

**FY2024 Budget Testimony:**  
**Joint Committee on Ways & Means Budget Hearing**

April 4, 2023

Springfield Technical Community College

Springfield, Massachusetts



*Remarks by*

Kimberly S. Budd

Chief Justice of the Supreme Judicial Court

Representative Williams, Senator Gomez, members of the Joint Committee:

Good afternoon. I very much appreciate the opportunity to appear before you on behalf of the Judicial Branch. Let me begin by thanking you and your colleagues in the Legislature for your unwavering support of the Judiciary over the past few years. The FY2023 budget and the passage of the Judiciary IT Bond Bill have strengthened the Judiciary's ability to increase access to justice for the people of the Commonwealth, especially for our most vulnerable populations, and we appreciate your partnership.

Because you will hear from others from the judicial branch, and because I want to leave time for your questions, my remarks will be brief. I will provide a couple of highlights of the Fiscal Year 2024 Judiciary Budget request, and then discuss the Supreme Judicial Court Budget in more detail. You will also hear from Chief Justice Mark Green regarding the Appeals Court Budget, and Chief Justice Jeffrey Locke and Court Administrator Thomas Ambrosino on the Trial Court Budget.

The Justices and I are well aware of the economic challenges and uncertainties the Commonwealth will face as we continue to emerge from the pandemic in FY2024. We therefore will continue to leverage technologies and create efficiencies throughout the court system as we strive to deliver justice. These efforts will be enhanced in FY24 and beyond by the funding provided in the

Judiciary IT Bond Bill. Specifically, in FY2024, the Judiciary IT bond bill will enable us to move forward on several critical projects, including deploying digital signage to assist the public in navigating our many courthouses, modernizing the case management system for the Appellate Courts, installing courthouse Wi-Fi, improving network bandwidth, and updating electronic security systems.

As is the case every year, our goal for the coming fiscal year is to receive a budget that provides the funds needed for the courts to deliver justice in a timely and efficient manner.

The FY2024 Judiciary Budget Request is largely limited to maintenance with a few targeted investments that would make our courts more accessible to all who use them. The Justices and I fully support the Trial Court's Fiscal Year 2024 maintenance budget of \$868,734,750. Funding at this level is essential to maintain stability as courts continue to address backlogs and resume normal business operations. The budget includes funding needed to cover the annualized cost of roughly 6,500 FTEs and other non-personnel expenses. The FY2024 Request, however, does not include anticipated Collective Bargaining Agreement increases for court union and confidential employees that would begin July 1, 2023.

As has been the case for the past few years, the Trial Court budget includes budget modules for specific initiatives that the Judiciary asks the Legislature to

consider funding in Fiscal Year 2024, in addition to the maintenance needs discussed earlier. These investments would:

- 1) bolster the Court Service Center resources,
- 2) address the growing court needs for interpreters throughout the Commonwealth by adding full time court interpreters, and
- 3) increase the number of Probate & Family Court judges to expedite the delivery of justice in the Probate and Family Court department.

Details on these proposed investments will be provided by Chief Justice Locke and Court Administrator Ambrosino, but for a relatively modest investment, the Commonwealth can greatly enhance the access to justice and court experience for all our residents.

The Governor's FY24 H-1 Budget recommendation fully funds the Trial Court maintenance and targeted investment request at \$967,204,076. The Governor's Budget is a clear and encouraging indication of support for our courts.

I'd like to turn now to the specific request of the Supreme Judicial Court. For Fiscal Year 2024, the Justices have requested \$11,264,575 in the Supreme Judicial Court administration account and \$2,320,382 dollars for the Clerk of the Supreme Judicial Court for Suffolk County. These requests provide base funding for court operations, Appellate Court IT expenses, and the funding necessary to maintain an already small staff at a manageable level. The Governor's FY24 H-1

Budget recommendation funds the Supreme Judicial Court at our FY24 maintenance needs.

There are several non-judicial and non-affiliate organizations that, for budgetary purposes, are included within the sequence of accounts associated with the Supreme Judicial Court. You may recall that the Supreme Judicial Court has no control over the budgets of these agencies, and we do not oversee their spending. Consequently, our general practice has been merely to forward the budget requests of these agencies without formal recommendations, and we do so again this year.

We note, however, that included in this budget proposal is a \$8 million increase for the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation for Fiscal Year 2024. This funding supports the critical work of legal aid programs in addressing the needs of some of the Commonwealth's most vulnerable residents and will help them cope with the greatly increased demand for legal services during these very difficult times.

I want to thank the Joint Committee Chairs, Senator Rodrigues and Representative Michlewitz, the chairs of today's hearing, Representative Williams and Senator Gomez, and all the members of the Joint Committee, for this opportunity to address the budgetary needs of the Judiciary, and to share the Justices' views on the Governor's FY2024 budget recommendations contained in

H-1. I also thank you for the careful and considered analysis you have given to our budget requests in prior years, and I know that you will give similar care to this year's request. I also want to reiterate the continued commitment of the Justices and all court leaders to work cooperatively with you and committee staff as you prepare a budget that allows us to deliver justice in a fiscally prudent manner.