



Circuit Court

RECOMMENDED FY26 BUDGET

\$20,548,763

FULL TIME EQUIVALENTS

129.00

JAMES A. BONIFANT, ADMINISTRATIVE JUDGE

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Circuit Court is to serve Sixth Judicial Circuit residents in the determination of litigation in serious criminal matters, substantive civil cases, domestic cases, and child support cases in accordance with the United States and Maryland Constitutions while administering justice in an honest, fair, and efficient manner.

BUDGET OVERVIEW

The total recommended FY26 Operating Budget for the Circuit Court is \$20,548,763, an increase of \$1,158,997 or 5.98 percent from the FY25 Approved Budget of \$19,389,766. Personnel Costs comprise 85.87 percent of the budget for 127 full-time position(s) and four part-time position(s), and a total of 129.00 FTEs. Total FTEs may include seasonal or temporary positions and may also reflect workforce charged to or from other departments or funds. Operating Expenses account for the remaining 14.13 percent of the FY26 budget.

COUNTY PRIORITY OUTCOMES

While this program area supports all seven of the County Executive's Priority Outcomes, the following are emphasized:

- Thriving Youth and Families**
- Safe Neighborhoods**
- Effective, Sustainable Government**

INNOVATIONS AND PRODUCTIVITY IMPROVEMENTS

- Initiated Expanded Voir Dire, a pilot program running from January 1, 2025, through June 2025, which studies the impact of expanded jury selection effectiveness, case management, and public perception of the trial process.
- Expanded the Problem Solving Court, including Montgomery County Driving Under the Influence (DUI) Court which began in October 2023.
- Augmented the Family Law grant to include a new Case Manger to address an uptick in special juvenile immigration status case matters over the last two years.
- Instituted a Justice/Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) Coordinator to develop and execute outreach and marketing strategies about Court proceedings at local schools.

PROGRAM CONTACTS

Contact Timothy H. Sheridan of the Circuit Court at 240-777-9102 or Derrick Harrigan of the Office of Management and Budget at 240-777-2759 for more information regarding this department's operating budget.

PROGRAM PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Performance measures for this department are included below (where applicable), with multi-program measures displayed at the front of this section and program-specific measures shown with the relevant program. The FY25 estimates reflect funding based on the FY25 Approved Budget. The FY26 and FY27 figures are performance targets based on the FY26 Recommended Budget and funding for comparable service levels in FY27.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS

Adjudication

Adjudication encompasses support staff for the Judiciary, Case Management, and Data Quality. Conceptually, this division monitors case assignments (criminal, civil, and family cases), provides expedited case disposition for incarcerated offenders, and provides supervision consistent with the complexity of each case filed. Adjudication and case management improve the efficiency of case processing and reduce the demand for judicial intervention at various stages of litigation. To minimize case delay, each case is assigned to an appropriate track that allows for the performance of pre-trial tasks and allocates the appropriate level of judicial intervention. Tracks are monitored for performance and are evaluated based on established performance measures. The Data Quality department maintains the integrity of the information the Court generates and improves the quality of the data the Court collects.

FY26 Recommended Changes	Expenditures	FTEs
FY25 Approved	4,538,183	35.50
Increase Cost: Adjustment to Compensation for Judicial Support	28,596	0.00
Multi-program adjustments, including negotiated compensation changes, employee benefit changes, changes due to staff turnover, reorganizations, and other budget changes affecting multiple programs.	557,087	0.50
FY26 Recommended	5,123,866	36.00

Administration

The Administrative Office of the Circuit Court serves as a conduit for many operations of the Court. The Court Administrator's role is to facilitate the administrative functions of the Court and to develop policies to enhance systems performance, while maintaining the independence of the Judiciary. Basic functions performed by the Court Administrator and staff include the following: fiscal administration of the budget, human resources, case flow management and statistics, technology management, information management, jury management, space management, intergovernmental liaison, and public information.

The Trial Court Researchers, funded in part by the Trial Court Research Partnership Grant, provide research and statistical support for judiciary-wide research projects; prepare reports based on statistics and other data collected from the Montgomery County Circuit Court; establish links to national research/statistical sources relative to courts; and analyze court-wide programs,

functions, and organizations to determine whether current management systems accomplish objectives efficiently.

