



Fiscal Note

Legislative Council Staff

Nonpartisan Services for Colorado’s Legislature

SB 25-024: JUDICIAL OFFICERS

Prime Sponsors:

Sen. Roberts; Frizell
Rep. Carter; Soper

Fiscal Analyst:

Aaron Carpenter, 303-866-4918
aaron.carpenter@coleg.gov

Published for: House Judiciary

Drafting number: LLS 25-0445

Version: Third Revised Note

Date: February 27, 2025

Fiscal note status: This revised fiscal note reflects the reengrossed bill.

Summary Information

Overview. The bill increases the number of district and county judges by 15 judges over two years.

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 includes an appropriation of \$3.26 million to the Judicial Department; however, the fiscal note estimates the bill requires an appropriation of \$3.34 million. See Table 1B and the State Appropriations section for more detail.

**Table 1
State Fiscal Impacts**

Type of Impact ¹	Budget Year FY 2025-26	Out Year FY 2026-27	Out Year FY 2027-28
State Revenue	\$0	\$0	\$0
State Expenditures ²	\$3,897,195	\$12,231,280	\$11,391,400
Transferred Funds	\$0	\$0	\$0
Change in TABOR Refunds	\$0	\$0	\$0
Change in State FTE	24.9 FTE	86.9 FTE	86.9 FTE

¹ Fund sources for these impacts are shown in the tables below. Note that the figures in Table 1 reflect the LCS estimates for this bill. Currently, the bill’s appropriation differs from these amounts by not including an appropriation for the Bridges program. Table 1B below summarizes the difference between the LCS estimate and the included appropriations for FY 2025-26.

² Estimated state expenditures currently include capital outlay costs. If these costs are funded through the Long Bill instead, total costs will be \$3,494,995 in FY 2025-26 and \$11,754,080 in FY 2026-27.

**Table 1A
State Expenditures**

Fund Source	Budget Year FY 2025-26	Out Year FY 2026-27	Out Year FY 2027-28
General Fund	\$3,339,381	\$10,303,880	\$9,464,000
Cash Funds	\$0	\$0	\$0
Federal Funds	\$0	\$0	\$0
Centrally Appropriated	\$557,814	\$1,927,400	\$1,927,400
Total Expenditures	\$3,897,195	\$12,231,280	\$11,391,400
Total FTE	24.9 FTE	86.9 FTE	86.9 FTE

**Table 1B
Comparison of LCS Fiscal Note Estimate and
FY 2025-26 Appropriations Included in Bill¹**

Department	LCS Estimate	Current Appropriation	Difference
Judicial Department / Trial Courts	\$2,638,326	\$2,638,326	\$0
Office of State Public Defenders	\$621,337	\$621,337	\$0
Office of the Behavioral Health Court Liaison (Bridges)	\$79,718	\$0	-\$79,718
Total Appropriations	\$3,339,381	\$3,259,663	-\$79,718

¹ Fiscal notes reflect the nonpartisan fiscal assessment of Legislative Council Staff. However, fiscal notes are decision-making tools for the General Assembly and it is the General Assembly that determines how much funding is appropriated to state agencies. Table 1B highlights the differences between the LCS estimate identified in this fiscal note and appropriation decisions made by the General Assembly for the bill thus far in the legislative process.

Summary of Legislation and Assumptions

Subject to available appropriations, the bill increases the number of district and county judges in Colorado by 15, 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 Types¹**

Court	Current → New Judge Total	Judges Starting 2025	Judges Starting 2026	Total New Judges	Assumed Docket Type	Criminal Dockets
4 th District	24 → 26	1	1	2	1 civil, 1 domestic	0
7 th District	5 → 6	0	1	1	All cases	1
13 th District	5 → 6	0	1	1	All cases	1
17 th District	16 → 18	1	1	2	1 domestic, 1 D&N	0
18 th District	17 → 19	1	1	2	1 civil, 1 domestic	0
19 th District	11 → 12	0	1	1	All cases	1
23 rd District	8 → 9	1	0	1	Criminal	1
Larimer County	5 → 6	0	1	1	Civil	0
Douglas County	3 → 4	0	1	1	Criminal	1
La Plata County	1 → 2	1	0	1	All cases	1
Mesa County	3 → 4	0	1	1	All cases	1
Eagle County	1 → 2	0	1	1	All cases	1
Total	187 → 202	5	10	15		8

¹ Docket assumptions are from a Judicial Department survey; the four docket types are criminal, civil, dependency & neglect, and domestic relations. Criminal dockets drive impacts for the OSPD, Bridges, and district attorneys.

