



Fiscal Note

Legislative Council Staff

Nonpartisan Services for Colorado’s Legislature

SB 25-024: JUDICIAL OFFICERS

Prime Sponsors:

Sen. Roberts; Frizell

Fiscal Analyst:

Aaron Carpenter, 303-866-4918

aaron.carpenter@coleg.gov

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Summary Information

Overview. The bill increases the number of appellate, district, probate, and county judges by 29, which results in a corresponding staff increase in other agencies supporting the courts.

Types of impacts. The bill is projected to affect the following areas on an ongoing basis:

- State Expenditures
- Local Government

Appropriations. For FY 2025-26, the bill requires and appropriation of \$18.7 million to multiple state agencies.

Table 1
State Fiscal Impacts

Type of Impact	Budget Year FY 2025-26	Out Year FY 2026-27
State Revenue	\$0	\$0
State Expenditures (General Fund)	\$18,793,827	\$26,141,484
Transferred Funds	\$0	\$0
Change in TABOR Refunds	\$0	\$0
Change in State FTE	113.0 FTE	183.8 FTE

Summary of Legislation and Assumptions

Subject to available appropriations, the bill increases the number of appellate, district, probate, and county judges in Colorado by 29, as shown in Table 2. Table 2 also shows the assumed docket types assigned to each judge, based on a Judicial Department survey. Dockets that include criminal or juvenile cases drive staffing needs in other agencies supporting the courts.

**Table 2
Additional Judges and Docket Types**

Court	Current / New Judge Total	Judges Starting 2025	Judges Starting 2026	Total Add'l Judges	Assumed Docket Type¹	Dockets Affecting Other Agencies²
Court of Appeals	22 → 25	0	3	3	Appellate cases	0
2 nd District	27 → 28	0	1	1	All cases	1
4 th District	24 → 28	2	2	4	All cases but criminal	4
7 th District	5 → 6	0	1	1	All cases	1
8 th District	9 → 10	1	0	1	All cases but criminal	1
13 th District	5 → 6	1	0	1	All cases	1
17 th District	16 → 19	2	1	3	1 civil, 1 criminal, 1 juvenile	2
18 th District	17 → 20	2	1	3	1 civil, 2 domestic	0
19 th District	11 → 12	1	0	1	All cases	1
20 th District	9 → 10	0	1	1	All cases	1
23 rd District	8 → 9	1	0	1	Criminal cases	1
Adams County	8 → 9	1	0	1	Criminal cases	1
Arapahoe County	8 → 9	1	0	1	Criminal cases	1
Larimer County	5 → 6	1	0	1	All cases but criminal	1
Douglas County	3 → 4	1	0	1	Criminal cases	1
La Plata County	1 → 2	1	0	1	All cases	1
Mesa County	3 → 4	1	0	1	All cases	1
Weld County	4 → 5	1	0	1	All cases	1
Eagle County	1 → 2	1	0	1	All cases	1
Denver Probate	1 → 2	0	1	1	Probate cases	0
Total	187 → 216	18	11	29		21

¹ Assumed docket types come from a Judicial Department survey. The four docket types are criminal, civil, juvenile, and domestic.

² Criminal and juvenile dockets drive impacts for the OSPD, Bridges, and district attorneys.

State Expenditures

The bill increases state expenditures by \$18.8 million in FY 2025-26, \$26.1 million in FY 2026-27, and by similar amounts ongoing. These costs will be incurred in the Judicial Department, the Office of the State Public Defender (OSPD), and the Office of the Behavioral Health Court Liaison (Bridges), as shown in Table 3 and described in the sections below. Costs are paid from the General Fund.

**Table 3¹
State Expenditures
All Departments**

Department	Budget Year FY 2025-26	Out Year FY 2026-27
Judicial Department	\$12,884,521	\$18,087,940
Office of the State Public Defender	\$5,301,415	\$7,039,349
Office of the Behavioral Health Court Liaison (Bridges)	\$607,891	\$1,014,195
Total Costs	\$18,793,827	\$26,141,484

Judicial Department

The bill increases expenditures in the Judicial Department by \$12.9 million in FY 2025-26, \$18.1 million in FY 2026-27, and similar amounts ongoing to bring on the judges required by the bill and their support staff. Costs are discussed below and shown in Table 3A.

**Table 3A
State Expenditures
Judicial Department**

Cost Component	Budget Year FY 2025-26	Out Year FY 2026-27
Personal Services	\$7,291,166	\$13,276,344
Operating Expenses	\$137,530	\$243,700
Capital Outlay Costs	\$4,027,000	\$1,988,100
All Employee Insurance	\$793,379	\$1,422,370
Supplemental PERA	\$635,446	\$1,157,426
Total Costs	\$12,884,521	\$18,087,940
Total FTE	61.4 FTE	110.0 FTE

¹ Excluding capital outlay costs (if those are funded through the Long Bill rather than in this bill), total costs in the Judicial Department will increase by \$9,264,721 in FY 2025-26 and \$16,389,141 in FY 2026-27.

