

Washington State Judicial Branch 2023 Supplemental Budget Fully Fund Judicial Branch IT Infrastructure

Agency: Administrative Office of the Courts

Decision Package Code/Title: B1 – Fund Jud Branch IT Infrastructure

Agency Recommendation Summary Text:

The Administrative Office of the Courts requests \$6.7 million for FY 2023 in General Fund-State support to fully fund the information technology (IT) infrastructure of the judicial branch.

The Judicial Information Systems Account (JIS), the primary fund source for judicial branch IT, has seen an almost 50 percent drop in its main revenue stream – traffic infractions – over the past two years. However, prior to the recent pandemic, revenue had been steadily falling. To decrease our reliance on an uncertain and declining revenue stream, the judicial branch is requesting financial support from the General Fund as a deposit to the JIS Account. (General Fund-State)

Fiscal Summary:

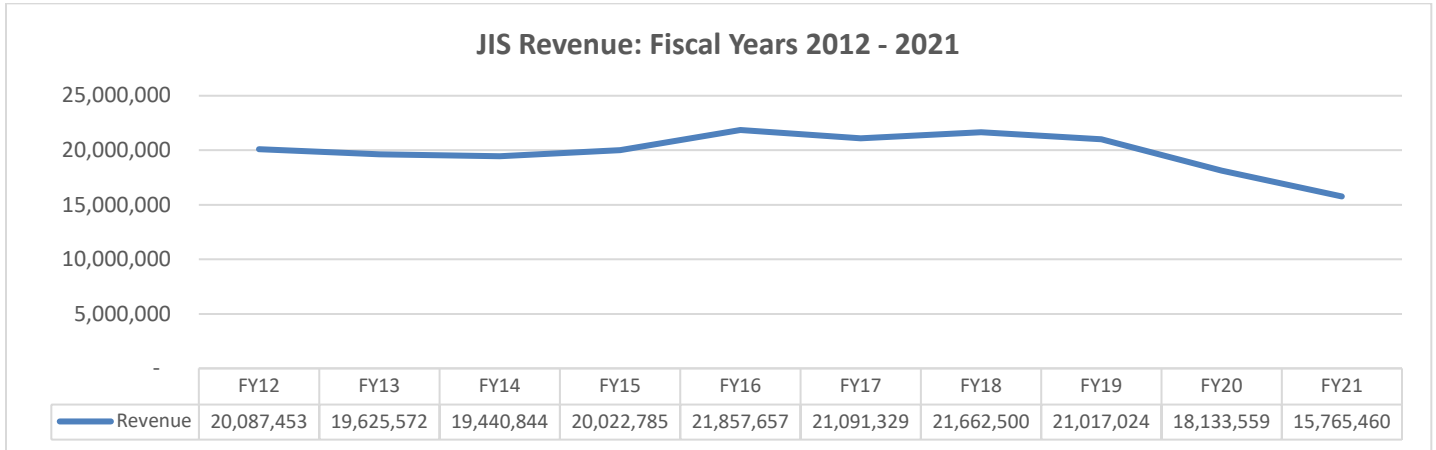
	FY 2022	FY 2023	Biennial	FY 2024	FY 2025	Biennial
Staffing						
FTEs	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Operating Expenditures						
Fund 001-1	\$0	\$6,700,000	\$6,700,000	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total Expenditures						
	\$0	\$6,700,000	\$6,700,000	\$0	\$0	\$0

Package Description:

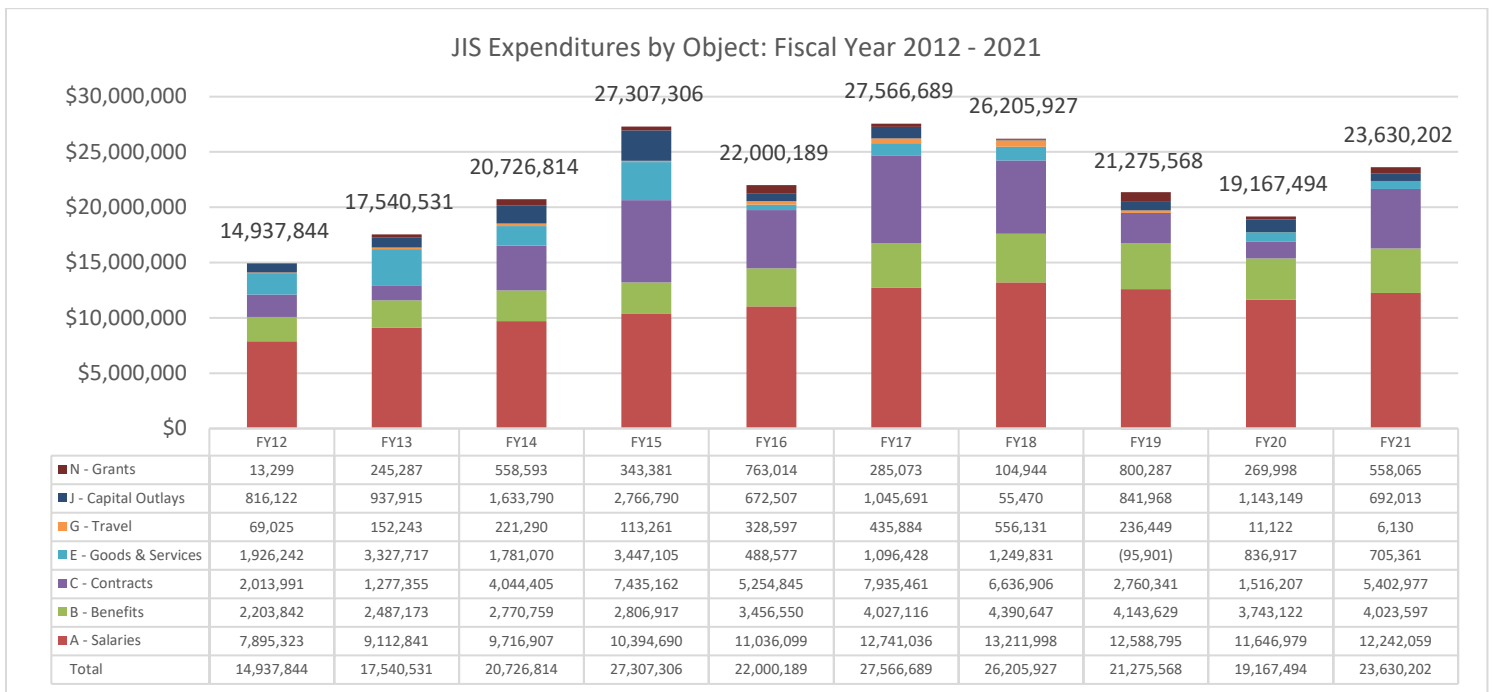
The Judicial Information Systems Account, the primary fund source for judicial branch IT, has seen an almost 50 percent drop in its main revenue stream – traffic infractions – over the past two years. However, prior to the recent pandemic, revenue had been steadily falling. To decrease our reliance on an uncertain and declining revenue stream, the judicial branch is requesting financial support from the General Fund as a deposit to the JIS Account.

