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

**before**

**The Ohio Senate  
General Government Committee**

**Wednesday, April 26, 2023**

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Chairman Rulli, Ranking Member DeMora, 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 address you today in support of this proposed budget 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' principal 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 involving access to public records.

For the upcoming biennium, the Court has submitted a budget that includes a modest increase in funding to accommodate statutory and cost of living 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 FY2024, the Court is requesting a total appropriation of \$4,603,356 (an increase of 6 %, from FY2023), and for FY2025 a total appropriation of \$4,787,931 (an increase of 4 % from FY2024).

The budget is:

- 85.7 % Payroll (includes staff, special masters, magistrates & judges)
- 10.7 % Supplies & Maintenance (includes hosting services for case management & e-filing systems and our new open data portal)
- 2.7 % Purchased Personal Services (court reporters, assigned referees, & IT support)
- 0.9 % 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:

As Ohio's only state-wide trial court, the Court of Claims has focused on improving its capability to conduct proceedings by videoconferencing. During the pandemic, the court followed the guidance from the Ohio Supreme Court and kept its docket moving by conducting conferences and hearing remotely. After the Ohio Judicial Center re-opened for in-person hearings, the court has continued to offer video technology to serve litigants and witnesses who reside outside of Columbus. Hybrid proceedings, incorporating both in-person and remote appearances, have become the new-normal at the court.

The court also uses videoconferencing technology in our conference rooms allowing us to operate more efficiently in communicating with other state agencies, and meeting with a variety of entities including technology consultants, vendors, and prospective employees.

The court continues to update its case management system with upgrades and new features. Judicial officers now have the capability to review documents and electronically sign decisions and orders which has helped expedite the docketing process. The court can accept trial exhibits electronically which are distributed to our judges and the litigants. The public interface with the case management system has been enhanced providing non-court users with better access to case information. We are looking forward to increased efficiency soon when Franklin County courts go live with the same case management system which will enable us to electronically share our docket and files with the 10<sup>th</sup> District Court of Appeals.

The court is also committed to transparency and accountability.

- We have expanded our open data portal which gives the public access to the court's data. The court's website has recently been linked to both our case management information and the court's financial operations data which is available on-line through Ohio Checkbook. The public can review real-time financial and transactional data pertaining to the court's payroll and operating expenditures as well as revenue collected for court costs and fees.

- The open data portal allows the court to respond quickly to public records requests, and it enables public users, including the media, to directly obtain and analyze court information. Information on the open data portal can be accessed as raw data in spreadsheet format. The public can view the court's data using charts and graphs that the court has developed. Users can all also create their own tables, charts, or graphs with the portal's tools.

- The court is in the process of enhancing its on-line dispute resolution system for public records cases which will make it more user friendly and allow the parties to directly communicate and share information prior to formal mediation. Mediation is

required in all public records cases and over half of all public records cases were resolved during mediation. The court's public records program continues to receive positive attention from the news media.

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 are modernized. Our proposed budget will allow the court to keep pace with developing technology.

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