

## District Court 2023 Budget Supplemental Questions

### Strategic Goals

1. Provide your 2022 strategic goals; how are they different from 2022? In what way, if at all, are your strategic changes demonstrated in your budget request?

District Court has been working on a five-year long-range plan for over one year. It is near completion. The most recent draft is attached as Attachment 1. Our goals have not changed since the 2022 budget season; however, the plan has been refined and is more detailed.

Strategic goals demonstrated in our budget request include the following:

<b>Goals from Long-Range Plan</b>	<b>Budget Request</b>	<b>Priority Package</b>
Add a judicial position to meet increased needs and balance caseloads between divisions	District Court is requesting an additional judge to balance the workloads between divisions, respond to our growing population base, prepare for increased filings, adapt to the increased time needed to provide access with virtual hearings, respond to increased protection order petitions, and to increase capacity for the adoption of additional therapeutic court models.	341
Add an HR position to ensure District Court HR has the necessary staffing to meet HR needs and responsibilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure diversity in recruitment and hiring, and provide ongoing support; Advertise for openings in traditional and non-traditional recruitment sites; Create an inclusive work environment that is comfortable for all staff</li> <li>• Improve training and consistency through uniform manuals and desk books for all divisions; Develop a leadership academy; provide</li> </ul>	We are requesting an HR Coordinator to carry out recruitments, perform all HR-related data entries, onboard new employees, regularly update policies and procedures and post them on our internal and external websites, serve as DEI coordinator to develop best practices for diversity, equity, and inclusion, lead our five divisions with a unified approach to implementing and maintaining a DEI program, serve as ADA coordinator to receive and respond to ADA requests and ADA grievances, and coordinate training efforts to standardize and implement training in all five of our divisions.	342

development for promotional opportunities		
Review salaries annually to ensure salaries and benefits are in parity with similar CLJ positions	District Court requests funding to reclassify our Accounting Specialist, our Assistant Administer, and our Probation Manager to align the salaries for these positions with other county positions and positions in other courts of limited jurisdiction.	301, 342
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purchase a document management system to implement electronic court and probation files</li> <li>• Create electronic court templates for court-wide, universal use, including for probation and therapeutic court.</li> <li>• Offer online scheduling for court hearings; Offer online submission of protection order petitions and other forms</li> </ul>	District Court intends to purchase a document management system that will allow us to go paperless, to create electronic templates and forms, and to offer an online portal for filing documents. District Court is requesting funding for the annual maintenance and service fee or for other related needs associated with the document management system.	346
Enhance existing programs – Therapeutic Courts	District Court is requesting funding to pay for one-half of the annual salaries and benefits for our Mental Health Court Coordinator and LPA II for one-half of the year so that we can provide additional support and services. We have received grant funding to increase these two half-time positions to full time from January through June 2023.	344

<p>Ensure the health and safety of our staff, judges, court participants, and the public. Make improvements to our facilities in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modernize HVAC systems</li> <li>• Bring fire protection systems including fire alarms and sprinklers up to code</li> <li>• Remodel restrooms</li> </ul>	<p>District Court is requesting funding to replace outdated HVAC systems, to purchase fire protection systems that are up to current code, and to remodel public and staff restrooms that are dirty and unsanitary.</p>	<p>343</p>
--	---	------------

**National, state and local landscape:**

1. What are the federal, state and local issues facing your work? What risks or opportunities does that create for you in 2023 and beyond? What is your plan to leverage the opportunity or mitigate the risk? What support do you need?

Our revenue has decreased due to fewer stops, arrests and charges. Further, we are unable to assess or collect fines as a result of recent case decisions. We do not have control over revenue, but we still need the same resources and level of staffing.

There is increasing recognition that therapeutic courts provide for effective and compassionate accountability. Therapeutic Courts, such as Mental Health Court, Drug Court, and Veterans Courts are successful, but they are expensive because there is greater support for each individual person participating in the program. In our current environment, we need funding to support our Mental Health Court positions that are now partially funded through grants from the Administrative Office of the Courts, and to expand Mental Health Court into other therapeutic options. Further, we need funding that is consistent, not piecemeal from various sources, in order to continue and expand therapeutic options.

The 2023 legislature will likely address drug possession laws. There is a balance between strict accountability and providing leniency and therapeutic options. We do not know how the legislature will address this difficult issue. If the drug laws become stricter, we may see a large volume of cases that we do not have the resources to handle.