Judges and Support Staff

The bill adds 29 judges over two years. Specifically, 18 judges will start in August 2025 in FY 2025-26 and 11 additional judges will start in July 2026 in FY 2026-27. For each new judge, there is an associated ratio of court clerk staff, research staff, and, in some cases, administrative staff, to help manage the court room. The standard ratios used by the Judicial Department are as follows:

- a district court judge needs 3 support staff (2 clerks and 1 researcher);
- a county court judge needs 2 support staff (2 clerks); and
- an appellate judge needs 1.6 support staff (1 researcher and 0.3 each of an administrative assistant and clerk).

Using these ratios, the judges included in the bill require a total of 78 new support staff. Like the judges, these staff will phase in over two years, with 46 new support staff starting in FY 2025-26 and an additional 32 support staff starting in FY 2026-27.

Judge Operating Costs

In addition to standard operating costs, judges require additional operating costs that differ from standard state employees. This includes costs for a law library (\$2,000), robes and cleaning (\$1,500), and travel (\$1,300). Total operating costs are \$137,530 in FY 2025-26, \$243,700 in FY 2026-27 and similar amounts ongoing.

Judge Capital Outlay Costs

There are capital outlay costs for each judgeship totaling about \$4.0 million in FY 2025-26 and \$2.0 million in FY 2026-27 only. These are one-time costs, except that each judge software subscription of \$400 per year. These capital costs apply to each new district and county judge and include a courtroom (\$67,000), jury room (\$25,000), and conference room (\$4,100); furnishing the judge's office (\$30,000); installing AV equipment (\$75,000); and providing a computer and software (\$3,900). Appellate judges only require computers, furniture, and software.

Courtroom Appropriations—Via in this Bill or through the Budget

The Judicial Department has indicated that the cost for building courtrooms, jury rooms, and conference rooms; furnishing the offices; and installing AV equipment, which totals \$3.6 million in FY 2025-26 and \$1.7 million in FY 2026-27, will be requested through the annual budget process as part of a larger capital request. The fiscal note, however, includes these costs to show the total costs of expanding the number of judges and to be consistent with standard practices for fiscal notes. If the General Assembly chooses to appropriate these capital costs through the Long Bill, these amounts should be excluded from the bill's appropriation. See Table 3A and the State Appropriations section for more detail.

Central Administrative Support Staff

The Judicial Department requires 2.0 FTE to provide training to the new judges and staff, and 1.0 FTE to provide technical support to the new judges and their staff, starting August 2025.

Office of the State Public Defender

The bill increases expenditures in the OSPD by \$5.3 million in FY 2025-26, \$7.0 million in FY 2026-27, and similar amounts ongoing to add public defenders to support the additional assumed dockets (shown in Table 2). If more criminal or juvenile dockets are added than estimated here, additional public defender staffing may be required and will be requested through the annual budget process. Costs are discussed below and shown in Table 3B.

**Table 3B
State Expenditures
Office of the State Public Defender**

Cost Component	Budget Year FY 2025-26	Out Year FY 2026-27
Personal Services	\$3,898,355	\$5,457,299
Operating Expenses	\$60,160	\$84,224
Capital Outlay Costs	\$340,170	\$100,050
Attorney Registration Fees	\$51,000	\$66,000
Training	\$5,320	\$6,840
Supplemental PERA	\$601,667	\$842,331
Employee Insurance	\$344,743	\$482,605
Total Costs	\$5,301,415	\$7,039,349
Total FTE	47.0 FTE	65.8 FTE

Public Defenders and Support Staff

This bill increases the number of criminal and juvenile court dockets that must be staffed by public defenders to ensure availability of counsel for indigent offenders. Based on the 21 assumed criminal and juvenile dockets, and assuming 2 attorneys per criminal docket, 2 attorneys for the 17th District Court’s all-juvenile docket, and 1 attorney for each mixed juvenile dockets, a total of 36 public defenders are required. Of these, 28 public defenders will start August 2025, and the remaining 8 will start July 2026.

The addition of 36 public defenders requires 29.8 FTE for support staff, including investigators (at a 1-to-5 attorney ratio), legal assistants (at a 1-to-6 attorney ratio), administrative assistants (at a 1-to-4 attorney ratio), and central staff (at 4.5 percent of trial office staff). Of these, 23.2 FTE support staff will start August 2025, and the remaining 6.6 FTE will start July 2026.

Public Defender Operating and Capital Outlay

Standard operating and capital outlay costs are included for each new staff, as well as costs for training and attorney fees, where applicable.

Office of the Behavioral Health Court Liaison (Bridges)

The bill increases expenditures in Bridges by \$610,000 in FY 2025-26, \$1.0 million in FY 2026-27, and similar amounts ongoing to add Bridges staff to support the additional assumed dockets (shown in Table 2). If more criminal or juvenile dockets are added than estimated here, additional Bridges staffing may be required and will be requested through the annual budget process. Costs are discussed below and shown in Table 3C.

