

News Release



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Remarks of Glenn A. Grant, Acting Administrative Director of the Courts, Before the Assembly Budget Committee

Good morning, Chairwoman Pintor Marin, Vice Chair Wimberly, and the other members of the Assembly Budget Committee.

On behalf of Chief Justice Stuart Rabner and the justices of the Supreme Court, and on behalf of our judges and staff, it is my privilege to speak to you today about the Judiciary and the proposed budget for the upcoming fiscal year.

With me today are Assignment Judges Michael Toto from Middlesex, Sheila Venable of Essex, Michael Blee of Atlantic and Cape May counties, Robert Lougy of Mercer County, and Kevin Shanahan of Somerset, Hunterdon, and Warren counties. Also here today, from the Administrative Office of the Courts, are Todd McManus, who oversees the Judiciary's financial operations, and our Chief Information Officer Laks Kattalai.

I'd like to start off my remarks by expressing our appreciation for the progress made with respect to judicial vacancies. As of today, our courts operate with 39 judicial vacancies, as compared to 58 vacancies at the start of 2024 and a peak of 78 vacancies in May 2022.

With the recent addition of new judges, we are once again able to conduct civil and matrimonial trials in all vicinages across the state. The final moratorium on such cases, in our Passaic Vicinage, was lifted on April 1.

Filling judgeships requires continued vigilance, and we stand ready to provide whatever assistance might be needed to reduce the number of vacancies even further.

Years of high vacancy rates, combined with the Covid-19 pandemic and its resulting impact on staffing levels, have significantly challenged the Judiciary's ability to conduct management conferences, hearings, and trials. A growing and unmanageable backlog of court cases was the predictable result.

As of January 1, 2024, backlogged matters in the trial courts stood at 81,415, more than double the mark from June 2019.

In late March of this year, the Judiciary released its strategic plan for backlog reduction. The goal is to return to pre-pandemic backlog levels within the next three years. We are committed, as an organization, to do whatever is needed to resolve cases. Ultimately, the success of that plan will be contingent on the ability to continue to reduce the number of judicial vacancies and bring in new employees.

With that said, I want to commend our judges and court staff for their resilience during these challenging times, ensuring the Judiciary's continued service to the public.

Collaboration across the three branches of government has been pivotal to our courts and operations and more importantly allowed our organization to continue to evolve in the ways we respond to the various needs of the people of New Jersey who interact with the courts.

The most significant example of this would be the adoption of Criminal Justice Reform. Now in its eighth year, CJR has proven to be a fairer and more effective system than the former cash bail model. Part of its strength lies in its adaptability. We have recognized from the start that CJR should continually evolve according to evidence-based analysis. With that in mind, we support existing legislation that would enact the recommendations from the Joint Committee to sustain the strengths of the current system and integrate further improvements.

For decades now, we have worked together to develop solutions that protect the public while offering criminal defendants a path to rehabilitation and an opportunity to break generational cycles that only lead to more crime, more broken families, and a greater expenditure of taxpayer dollars.

Recovery court, administered by the Judiciary in close partnership with the Department of Human Services, continues to positively impact our communities in numerous ways.

Consider: the re-incarceration rate for adult offenders within three years from their release from state prison is 29.2 percent. The re-incarceration rate for recovery court participants within three years of graduating from the program is 1.9 percent.

Think about that: 29.2 percent reoffending versus 1.9 percent. Those are numbers that create a ripple effect of positive results.

We've seen dramatic increases in the percentage of recovery court participants who gain employment, the percentage of recovery court participants who obtain drivers licenses, and the percentage of recovery court participants who secure medical benefits.

The Intensive Supervision Program, groundbreaking when it was established in 1983, continues to demonstrate improved results, helping provide resources for substance abuse, mental health needs, housing, education, vocational training, and employment assistance.

In Fiscal Year 2023, the cost of ISP to the state was approximately \$35,180 per person, as compared to \$76,818 for the cost of incarceration in state prison. That means the program saved the state approximately \$19 million over the course of the fiscal year – and ISP participants had a lower re-arrest rate three years after graduation than those released from state prison did after three years.

The JOBS program (Judiciary Opportunities for Building Success) takes the positive results of those programs to the next logical step, helping connect those on probation, as well as recovery court and ISP participants, with connections to employers and job training. JOBS program partners include private corporations, public agencies, non-profit organizations, healthcare organizations, educational institutions, and government organizations.

The last program I'd like to talk about is the Gun Violence Reduction Initiative, another collaborative effort that began in the Passaic Vicinage and has now expanded to nine additional vicinages. Through the program, the Judiciary works with community leaders, third-party agencies, and service providers to connect individuals placed on probation for gun-related offenses to appropriate resources and services.

The Probation Division reviews eligible cases for presentation to the Gun Violence Reduction Initiative Advisory Board, which recommends interventions, such as counseling, mentoring programs, job training, education, and other community-

based services based on the individual's needs. To date, there are 316 participants currently in the initiative, and 226 are employed.

These meaningful, evidence-based programs are all born from a collaboration that has existed among the three branches of government for decades, going back to the adoption of the state constitution in 1947.

Through these collaborative efforts and partnerships, we have not only resolved disputes impartially, but also implemented impactful initiatives that enhance public safety and community well-being. Working together, we've saved taxpayers' dollars while implementing thoughtful, evidence-based solutions that seek to improve lives and impact our communities in a positive manner.

Thank you once again for your time and we welcome any questions you may have on our budget and operations. Thank you.

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