Significant changes in protection order legislation were made in July 2022. The new legislation makes it easy to file for protection, as it should be, but has increased the volume of filings in District Court significantly. This increased volume is making it difficult to hear these matters in a timely fashion. We are asking for funding for a new Judge and LPA II in the 2023 budget, in part to address this volume, and in part to address new business from the City of Arlington that began in 2020.

The Prosecutor’s backlog for District Court cases stemming from COVID-19, and its sequelae, has gone from 6000 in March 2022, to 7,200 in September 2022. The backlog has increased, not decreased. The

Prosecutor has hired additional staff and has indicated that it will begin to work off the backlog. If the Prosecutor files a significant percentage of this backlog, District Court will experience a flood of criminal cases that must be heard expeditiously. Again, we do not have the resources to handle a sudden flood of work.

District Court can not hire fast enough to keep pace with the number of employees who are leaving. We are making efforts to hire as quickly as possible. We are currently keeping up with the workload, but we are doing so at the risk of burning out staff. We need support from the County with funding to hire an HR coordinator to relieve our Assistant Court Administrator from performing all HR duties while still supervising five division supervisors and providing oversight of 55 staff and four court locations. We also need funding to get our document management system up and running so that we can offer staff some flexibility by occasionally allowing some work from home days.

Finally, COVID-19 is not gone. We are managing the current level of infection by using the processes we have put in place to provide protection to our staff and to the public. Although we are very hopeful and optimistic that Covid is going away, we do not know what is around the corner. We continue to need support from the County to provide PPE to our staff and the public.

2. What, if any, new mandates do you have impacting your work? Are they funded or unfunded? What is the plan for accomplishing the work?

Protection Orders – See National, state and local landscape, #1, above. The protection order legislation did not provide any funding for additional judicial resources or staffing to respond to the increased volume and complexity of protection orders. One of our judicial officers has created a streamlined electronic order which will help our judges be more efficient in managing the paperwork associated with the increased volume and complexity. We are asking for one additional judge and one additional LPA II, partly to address the effects of the protection order legislation.

The Blake Case was decided in 2020 but continues to have an impact on our work. District and Superior Courts are required to dismiss and reverse sentences on specific drug possession crimes, and refund fees and fines. Legislation implemented after the case provided funding to hire staff and refund fees and fines. Although we have funding, we are simply unable to begin a project to address the legislative mandate due to an inability to hire staff to work on the project. We hope to begin this project in 2023.

## **Programs**

1. List programs, projects and services within your department funded through federal COVID/ARPA funds. What, if any, of those programs are you recommending ongoing funding for and what is the source of ongoing funding?

We currently have a Network Administrator position and four LPA I (entry level legal assistant) positions funded through ARPA. With a very brief exception, we have not filled the LPA I positions to date due to struggles with recruitment. We have requested funding through 2024 and have been advised by the Executive that the funding has been granted through 2024.

2. What new programs are you launching for 2023? What need or efficiency is that new program addressing? How is that program funded for sustainability? What metrics are in place to determine effectiveness?

We will be launching a new document management system in 2023. District Court is currently a paper court, meaning that all court and probation files are paper. Staff process files by passing them from desk to desk. Judges are not able to review files or documents electronically. Court files are not allowed to be removed from court facilities per state court policy. During the pandemic, District Court was unable to send staff home to work because we did not have an electronic document management system. We will be far more efficient and save many trees by converting to electronic files. District Court is purchasing the system with money received from the state for trial court improvements. The Court has saved the bi-annual trial court improvement disbursements it has received for many years for this purpose. However, we are asking the County to fund the annual license and maintenance fees for three to five years. Thereafter, we will receive a new case management system with document management capabilities, through the state. We are also asking for cooperation from County IT to support us in this endeavor and to provide ongoing support if needed. There are currently no metrics in place.

