



STATE COURT ADMINISTRATION

Iowa Judicial Branch Building
1111 East Court Avenue
Des Moines, IA 50319

ROBERT D. GAST
State Court Administrator

November 26, 2024

Kraig Paulsen
Department of Management
State Capitol
LOCAL

Tim McDermott
Legislative Services
State Capitol
LOCAL

Sen. Amy Sinclair
Iowa Senate President
State Capitol
LOCAL

Rep. Pat Grassley
Speaker of the House
State Capitol
LOCAL

Sen. Julian Garrett
Chair, Senate Justice System Appropriations Committee
State Capitol
LOCAL

Rep. Brian Lohse
Chair, House Justice System Appropriations Committee
State Capitol
LOCAL

Dear Director Paulsen, Mr. McDermott, Senators and Representatives:

Pursuant to Iowa Code section 602.1301(2)(a), I hereby submit, on behalf of the Iowa Supreme Court, the FY26 budget request for the Iowa Judicial Branch. We respectfully request this budget request be forwarded to the legislature as submitted to illustrate the needs of the judicial branch.

Iowa Judicial Branch employees demonstrate perseverance, adaptability, and great resolve every day. Our workforce has adapted to new technologies and work process innovations to provide timely, necessary services for all Iowans. As we move forward, it is indeed my pleasure to lead this team of dedicated public servants as we continue to improve our ability to serve Iowans.

New processes and innovations would not be possible without the incredible team of committed judicial officers and professionals within the judicial branch. The appropriation for FY25 allowed the branch to strengthen our ability to retain and recruit quality judicial officers and employees by raising wages and changing the formula for judicial retirement, it was greatly appreciated.

We continue to hold fast the importance of investing in communities to bring about improvements in the delivery of justice for all Iowans. The following requests for FY26 will help the judicial branch maintain and increase the level of service to communities across the state.

Investing in Human Capital - Existing Personnel

Iowans in all 99 counties benefit from the services provided by approximately 1,700 judicial officers and employees. These judicial officers and employees are members of every community and resolve disputes to provide justice to Iowans who need assistance in more than 700,000 cases filed every year. The education, skills, and experience of these individuals are the strongest assets of the judicial branch.

Contract negotiations are getting underway, and we do not want to unduly influence the outcome of those negotiations. Once negotiations are completed, a revised letter detailing salary increase requests and health insurance for both contract and non-contract employees may be submitted.

Proposed Judicial Pay Plan

Maintaining a total compensation package for judicial officers that allows for more efficient budgetary oversight and recruitment of quality judicial officers is very important. In order to achieve that goal, the branch is suggesting the following proposal which is similar to a plan approved in Kansas and is set to take effect on January 1, 2025. This proposal would codify a formula for judicial officer salary by tying it to the salary of a U.S. district judge, which would establish a mechanism to increase judicial salary annually and would include a four-year catch-up period as set forth in the table below.

This proposal sets an Iowa District Judge salary at 75% of a U.S. District Judge salary phased in over four fiscal years. The plan provides that the remaining classes of judges would be calculated from the Iowa district judge figure. The cost for this plan in FY26 would be approximately \$2,828,127.

Fiscal Year	Iowa District Judge Salary
FY July 1, 2025-June 30, 2026	72% of U.S. District Judge Salary \$175,176
FY July 1, 2026- June 30, 2027	73% of U.S. District Judge Salary \$181,161
FY July 1, 2027- June 31, 2028	74% of U.S. District Judge Salary \$187,316
FY July 1, 2028-June 31, 2029 and later	75% of U.S. District Judge Salary \$193,644

In 2024 a U.S. District Judge earns \$243,300 and 72% of a U.S. District Judge Salary is \$175,176. Under this approach, a state district judge would receive approximately a 5.55% salary increase in FY26 and other judicial officers would receive similar percentage increases, if there were no increase in federal judge pay. A 5.55% salary increase for an Iowa district judge would raise their pay from \$165,959 to \$175,176.

Assuming a 2% salary increase for U.S. District Judges for FY27 to FY29 the following approximate scenarios would happen. In FY27, with 73% of a U.S. District Judge salary, a state district judge would receive approximately a 3.4% increase from FY26, increasing the annual salary from \$175,176 to \$181,161. In FY28, with 74% of U.S. District Judge salary, a state district judge would receive approximately a 3.4% increase from FY27 increasing the annual salary from \$181,161 to \$187,316. In FY29, the multi-year judicial salary plan is fully phased in. In FY29, 75% of a U.S. District Judge salary, a state district judge would receive approximately a 3.38% increase from FY28 increasing that annual salary from \$187,316 to \$193,644. The plan now assumes moving forward that a state district judge's salary will be 75% of U.S. District Judge salary.

The proposal permits the Supreme Court to provide judicial officers a smaller annual salary increase, if it determines the judicial branch appropriation is insufficient to provide the full judicial salary increase determines or other good cause exists.

Indigent Defense

The judicial branch recognizes that there is an indigent defense crisis across the state. Contract attorneys are vital to ensuring that the rights of Iowans are maintained. While not part of the judicial branch budget, the judicial branch supports efforts to increase funding for indigent defense across the state.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests. We look forward to the opportunity to continue working with the legislature to make our Iowa Judicial Branch one of the best in the nation. The Iowa Judicial Branch values its continued partnership with Governor Reynolds and the legislature in providing the services that all Iowans deserve from their justice system.

Sincerely,

Robert D. Gast