Program Performance Measures	Actual FY23	Actual FY24	Estimated FY25	Target FY26	Target FY27
Case Clearance Rate (includes re-opened cases) - Civil	96.0%	96.5%	91.2%	92.0%	91.2%
Case Filings (includes re-opened cases) - Civil	8,082	7,938	9,301	9,832	10,528
Case Terminations (includes re-opened cases) - Civil (including District Court appeals)	7,761	7,662	8,478	9,046	9,598
Case Clearance Rate (includes re-opened cases) - Criminal	100.4%	99.5%	93.5%	92.5%	90.4%
Case Filings (includes re-opened cases) - Criminal	4,061	4,479	4,830	5,171	5,518
Case Terminations (includes re-opened cases) - Criminal (including District Court appeals)	4,078	4,455	4,514	4,783	4,991
Case Clearance Rate (includes re-opened cases) - Domestic Relations	97.4%	101.4%	99.2%	101.2%	101.9%
Case Filings (includes re-opened cases) - Domestic Relations	10,854	11,477	12,397	13,243	14,080
Case Terminations (includes re-opened cases) - Domestic Relations	10,576	11,632	12,292	13,402	14,345
Case Clearance Rate (includes re-opened cases) - Juvenile	99.8%	90.6%	95.8%	94.0%	93.9%
Case Filings (includes re-opened cases) - Juvenile	1,255	1,952	2,431	3,023	3,588
Case Terminations (includes re-opened cases) - Juvenile (including Delinquency, CINA, and TPR)	1,253	1,769	2,330	2,843	3,368
Case Clearance Rate	97.6%	98.7%	95.4%	96.2%	95.8%
Number of Case Filings	24,252	25,846	28,960	31,269	33,712
Number of Case Terminations	23,668	25,518	27,614	30,073	32,301
Number of Trials	1,828	1,993	2,109	2,267	2,407

FY26 Recommended Changes	Expenditures	FTEs
FY25 Approved	3,050,574	9.28
Add: Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) Grant to Support the Problem Solving Court	72,440	0.00
Shift: Rebalance Positions Charged to the Grant and General Fund to Align with Available Grant Allocation	65,059	0.50
Increase Cost: Change in Position Status from Part-time to Full-time to Support the Senior Judge's Coordinator	62,136	0.50
Shift: Rebalance Expenditures Charged to the Grant and General Fund to Align With Available Grant Allocation	(6,729)	0.00
Multi-program adjustments, including negotiated compensation changes, employee benefit changes, changes due to staff turnover, reorganizations, and other budget changes affecting multiple programs.	(82,759)	(1.00)
FY26 Recommended	3,160,721	9.28

Case Assignment

The Assignment Office schedules and maintains all hearings, trials, and motion dates as well as special event dates for Judges and Family Magistrates of the Court and ensures that these events are scheduled in accordance with the Court's Differentiated Case Management (DCM) plans. The Assignment Office maintains all scheduling information related to criminal indictments and information; criminal jury demands and appeals; civil, juvenile, and family trial assignments; civil, family, and juvenile motions; and bench warrants. The Assignment Office also manages all courtroom information sheets, locates all files for assigned calendars, reviews each file, and delivers files.

FY26 Recommended Changes	Expenditures	FTEs
FY25 Approved	1,554,646	14.00
Multi-program adjustments, including negotiated compensation changes, employee benefit changes, changes due to staff turnover, reorganizations, and other budget changes affecting multiple programs.	119,367	0.00
FY26 Recommended	1,674,013	14.00

Family Division Services

This program provides a variety of services for children and families, most of them funded by the Family Law Grant. Services include case managers that provide day-to-day management of cases supported by Family Magistrates, Judges, counsel, and litigants; custody mediation involving litigants in an effort to obtain a settlement of custody issues prior to litigation; the Family Law Self Help Center staffed by attorneys to help individuals representing themselves in uncomplicated family law cases involving divorce, custody, and child support; psychological evaluations when psychological testing is necessary as an adjunct to arriving at a decision in the best interest of the children; best interest attorney appointments to specifically represent the interests of children; and operating expenses associated with managing the division.

Family Division Services also handles adoption investigations, as well as child custody and visitation evaluations. After the establishment of a Court Order, independent evaluations for child custody and visitation and adoption investigations are conducted by Court staff possessing substantial experience in social science or suitable credentials in the field of social work. The evaluator meets with the litigants and children and interviews professionals and collateral references to ascertain the appropriate custodial situation for the children.

The Court has an initiative that is allowing litigants to meet with a courthouse appointed mediator at no cost to the community. This is a response to the pandemic to allow litigants to have a licensed mediator to help them reach an agreement before going to trial.