We will be continuing the expansion of our Mental Health Court currently supported with grant funds through the Administrative Office of the Courts. The award total of \$196,599 has allowed us to increase our Court Program Coordinator and LPA II positions from half time to full time through June 30, 2023. We also received funding for a Case Manager through June 30, 2023. These grant funded positions have allowed our court to expand the support and services needed for our participants diagnosed with serious mental health disorders. Before this grant award, our mental health court was struggling to reach those community members involved in the criminal justice center that needed our services. The requirements for acceptance into the court, while evidence-based and in line with best practices, required a considerable amount of time, energy and effort that we simply did not have. This led to lack of referrals from attorneys, a lengthy opt-in period and an overall negative feeling about our court. With the grant funds, we have started partnerships with local treatment providers, begun building MOUs with local resources and we will be providing limited transportation to and from court-required appointments. We have also opened lines of communication with other county entities such as Human Services to build wrap-around services for our court participants. This has streamlined our referral process, reduced the amount of time a potential participant takes to opt-in to the court, and has increased interest from attorneys which will lead to more referrals. Our state grant will sustain this expansion through June 30, 2023, we are asking for an increase in fund 124 sub fund 002 1/10 of 1% sales tax, to continue the program expansion through at least December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2023. Our court utilizes a case management system, the Drug Court Case Management system, that includes the ability to pull recidivism and self-efficacy data on our past and current participants. These statistics are what we use to determine the effectiveness of our court. Past graduates have enjoyed the benefits of having stable housing, employment and some have achieved their general education degree. We believe this expansion will allow for a greater number of our County's justice-involved individuals to find success and exit the criminal justice cycle. We request Council approve our funding request through December 31, 2023.

In 2020, District Court launched virtual hearings in six weeks, from decision to start. Our technology was, and still is, rudimentary. District Court has not had the funding or the bandwidth to improve its virtual hearing technology until now. We recently received an audio-visual (AV) grant from the state in the amount of \$292,885. The grant funds will allow us to hire a vendor who will purchase and install omnidirectional XLR microphones, gooseneck XLR microphones, ethernet video cameras compatible with a QSC core 110f processor in all 11 of our courtrooms, as well as several digital document cameras and an assisted listening system compatible with a QSC core 110f processor. We are working on the project but do not expect to install the technology until 2023. The AV improvements will allow much improved sound quality and visual capabilities for all virtual court participants, including those who are in the courtroom while others appear remotely. The hearing device will provide greater access for hearing impaired persons. We do not have funding for further improvements and there are currently no metrics in place to determine effectiveness.

3. If different than #2, what are your areas of significant investment? What are you not doing because of that investment?

See #2 above. We have many other improvements we can make (see Draft Long-Range Plan, Attachment A), but at present, we are at maximum bandwidth.

## **Internal Operations**

1. What is your department doing to streamline processes or deliver services in a new way? How do your budget allocation requests play into these innovations? Are there ways which a different budget approach, e.g. several departments sharing a resource, could achieve the same or better results in a more cost-effective way?

See Programs, #2, above, regarding the document management system, the Mental Health Court expansion, and the AV improvements for virtual hearings. See Strategic Goals, #1 above regarding how our budget requests support these projects and innovations. It would be difficult to share resources with County departments as we are in a separate branch of government. However, we do receive much-appreciated assistance from various Executive branch departments including IT, HR, Finance, and Facilities. Superior Court and District Court often collaborate to share resources.

2. What, if any, hiring challenges are you experiencing? How is that affecting your level of service or internal operations? How are you mitigating those operational challenges and/or what is your plan for recruitment?

See National, state and local landscape, #1, above. We are also having difficulty because County departments are understaffed. This slows our processes that involve those departments, or which require their approval. Further, without our own HR Coordinator, our Assistant Court Administrator is forced to divide her time between recruitment efforts, supervising staff and assisting with projects. We are hindered in our recruitment by not having a dedicated HR Coordinator.

3. Please provide a list of all vacant position titles, position codes, date vacated, and date first posted. This should be a separate page or spreadsheet attachment.

See Attachment 2.

What effect has the increase of inflation and/or supply chain issues had on your department? What, if any, services, or projects have you had to adjust to accommodate for this? (i.e. moving to outside contracted services, delaying of project starts and/or purchasing, redistribution of workload, etc.)