Between Fiscal Year 2012 and Fiscal Year 2018, the JIS Account brought in an average of \$20 million per year. During the pandemic, however, revenue has dropped to under \$16 million in 2021. A month-to-month review of FY 2022 reveals an almost 40 percent drop in revenue from months in the prior fiscal year – a staggering loss of revenue for an account that is virtually the sole fund source of the judicial branch’s IT infrastructure.

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Like most IT shops in the state, the bulk of our expenditures are staffing-related. However, there have been recent surges in contracted expenditures due to the development and deployment of a new case management system – the Superior Courts’ case management system deployed in 2018 while the new system for Courts of Limited Jurisdiction is under development and about to deploy to pilot courts in late 2022.



In order to stabilize the JIS Account and to accurately reflect the benefit provided by the Judicial Information Systems network to the entire state of Washington, the Administrative Office of the Courts requests \$6,700,000 for FY 2023 in General Fund-State support to be used solely for the support of the judicial branch IT infrastructure. This amount is estimated to balance the account for the remainder of the 2021-23 biennium.

The JIS Account is currently funded primarily with traffic infraction surcharges, but the courts use the JIS network of systems for so much more than traffic adjudications. The courts process dozens of types of criminal cases, civil cases, family law cases, and more. Hundreds of thousands of individuals were impacted by the opioid epidemic, with thousands of cases coming before the courts – yet none of the recent settlement funds were dedicated for court operations. But all of those cases utilized the IT infrastructure of the branch.

Fully describe and quantify expected impacts on state residents and specific populations served:

Over 100,000 cases each year are heard in Washington’s courts – every one of these cases includes at least two sides, and each side is accessing judicial information systems. Apart from the case participants are thousands of court employees also accessing judicial information systems on a daily basis. Without adequate funding, these systems will eventually grind to a halt, either through a lack of maintenance funding or out of obsolescence without replacements. In the 21st century, justice relies as heavily on servers, computers, and systems just as much as it did on paper and manila folders in past centuries. A stable funding source keeps justice accessible, timely, and efficient.

Explain what alternatives were explored by the agency and why they were rejected as solutions:

There is not alternative to balance the 2021-23 biennium. For the future, an alternative explored was the diversion of traffic infraction revenue from the General Fund. However, that would continue to leave the IT infrastructure at the mercy of infraction revenues, and the judicial branch doesn’t believe that future justice should rely on the consequences of the convicted. The proper operation of the judicial system shouldn’t rely on the number of tickets that are issued; it is a neutral and public good and as such, should be funded from general funding sources.

What are the consequences of not funding this request?

If this request is not funded, certain projects would cease and, long-term, the existing systems would eventually fail without adequate replacement systems. The efficiency of justice would slow to a crawl as paper processes began to replace outdated and failing IT systems, and the justice of the 21st century would begin to look like the justice of the 19th century. Victims’ wait times for basic judicial relief would take weeks or months instead of days. A criminal justice backlog would grow exponentially over time. Without adequate funding to keep the judicial information systems infrastructure maintained and current, we would eventually revert to a pre-computerized judicial system.

Is this an expansion or alteration of a current program or service?

No

Decision Package expenditure, FTE and revenue assumptions:

None.

How does the package relate to the Judicial Branch principal policy objectives?

This package supports each of the five judicial branch policy objectives as it maintains the IT infrastructure that is the underpinning of the entire branch. None of these policy objectives can be met in the 21st century without a functioning and efficient IT system. This funding request ensures that resources remain available to continue moving Washington’s courts forward with the rest of society.

Are there impacts to other governmental entities?

Any governmental entity that interacts with the judicial system is affected by this request, and we anticipate that when faced with the loss of key systems due to a lack of funding, that these entities will support a permanent and stable fund source for this account.

Stakeholder response:

Any non-governmental entity – specifically private law firms and lawyers – that interacts with the judicial system is affected by this request, and we anticipate that when faced with the loss of key systems due to a lack of funding, that these entities will support a permanent and stable fund source for this account.

Are there legal or administrative mandates that require this package to be funded?

No.

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Does current law need to be changed to successfully implement this package?

No.

Are there impacts to state facilities?

No.

Are there other supporting materials that strengthen the case for this request?

None.

Are there information technology impacts?

No.

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