The Juvenile Division is also a part of Family Division Services and is responsible for oversight of delinquency petitions, Child in Need of Assistance (CINA) petitions, Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) petitions, Voluntary Placement petitions, and Petitions for Peace Orders. These matters, which are governed by strict statutory timeframes, require a high degree of judicial oversight by the Court on a long term basis.

FY26 Recommended Changes	Expenditures	FTEs
FY25 Approved	1,921,763	15.00
Shift: Rebalance Positions Charged to the Grant and General Fund to Align with Available Grant Allocation	66,004	0.50
Shift: State Positions Supplement Non-Departmental Account	60,756	0.00
Shift: Move Custody Evaluator Position from the General Fund to the Family Law Grant Fund	(124,334)	(1.00)
Multi-program adjustments, including negotiated compensation changes, employee benefit changes, changes due to staff turnover, reorganizations, and other budget changes affecting multiple programs.	30,695	(0.50)
FY26 Recommended	1,954,884	14.00

Family Magistrates

Family Magistrates are qualified individuals appointed by the Judges of the Circuit Court to hear family matters and make reports and recommendations based on testimony and analysis of the testimony received at hearings. Family Division Judges continue to review the recommendations, make rulings, and issue orders based on the recommendations of the Family Magistrates and any exceptions filed. The Juvenile Magistrate is an officer of the Court assigned to conduct proceedings on matters within the Juvenile Court of the Circuit Court for Montgomery County, pursuant to the Annotated Code of Maryland and the Maryland Rules, and in accordance with the Juvenile Differentiated Case Management plan, procedures, and policies. Juvenile Judges continue to review the recommendations and hear immediate reviews and exceptions in addition to other juvenile and CINA matters.

FY26 Recommended Changes	Expenditures	FTEs
FY25 Approved	618,418	6.00
Multi-program adjustments, including negotiated compensation changes, employee benefit changes, changes due to staff turnover, reorganizations, and other budget changes affecting multiple programs.	37,758	0.00
FY26 Recommended	656,176	6.00

Grants

The Family Law Grant is funded by the State Judiciary and provides services to families to reduce conflict and introduce the parties involved in litigation to problem-solving techniques to help reduce future litigation. See the Family Division Services Program for a description of the services supported by this grant.

The Trial Court Research Partnership Grant supports one Trial Court Researcher assigned to the Administration Program. This individual provides research, analysis, statistical support, and related reports on County and judiciary-wide research projects.

The Montgomery County Adult Drug Court is funded by the State Judiciary through a grant from the Office of Problem Solving Courts. The mission of the Adult Drug Court is to eliminate drug abuse, crime, and their consequences by forging continuing partnerships with the Court, health treatment providers, concerned community organizations, and law enforcement. By leveraging its partnerships and its authority, the Court directs substance-abusing offenders into evaluation and treatment to achieve personal responsibility and productive citizenship.

The Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion (DEI) Grant is funded by the State Judiciary to support one DEI Coordinator. The employee will raise awareness and support of equity, accessibility, and inclusion values. They will work on enhancing and strengthening system programs to ensure each service, program and activity operated in the Court building is readily accessible and usable by individuals with disabilities.

The Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Grant is funded by the State Judiciary to support ADR programs and projects which benefit our Court and the residents of Montgomery County. The ADR programs and projects will focus on expanding access to justice, enable the resolution of disputes with efficiency and prevent conflicts from escalating into violence or litigation.

FY26 Recommended Changes	Expenditures	FTEs
FY25 Approved	4,168,167	27.22
Increase Cost: Mediation Training - Alternative Dispute Resolution Grant	10,000	0.00
Multi-program adjustments, including negotiated compensation changes, employee benefit changes, changes due to staff turnover, reorganizations, and other budget changes affecting multiple programs.	49,038	1.00
FY26 Recommended	4,227,205	28.22

Jury

The Jury Office manages prospective and active jurors for civil and criminal proceedings. In accordance with Maryland Courts and Judicial Proceedings, Title 8, every citizen may serve as a juror and must serve when summoned. The Jury Commissioner and staff dispatch questionnaires to prospective jurors using information gathered from voter registration and Motor Vehicle

Administration listings. The Jury Commissioner maintains a qualified jury pool from the individuals who are determined to be qualified as jurors under Maryland Courts and Judicial Proceedings § 8-207.

