



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

before the

**The Ohio Senate
Government and Oversight and Reform Committee**

Wednesday, April 30, 2025

Chair Manchester, Vice Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Weinstein, and
Members of the Committee:

Good afternoon, 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. 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' 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 both increased costs of employee benefits and other program chargebacks as required by the Department of Administrative Services or the Office of Budget and Management, and to invest in technology and cybersecurity.

For FY2026, the Court is requesting a total appropriation of \$5,088,274 (an increase of 6 %, from FY2025), and for FY2027, a total appropriation of \$5,320,888, (an increase of 5 % from FY2026).

The budget is:

- 84 % Payroll (includes staff, special masters, magistrates & judges)
- 11 % Supplies & Maintenance (includes hosting services for case management & e-filing systems and our open data portal)
- 4 % Purchased Personal Services (court reporters, assigned referees, & IT support)
- 1 % 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:

The court is aware of the growing cybersecurity threat which has plagued state and local governments in recent years. To address the threat, the court has focused on three preventive measures; education, monitoring and systems upgrades. All court staff complete periodic cybersecurity awareness training that is provided by the court's tech vendor and then reinforced by individual testing, including spoof email.

The court's case management systems have been migrated to cloud-based servers which offer the latest in security and data protection. This configuration will

prevent the debilitating cyberattacks that have degraded state and local government entities, such as the costly ransomware attack on the city of Columbus last year. The court has also conducted threat penetration testing to detect any potential vulnerability to data hacking or cyber-attacks. Last year the court implemented an email security program that scans and automatically quarantines suspicious email which can be reviewed before it's released to the recipient.

The Court of Claims will continue to focus on improving our primary service as the only state-wide trial court. The Court has stayed up to date with the latest courtroom technology and now routinely conducts proceedings by videoconferencing, incorporating both in-person and remote appearances. Last year we integrated our courtroom equipment with Zoom technology to allow litigants and witnesses to electronically share documents and presentations during hearings.

The Court remains dedicated to transparency and accountability. We have expanded our open data system that provides public access to the Court's case data and financial information, which supports public oversight and enables transparency. The Court's data is available in convenient, modifiable formats that can be retrieved, downloaded, indexed and searched. Public users can view the data as tables, charts and graphs. We are planning another update of our website, which is the primary way the public interacts with the Court.

One notable example of the public's use of the Court's data is a research project that was conducted last year by a professor of media and journalism at Kent State University. Professor Mitch McKenney obtained case and financial data through our website, which connects to Ohio Checkbook, to present a paper on our Court's public records dispute process. That paper won first place at the 2024 National Freedom of Information Coalition's competition.

The Court's public records program continues to receive positive attention from the news media. A recent article in the Salt Lake Tribune advocated replicating the Court's public records program in every state. The Court is continuing to enhance its on-line dispute resolution system for public records cases to allow the parties to directly

communicate and share information before and during mediation. It's worth noting that over 60% 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 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.