

FY2026 Budget Testimony

Joint Committee on Ways & Means Budget Hearing

March 28, 2025

Clinton Town Hall

242 Church Street

Clinton, Massachusetts

Remarks by

Kimberly S. Budd

Chief Justice of the Supreme Judicial Court

Representative Kilcoyne, Senator Cronin, members of the Joint Committee:
Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you on behalf of the Judicial Branch.

The Justices of the Supreme Judicial Court (SJC) and I are always grateful for the Joint Committee's efforts on behalf of the Judiciary. Over the past years, the Legislature has provided the Judiciary with the necessary resources to meet our basic needs. With your help, we continue to improve access to justice for the people of the Commonwealth

I am fully aware of the fiscal climate confronting this committee as you craft the FY2026 budget. Addressing the growing needs of the Commonwealth with limited resources is always difficult, but never more so than in this unsettled time, with the uncertainty around federal funding.

I want to assure the Committee that the court leaders are committed to continuing our strong collaboration with you and your staff during the development of the FY2026 budget. As is the case every year, our goal for the coming fiscal year is simply to receive a budget that allows the courts to operate at a level of service the people of the Commonwealth expect and deserve.

In light of the gathering fiscal uncertainty, the overall FY2026 Judiciary budget request is limited to maintenance funding. The major driver of the

maintenance increase, it should be noted, is the annualization of the COLA increases for Local 6 and NAGE that were implemented in FY2025 based on parameters set by the Governor, and the related COLA increases scheduled to take effect in FY2026.

Overall, the FY2026 House 1 (H.1) budget falls significantly short of meeting the Judiciary's needs in FY2026. I would like to first turn to the area where H.1 poses the greatest threat – the Trial Court. The Justices and I fully support the FY2026 budget request submitted by the Trial Court. The Trial Court's maintenance budget of \$985,539,208 supports a workforce of approximately 6,600 full-time employees (FTEs), including the annualized and inflationary costs of personnel and non-personnel expenses.

The FY2026 H.1 budget recommendation underfunds the base maintenance needs of the Trial Court by \$33.5M. If the H.1 recommendation prevails in FY2026, then the Trial Court would need to reduce budgeted positions by over 300 FTEs and severely limit IT support - which would reverse the hard-earned gains made by the Legislature and Judiciary over the past few years through operating and capital investments. I respectfully urge the Committee to avoid these harmful impacts and fund the Trial Court, at a minimum, at the requested maintenance amount in FY2026.

I'd like to turn to the specific request of the SJC. For FY2026 the Justices have requested \$12,398,233 in the SJC administration account (line item 0320-0003) and \$2,448,632 dollars for the Clerk of the Supreme Judicial Court for Suffolk County (line item 0320-0010). The SJC administration account request provides base funding for court operations, Appellate Court IT expenses, and the funding necessary to maintain an already small staff. In the FY2026 H.1, the Governor recommended \$12,314,981 for the SJC administration account. This amount is slightly less than (\$83,252) the amount necessary to maintain operations after the annualization of FY25 CBA and backfills and we ask that you fund the SJC at our requested maintenance funding levels.

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

I want to thank the Joint Committee Chairs, Senator Rodrigues and Representative Michlewitz, the chairs of today's hearing, Representative Kilcoyne and Senator Cronin, 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 FY2026 budget recommendations contained in H.1. I thank you for the careful and considered analysis you have given to our budget requests in prior years; I know that you will give similar care to this year's request. I also want to reiterate the commitment of the Justices and all court leaders to work with you and committee staff as you prepare a budget that allows us to deliver justice across the Commonwealth in a fiscally prudent manner.