State Expenditures

The bill is projected to increase state expenditures by \$3.9 million in FY 2025-26, \$12.2 million in FY 2026-27, and \$11.4 million in FY 2027-28 and 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 3
State Expenditures
All Departments**

Department	Budget Year FY 2025-26	Out Year FY 2026-27	Out Year FY 2027-28
Judicial Department	\$3,045,958	\$8,655,524	\$7,975,724
Office of the State Public Defender	\$756,398	\$3,224,595	\$3,077,855
Office of the Behavioral Health Court Liaison (Bridges)	\$94,839	\$351,161	\$337,821
Total Costs	\$3,897,195	\$12,231,280	\$11,391,400

Judicial Department

The bill increases expenditures in the Judicial Department by \$3.0 million in FY 2025-26, \$8.7 million in FY 2026-27, and \$8.0 million in FY 2027-28 and 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	Out Year FY 2027-28
Personal Services	\$2,081,921	\$6,548,211	\$6,548,211
Operating Expenses	\$38,705	\$124,250	\$124,250
Capital Outlay Costs	\$517,700	\$701,800	\$22,000
Centrally Appropriated	\$407,632	\$1,281,263	\$1,281,263
Total Costs	\$3,045,958	\$8,655,524	\$7,975,724
Total FTE	17.5 FTE	55.0 FTE	55.0 FTE

¹ Judicial Department expenditures include capital outlay costs for new courtrooms. If those are funded through the Long Bill rather than in this bill, total costs in the Judicial Department will decrease to \$2,643,758 in FY 2025-26 and \$8,178,324 in FY 2026-27.

Judges and Support Staff

The bill adds 15 judges over two years. Specifically, 5 judges will start in August of FY 2025-26 and 10 additional judges will start in July of 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:

- for a district court judge, 3 support staff (2 clerks and 1 researcher); and
- for a county court judge, 2 support staff (2 clerks).

Using these ratios, the judges included in the bill require a total of 40 new support staff. Like the judges, these staff will phase in over two years, with 14 support staff starting in FY 2025-26, and 26 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).

Judge Capital Outlay Costs

There are capital outlay costs for each judgeship totaling about \$420,000 in FY 2025-26, \$514,000 in FY 2026-27, and \$6,000 in FY 2027-28 and ongoing. These are one-time costs, except that each judge requires a software subscription of \$400 per year.

In addition to standard capital costs of providing a computer and software (\$3,900), there are capital costs to renovate courtrooms. The Judicial Department has identified 2 courtrooms in FY 2025-26 and 2 courtrooms in FY 2026-27 that require renovations, and 1 courtroom in FY 2026-27 that requires AV upgrades. These costs include renovating a courtroom (\$67,000), jury room (\$25,000), and conference room (\$4,100); furnishing a judge's office (\$30,000); and installing AV equipment (\$75,000).

Courtroom Appropriations—Fiscal Note or Budget

The Judicial Department has indicated that the cost for building courtrooms, jury rooms, and conference rooms, furnishing offices, and installing AV equipment—which totals \$402,200 in FY 2025-26 and \$477,200 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. Currently, the FY 2025-26 appropriation included in the bill includes funding for these courtroom capital expenses. 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.

Office of the State Public Defender

The bill is projected to increase expenditures in the OSPD by \$756,000 in FY 2025-26, \$3.2 million in FY 2026-27, and \$3.1 million in FY 2027-28 and ongoing to add public defenders to support the additional assumed criminal dockets (shown in Table 2). If more criminal 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	Out Year FY 2027-28
Personal Services	\$557,311	\$2,420,585	\$2,420,585
Operating Expenses	\$8,576	\$37,376	\$37,376
Capital Outlay Costs	\$46,690	\$146,740	\$0
Attorney Registration Fees	\$8,000	\$29,000	\$29,000
Training	\$760	\$3,040	\$3,040
Centrally Appropriated Costs	\$135,061	\$587,854	\$587,854
Total Costs	\$756,398	\$3,224,595	\$3,077,855
Total FTE	6.7 FTE	29.2 FTE	29.2 FTE

Public Defenders and Support Staff

This bill increases the number of criminal dockets that must be staffed by public defenders to ensure availability of counsel for indigent offenders. Based on the 8 assumed criminal dockets, and assuming 2 attorneys per criminal docket, a total of 16 public defenders are required. Of these, 4 public defenders will start August 2025, and 12 will start July 2026.