FY26 Recommended Changes	Expenditures	FTEs
FY25 Approved	995,393	4.00
Multi-program adjustments, including negotiated compensation changes, employee benefit changes, changes due to staff turnover, reorganizations, and other budget changes affecting multiple programs.	31,814	0.00
FY26 Recommended	1,027,207	4.00

Law Library

The Law Library supports the research activities of the Court, the Bar, and the public, and is the only law library open to the public in Montgomery County. The Library has a comprehensive collection of law, including U.S. statutes and the codes of Maryland, Washington D.C., Virginia, and local ordinances. It has a complete collection of judicial opinions and a variety of subject treatises and reference materials. The Law Library also offers free access to the major online legal databases. Library staff are available to answer questions regarding the library and its collection but cannot give legal opinions or advice. The staff will provide limited assistance over the telephone and by e-mail.

FY26 Recommended Changes	Expenditures	FTEs
FY25 Approved	527,695	3.00
Multi-program adjustments, including negotiated compensation changes, employee benefit changes, changes due to staff turnover, reorganizations, and other budget changes affecting multiple programs.	32,929	0.00
FY26 Recommended	560,624	3.00

Technical Services

Technical Services is responsible for every aspect of the Court's information systems. The duties of, and services performed, range from installing and maintaining server/PC hardware and software applications to designing and troubleshooting complex computer networks and information databases. The department manages the electronic recording of all courtroom and hearing room proceedings. All video conferencing between the Circuit Court, District Court, Montgomery County Detention Center, and Montgomery County Correctional Facility is handled through this division. This equipment is used on a daily basis in order to conduct bond hearings via a video connection. Copies of court transcripts are purchased through this division. The Court's website and internal servers for the Court and Clerk's Office are administered by Technical Services.

FY26 Recommended Changes	Expenditures	FTEs
FY25 Approved	1,687,522	12.00
Multi-program adjustments, including negotiated compensation changes, employee benefit changes, changes due to staff turnover, reorganizations, and other budget changes affecting multiple programs.	112,844	0.00
FY26 Recommended	1,800,366	12.00

Trust and Guardianships

The Trust Office administers the case files for fiduciary entities (primarily guardianships) who are required to comply with the reporting requirements set forth in the Maryland Court Rules, Title 10, Guardians and Other Fiduciaries. The reports required to be filed include the Inventory and Information Report and Annual Fiduciary Report for guardianships of the property of a minor or disabled person and the Annual Report of the guardianship of the person. The Trust Clerk examines the Annual Fiduciary

Reports filed and prepares the Report of Trust Clerk for the Court.

FY26 Recommended Changes	Expenditures	FTEs
FY25 Approved	327,405	2.50
Multi-program adjustments, including negotiated compensation changes, employee benefit changes, changes due to staff turnover, reorganizations, and other budget changes affecting multiple programs.	36,296	0.00
FY26 Recommended	363,701	2.50

BUDGET SUMMARY

	Actual FY24	Budget FY25	Estimate FY25	Recommended FY26	%Chg Bud/Rec
COUNTY GENERAL FUND					
EXPENDITURES					
Salaries and Wages	8,966,588	9,608,457	9,732,036	10,431,167	8.6 %
Employee Benefits	2,924,660	3,061,130	3,102,211	3,382,945	10.5 %
County General Fund Personnel Costs	11,891,248	12,669,587	12,834,247	13,814,112	9.0 %
Operating Expenses	2,263,885	2,552,012	2,691,276	2,507,446	-1.8 %
County General Fund Expenditures	14,155,133	15,221,599	15,525,523	16,321,558	7.2 %
PERSONNEL					
Full-Time	99	99	99	99	—
Part-Time	4	4	4	3	-25.0 %
FTEs	101.60	101.28	101.28	100.78	-0.5 %
REVENUES					
State Jury Fee Reimbursement	744,570	1,165,570	1,165,570	1,165,570	—
Miscellaneous Revenues	54,286	55,230	55,230	55,230	—
County General Fund Revenues	798,856	1,220,800	1,220,800	1,220,800	—
GRANT FUND - MCG					
EXPENDITURES					
Salaries and Wages	2,290,329	2,926,106	2,926,106	2,865,349	-2.1 %
Employee Benefits	771,566	929,002	929,002	966,357	4.0 %
Grant Fund - MCG Personnel Costs	3,061,895	3,855,108	3,855,108	3,831,706	-0.6 %
Operating Expenses	196,298	313,059	313,059	395,499	26.3 %
Grant Fund - MCG Expenditures	3,258,193	4,168,167	4,168,167	4,227,205	1.4 %
PERSONNEL					
Full-Time	25	27	27	28	3.7 %
Part-Time	1	1	1	1	—
FTEs	24.90	27.22	27.22	28.22	3.7 %
REVENUES					
State Grants	3,241,383	4,168,167	4,168,167	4,227,205	1.4 %
Grant Fund - MCG Revenues	3,241,383	4,168,167	4,168,167	4,227,205	1.4 %

