is implementing an on-line dispute resolution system for public records cases. The on-line feature will allow the parties to directly communicate and share information prior to formal mediation.
- It's important to note that mediation is required in all public records cases and the number of mediations conducted by the court increased by approximately 50% during the 2018 calendar year. Over half of all public records cases were resolved during mediation.

These initiatives and others that reflect the Court's commitment to public service will be performed within our proposed budget by continuing to look for savings opportunities as court practices continue to be modernized.

Your valuable consideration of our budget request is appreciated. I thank you for the opportunity to appear before this Committee and I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.