

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

before the

**Ohio Senate
General Government Budget
Committee**

Wednesday, April 28, 2021

Chairman Schaffer, Vice Chair Wilson, Ranking Member Craig, 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 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 FY2022, the Court is requesting a total appropriation of \$4,108,852 which represents a slight decrease of .01%, from FY2021, and for FY2023 a total appropriation of \$4,210,42, an increase of 2.5% from FY2022.

The budget is:

- 87.0% Payroll (includes staff, special masters, magistrates & judges)
- 9.4 % Supplies & Maintenance (includes hosting services for case management & e-filing systems and our new open data portal)
- 2.4 % Purchased Services (court reporters, assigned referees, & IT support)
- 1.2 % 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:

- The court updated it's videoconferencing equipment and procedures to allow all proceedings to be conducted remotely. Since March 2020, the court has conducted numerous pretrial conferences, mediations, hearings and trials with all the participants appearing remotely from around the state.
- The court has continued to update the case management system that was implemented in 2018.

- The system now allows litigants to file electronically and also allows court staff to manage the docket remotely, an ability which has been critical during the pandemic.
- We recently added an electronic signature capability to allow the court's judicial officers to issue their decisions and entries remotely.
- For the past year, the court has remained open with only a minimal staff present in the court to perform certain in-person tasks, such as accepting and processing mail and serving walk-in customers.

This budget will allow the court to keep pace with ever-changing technology.

- The court is now in the process of updating our website, the primary way the public interacts with the court.
- Last May the court implemented a new open data portal to our case management system which allows the public to access the court's data. The portal is linked to the court's website and the data is updated daily to provide close to real-time information.
- Information on the open data portal can be viewed through charts and graphs that the court has developed. The public can also choose to access the raw data in spreadsheet format or use the portal's tools to create their own table, charts, or graphs.
- The court is continuing to implement an on-line dispute resolution system for public records cases which will 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 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.