DEPARTMENT TOTALS

BUDGET SUMMARY

	Actual FY24	Budget FY25	Estimate FY25	Recommended FY26	%Chg Bud/Rec
Total Expenditures	17,413,326	19,389,766	19,693,690	20,548,763	6.0 %
Total Full-Time Positions	124	126	126	127	0.8 %
Total Part-Time Positions	5	5	5	4	-20.0 %
Total FTEs	126.50	128.50	128.50	129.00	0.4 %
Total Revenues	4,040,239	5,388,967	5,388,967	5,448,005	1.1 %

FY26 RECOMMENDED CHANGES

	Expenditures	FTEs
COUNTY GENERAL FUND		
FY25 ORIGINAL APPROPRIATION	15,221,599	101.28
<u>Other Adjustments (with no service impacts)</u>		
Increase Cost: FY26 Compensation Adjustment	720,124	0.00
Increase Cost: Annualization of FY25 Compensation Increases	304,222	0.00
Increase Cost: Annualization of FY25 Personnel Costs	90,283	0.00
Increase Cost: Change in Position Status from Part-time to Full-time to Support the Senior Judge's Coordinator [Administration]	62,136	0.50
Shift: State Positions Supplement Non-Departmental Account [Family Division Services]	60,756	0.00
Increase Cost: Adjustment to Compensation for Judicial Support [Adjudication]	28,596	0.00
Increase Cost: Retirement Adjustment	9,471	0.00
Increase Cost: Motor Pool Adjustment	2,565	0.00
Shift: Rebalance Expenditures Charged to the Grant and General Fund to Align With Available Grant Allocation [Administration]	(6,729)	0.00
Decrease Cost: Printing and Mail Adjustment	(47,131)	0.00
Shift: Move Custody Evaluator Position from the General Fund to the Family Law Grant Fund [Family Division Services]	(124,334)	(1.00)
FY26 RECOMMENDED	16,321,558	100.78
GRANT FUND - MCG		
FY25 ORIGINAL APPROPRIATION	4,168,167	27.22
<u>Federal/State Programs</u>		
Add: Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) Grant to Support the Problem Solving Court	72,440	0.00
<u>Other Adjustments (with no service impacts)</u>		
Shift: Rebalance Positions Charged to the Grant and General Fund to Align with Available Grant Allocation [Family Division Services]	66,004	0.50
Shift: Rebalance Positions Charged to the Grant and General Fund to Align with Available Grant Allocation [Administration]	65,059	0.50
Increase Cost: Mediation Training - Alternative Dispute Resolution Grant [Grants]	10,000	0.00
Decrease Cost: Annualization of FY25 Personnel Costs	(154,465)	0.00

FY26 RECOMMENDED CHANGES

	Expenditures	FTEs
FY26 RECOMMENDED	4,227,205	28.22

PROGRAM SUMMARY

Program Name	FY25 APPR Expenditures	FY25 APPR FTEs	FY26 REC Expenditures	FY26 REC FTEs
Adjudication	4,538,183	35.50	5,123,866	36.00
Administration	3,050,574	9.28	3,160,721	9.28
Case Assignment	1,554,646	14.00	1,674,013	14.00
Family Division Services	1,921,763	15.00	1,954,884	14.00
Family Magistrates	618,418	6.00	656,176	6.00
Grants	4,168,167	27.22	4,227,205	28.22
Jury	995,393	4.00	1,027,207	4.00
Law Library	527,695	3.00	560,624	3.00
Technical Services	1,687,522	12.00	1,800,366	12.00
Trust and Guardianships	327,405	2.50	363,701	2.50
Total	19,389,766	128.50	20,548,763	129.00

FUNDING PARAMETER ITEMS

CE RECOMMENDED (\$000S)

Title	FY26	FY27	FY28	FY29	FY30	FY31
COUNTY GENERAL FUND						
EXPENDITURES						
FY26 Recommended	16,322	16,322	16,322	16,322	16,322	16,322
No inflation or compensation change is included in outyear projections.						
Labor Contracts	0	153	153	153	153	153
These figures represent the estimated annualized cost of general wage adjustments, service increments, and other negotiated items.						
Subtotal Expenditures	16,322	16,475	16,475	16,475	16,475	16,475

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