**Table 3C
State Expenditures
Office of the Behavioral Health Court Liaison (Bridges)**

Cost Component	Budget Year FY 2025-26	Out Year FY 2026-27
Personal Services	\$453,937	\$784,776
Operating Expenses	\$5,888	\$10,240
Capital Outlay Costs	\$33,350	\$20,010
Travel	\$15,354	\$26,800
Centrally Appropriated Costs	\$99,362	\$172,369
Total Costs	\$607,891	\$1,014,195
Total FTE	4.6 FTE	8.0 FTE

Bridges Staff, Staff Support, and Operating and Capital Costs

Similar to OSPD, the increase in the number of criminal and juvenile court dockets will increase the work to Bridges liaisons to represent defendants who are found incompetent to proceed. Bridges requires a total of 6.0 FTE liaisons, 1.0 FTE manager for the new liaisons, and 1.0 FTE data analyst to manage increased reporting. It is assumed four liaisons and the manager will start in August 2025 and the remaining two liaisons will start in July 2026. Standard operating and capital outlay costs are included for these staff.

Independent Judicial Agencies

The bill may impact workload for the Office of the Alternate Defense Counsel, the Office of the Child Representative, the Office of Respondent Parents’ Counsel, and the Office of the Public Guardianship due to the additional dockets. However, because the majority of these agencies use contract attorneys and the bill is not expected to impact the overall number of contract hours required, and because the bill is not expected to greatly impact cases involving guardianship, no change in appropriation is required for these agencies.

Governor's Office

Workload will increase in the Governor's Office of Boards and Commissions to make the required appointments under the bill, including recruiting, vetting, and interviewing potential appointees, and following the appointment through the Senate confirmation process. Based on the cumulative impact of all legislation, the Governor's Office may seek funding through the annual budget process, as necessary.

Employee Insurance and Supplemental Retirement

Pursuant to fiscal note and Joint Budget Committee policy, centrally appropriated costs for bills involving more than 20 FTE are appropriated in the bill, rather than through the annual budget process. These costs, which include employee insurance and supplemental employee retirement payments for the Judicial Department and the Office of the Public Defender, are shown in Tables 3A and 3B, respectively.

Centrally Appropriated Costs

Pursuant to a Joint Budget Committee policy, certain costs associated with this bill are addressed through the annual budget process and centrally appropriated in the Long Bill or supplemental appropriations bills, rather than in this bill. This is the case for the Office of the Behavioral Health Court Liaison, as shown in Table 3C.

Local Government

Beginning in FY 2025-26, this bill increases district attorney, court security, and court facility costs for counties as described below.

District Attorneys

Statewide, costs to district attorney offices will increase by \$7.5 million in FY 2025-26 and \$10.0 million in FY 2026-27, with similar amounts ongoing. District attorney offices are funded by counties.

District Attorney and Support Staff

Costs to district attorney offices assume 2 deputy district attorneys are required for each of the 21 criminal and juvenile court dockets (shown in Table 2), and that each docket requires 1 support staff and 0.5 investigator. This results in the addition of 31 deputy district attorneys, 16 support staff, and 8 investigators in FY 2025-26, for a total of 55 staff, which grows to 41 deputy district attorneys, 21 support staff, and 10.5 investigators in FY 2026-27 when the new judgeships are fully implemented. On average, it is estimated that each new docket will increase district attorney costs by about \$480,000 per year.

Sheriffs

Overall costs for county sheriffs statewide will increase by approximately \$3 million per year. The addition of 29 judges increases court security costs for 1 sheriff deputy to provide court security in each of the new courtrooms, at a cost of \$103,000 per year per sheriff deputy.

Court facilities

The addition of 8 new county judges increases county court facility costs for courtroom building and remodeling, office space, staff relocations, and for other updates which include audio, video and other equipment, courtroom or office wiring, and security upgrades. As of writing, a range for upgrade costs are not available. The fiscal note will be updated if more information becomes available.

Effective Date

The bill takes effect upon signature of the Governor, or upon becoming law without his signature.

State Appropriations

For FY 2025-26, the bill requires General Fund appropriations totaling \$18.7 million, as detailed below.

- **Judicial Department.** The Judicial Department requires an appropriation of \$12,884,521 and 61.4 FTE. Of this amount, \$3,619,800 for capital construction may be appropriated through the Long Bill. If this occurs, the capital construction appropriations should be excluded from this bill, resulting in the need for an appropriation of \$9,264,721 in this bill.
- **Office of State Public Defender.** The office requires an appropriation of \$5,301,415 and 47.0 FTE.
- **Office of the Behavioral Health Court Liaison.** The office requires an appropriation of \$508,529 and 4.6 FTE. Because the staffing increases by less than 20 FTE, centrally appropriated costs are not included in the appropriation amount for the bill.

State and Local Government Contacts

Alternate Defense Counsel

Bridges

Counties

Denver County Courts

District Attorneys

Governor's Office

Judicial

Office of the Child Protection Ombudsman

Office of the Child's Representative

Office of Respondent Parents' Counsel

Office of the Public Defender

Office of Public Guardianship

Sheriffs