

Washington State Judicial Branch 2015-2017 BIENNIAL BUDGET REQUEST

Decision Package

Agency	Administrative Office of the Courts
Decision Package Title	Family and Juvenile Court Improvement Plan Expansion
Budget Period	2015-2017 Biennial Budget
Budget Level	Policy Level

Agency Recommendation Summary Text

Funding is requested for expansion of the Family and Juvenile Court Improvement Program (FJCIP). This program, developed as a strategic approach to improving court operations consistent with Unified Family Court principles, is supported by a legislator who has requested an expansion plan for the FJCIP. The budget package includes funds to expand FJCIP into additional superior courts to promote best practices in family and juvenile court operations as requested by the legislator.

Fiscal Detail

Operating Expenditures	FY 2016	FY 2017	Total
001-1 General Fund State	\$ 186,000	\$ 372,000	\$ 558,000
Staffing	FY 2016	FY 2017	Total
FTEs (number of staff requested)	0	0	0

Package Description

The Family and Juvenile Court Improvement Plan, RCW 2.56.030, coordinates courts' efforts on Superior/Family and Juvenile cases, to strategically implement principles of Unified Family Court (UFC) which were adopted as best practices by the Board for Judicial Administration in 2005. FJCIP funding and framework for superior courts exist in thirteen counties to implement enhancements to their family and juvenile court operations that are consistent with UFC principles, including longer judicial rotations. The FJCIP allows flexible implementation centered on core elements including stable leadership, education, and case management support. The statewide plan promotes a system of local improvements, but is limited to courts who were selected for FJCIP funding. The demonstrated successes in FJCIP courts is a result of appointing judicial leaders to create actionable plans to enhance court operations. The coordinators work

closely with the assigned chief judge to implement local court improvements associated with UFC best practices.

FJCIP is a product of a partnership between the judicial and legislative branches of government. The courts developed FJCIP as a strategic approach to improving court operations consistent with the legislature who provided funding. The budget package includes funds to expand FJCIP into additional superior courts to promote best practices in family and juvenile court operations as requested by the legislature.

FJCIP courts have initiated and sustained court operational improvements as a result of FJCIP which have demonstrated favorable outcomes. The program sustained a reduction in funding (19.3% or \$309,000 in 2009). As a result, funding for ancillary support such as education was eliminated, and all funding was dedicated to maintaining adequate staffing levels for FJCIP courts. That funding prioritization worked, and the programs continued to operate without significant interruption.

The legislature has requested an FJCIP expansion strategy to encourage local improvement consistent with UFC principles in additional jurisdictions. The existing pilots have demonstrated positive outcomes associated with cases managed by FJCIP (see attached report from Dependency Time Standard Report). FJCIP provides funding for system improvement in selected courts because state FJCIP funding pays for staff to coordinate and implement the identified improvement projects. FJCIP is not a program where best practices or strategies can be adopted in courts that do not have coordinator support. Therefore, expansion of FJCIP relies on additional state resources.

The conservative expansion plan is to fund up to four FTEs in the 2015-2017 budget. The division of the FTEs can either be assigned to between four courts and eight courts depending on if the workload justifies a full FTE or .5 FTE. The AOC team has used research, in particular the Annual Dependency Time Standard Report, to identify counties that have lower compliance with mandatory dependency deadlines, to prioritize funding for county expansion of FJCIP.

Narrative Justification and Impact Statement

Measure Detail

Impact on clients and service

None

Impact on other state services

None

Relationship to Capital Budget

None

Required changes to existing Court Rule, Court Order, RCW, WAC, contract, or plan

Additional FJCIP contracts will need to be executed to accommodate the additional courts selected to receive state funding.

Alternatives explored

Not applicable

Distinction between one-time and ongoing costs and budget impacts in future biennia

Costs will be ongoing.

Effects of non-funding

If this budget package is not funded, and assuming the program does not receive reductions, the thirteen FJCIP courts will continue to sustain improvements to court processes in the capacity they do now. There are basic court management or coordination efforts that can impact the quality of case processing that are consistent with UFC principles. These modifications have happened to a large extent by using court leadership and innovation that does not require additional funding. These enhancements will be maintained at their current level as long as salaries are adequate to keep staff with experience and expertise.

FJCIP provides a framework for the chief judge to exercise court leadership and direct modifications to court operations to improve services and support to the court, staff, and the public.

If existing FJCIP courts are under-funded and expansion of FJCIP is not realized, the result will be a continued political effort to propose legislation or to modify the constitution that would adjust the structure of superior court, or courts of general jurisdiction. Efforts are currently underway to make family and juvenile court a specific court type, administered and funded separate from superior court operations. This alternative has significant policy and funding implications for the state and local governments. The justification for this type of radical change is to improve case processing of family and juvenile cases, consistent with Unified Family Court principles which are also the foundation of FJCIP court plans. A better investment strategy for the state to accomplish improvement goals to family and juvenile court operations is to expand FJCIP funding rather than create a completely independent and more costly separation of case types that would require an entirely separate administration.

Effects of not funding FJCIP expansion is a more expensive alternative.

Expenditure calculations and assumptions and FTE assumptions

The funding requested will expand FJCIP by four coordinators, which adds between between four and eight courts in 2015-2017. The AOC determines the appropriate level of case coordinator the court is eligible for (half or full) depending on the number of judges and case filings.

The amount requested is based on an equivalent state salary and benefit package for a range 62 (monthly top step in range \$93,059).

Object Detail	FY 2016	FY 2017	Total
Staff Costs	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 0
Non-Staff Costs	\$ 186,000	\$ 372,000	\$ 558,000
Total Objects	\$ 186,000	\$ 372,000	\$ 558,000