The addition of 16 public defenders requires 13.2 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, 3.3 FTE support staff will start August 2025, 9.9 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 is projected to increase expenditures in Bridges by \$95,000 in FY 2025-26, \$351,000 in FY 2026-27, and \$338,000 in FY 2027-28 and ongoing to add Bridges staff to support the additional assumed criminal dockets (shown in Table 2). If more criminal dockets are added than estimated here, additional Bridges staffing may be required. Costs are discussed below and shown in Table 3C. Currently, the bill does not include appropriations to the Bridges Program for these estimated costs.

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

Cost Component	Budget Year FY 2025-26	Out Year FY 2026-27	Out Year FY 2027-28
Personal Services	\$69,081	\$266,032	\$266,032
Operating Expenses	\$896	\$3,456	\$3,456
Capital Outlay Costs	\$6,670	\$13,340	\$0
Travel	\$3,071	\$10,050	\$10,050
Centrally Appropriated Costs	\$15,121	\$58,283	\$58,283
Total Costs	\$94,839	\$351,161	\$337,821
Total FTE	0.7 FTE	2.7 FTE	2.7 FTE

Bridges Staff, Staff Support, and Operating and Capital Costs

Similar to OSPD, the increase in the number of criminal court dockets will increase the work to Bridges liaisons to represent defendants who are found incompetent to proceed. Bridges requires a total of 2 liaisons, 0.4 manager for the new liaisons, and 0.3 support staff. It is assumed 0.5 liaisons, 0.1 manager and 0.1 staff support will start in August 2025, and 1.5 liaisons, 0.3 manager, and 0.2 staff support 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.

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. These costs, which may include employee insurance, supplemental employee retirement payments, indirect cost assessments, and other costs, are shown in the tables above.

Local Government

Beginning in FY 2025-26, this bill increases county costs for district attorney, sheriffs, and court facilities, as described below.

District Attorneys

Statewide, costs to district attorney offices statewide will increase by \$0.9 million in FY 2025-26, and \$3.7 million in FY 2026-27 and 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 8 criminal dockets (shown in Table 2), and that each docket requires 1 support staff and 0.5 investigator. This results in the addition of 4 deputy district attorneys, 2 support staff, and 1 investigator in FY 2025-26, for a total of 7 staff, which grows to 15 deputy district attorneys, 8 support staff, and 4 investigators in FY 2026-27, for a total of 27 staff 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 \$1.5 million per year once all judges are fully implemented. The addition of 15 judges increases court security costs for 1 sheriff deputy to provide court security in each of the new courtrooms, at an annual cost of \$103,000 per county sheriff department.

Court Facilities

Similar to the state, the addition of new judges increases county court facility costs for courtroom building or remodeling, staff relocations, and other updates which may include audio and video equipment, technology, and facilities 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 includes a General Fund appropriation of \$3.26 million to the Judicial Department and Office of the State Public Defender. However, the fiscal note estimates the bill requires General Fund appropriations totaling \$3.34 million, which include costs for the Bridges Program. Appropriations are detailed below. A comparison between the LCS estimate and appropriations currently included in the bill is also provided in Table 1B.

- **Judicial Department.** The bill requires and includes an appropriation of \$2,638,326 and 17.5 FTE to the Judicial Department. Of this amount, \$402,200 for capital construction is currently included in the bill's appropriation, but this funding may instead 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 \$2,236,126 in this bill.
- **Office of State Public Defender.** The bill requires and includes an appropriation of \$621,337 and 6.7 FTE to the Office of the State Public Defender in the Judicial Department.
- **Office of the Behavioral Health Court Liaison.** The bill requires, but does not include, an appropriation of \$79,718 and 0.7 FTE to the Bridges Program in the Judicial Department.

State and Local Government Contacts

Bridges	Public Guardianship
Judicial	Sheriffs
Public Defender	

The revenue and expenditure impacts in this fiscal note represent changes from current law under the bill for each fiscal year. For additional information about fiscal notes, please visit the [General Assembly website](#).