Supply chain issues have had an impact on almost everything we need to purchase, including paper, pens, copy machines, printers, security cameras, etc. The RFP process and/or the need to involve another department already creates a delay. While we may have funding in our budget for a purchase or a project, we cannot get the vendor, items or supplies we are trying to purchase before budget year end. For example, we are trying to purchase security cameras for the exterior of our South Division courthouse which has experienced significant vandalism in the past two years. We tried to complete the project in 2021 but could not do so because the vendor could not get the supplies in time for budget year end. We are trying again in 2022, but there have been significant delays due to purchasing requirements (RFP), supply chain issues, and increased prices. Inflation has also hit our budget line items. For example, the armored car service is now more expensive, and our 2022 budget does not cover the cost, so we are borrowing from other budget line items. We had to wait many months for new copy machines and printers and had to extend the leases on the old machines which frequently malfunctioned due to age.

## **Successes**

1. Take this opportunity to share one significant success in your department over this past year. What made it a success?

In 2022, District Court applied for and was awarded three grants funded by the state legislature through the Administrative Office of the Courts. Although the application process required significant research and writing, it was much less complicated and far more expeditious than other funding we have applied for or requested. This was, in itself, a success. District Court received funding in the amount of \$90,824 to increase our Mental Health Court (MHC) Coordinator half-time position to full time and our MHC LPA II half-time position to full time as well. We also received funding in the amount of 105,599, to hire a full-time Mental Health Court Case Manager. This funding expires on June 30, 2023. Finally, we received an AV grant in the amount of \$292,885 to improve technology for our virtual hearings and in our courtrooms. In all, we received grant funds in the amount of \$489,484.

Our MHC Court Coordinator and LPA II were increased to full time in September 2022, and we are in the recruitment phase to hire the Case Manager. Our MHC staff have already started new partnerships with local treatment providers, begun building MOUs with local resources, and will begin providing limited transportation to and from court required appointments soon. We have opened lines of communication

with other county entities such as Human Services to build wrap-around services for our court participants. We have already streamlined our referral process, reduced the amount of time a potential participant takes to opt-in to the court, and increased interest from attorneys which will lead to more referrals.

We are working with the County's JOC contractor to define the scope of the AV project to fit within grant funding. We will be installing higher quality microphones, gooseneck microphones, and ethernet video cameras in all 11 of our courtrooms. We will also be purchasing several digital document cameras and an assisted listening system. The AV improvements will allow much improved sound quality and visual capabilities for all virtual court participants, including those who are in the courtroom while others appear remotely. The hearing device will provide greater access for hearing impaired persons. Additionally, the equipment will be compatible with and feed into our current recording system and will improve our hearing recordings.



**DRAFT: DISTRICT COURT LONG-RANGE PLAN – September 28, 2022****ONE: STAFF RECRUITMENT, DEVELOPMENT, AND RETENTION**

- Recruitment
  - Ensure diversity in recruitment and hiring, and provide ongoing support
  - Advertise for openings in traditional and non-traditional recruitment sites
  - Create an inclusive work environment that is comfortable for all staff
- Staff development, training, and education programs
  - Improve training and consistency through uniform manuals and desk books for all divisions
  - Develop a leadership academy; provide development for promotional opportunities
  - Conduct quarterly policies and procedures training
- Improve Retention
  - Review salaries annually to ensure salaries and benefits are in parity with similar CLJ positions
  - Support intangible benefits including flexible schedules and work from home if business operations permit
  - Improve and maintain positive morale
    - Engage in team building activities
    - Increase and improve staff recognition
  - Promote open and transparent communication with staff
    - Prioritize and institutionalize staff input
    - Promote transparency between staff, management, and judges
    - Increase internal communication through meetings, SharePoint, and court newsletter

**TWO: EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION, OUTREACH, AND RELATIONSHIPS**

- Provide excellent customer service and communication
  - Regularly review and update website to provide maximum customer service
  - Provide accurate and timely data to stakeholders
  - Hold regular stakeholder meetings
  - Consider regular staff input regarding external relationships
- Maintain reputation of distinction among CLJs statewide and in our community
  - Participate in statewide committees and organizations
  - Share successes with stakeholders and media
  - Promote positive relationships with local municipal courts
- Nurture positive relationships with stakeholders, including executive, council, superior court, prosecutor, defense bar, law enforcement, interpreters, bar membership, MH providers, our community, court participants, and jurors
- Always be transparent and accurate

**THREE: PLANNING, DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE**

- Build a leadership structure that meets the needs of the court
  - Add a judicial position to meet increased needs and balance caseloads between divisions
  - Add an HR position to ensure District Court HR has the necessary staffing to meet HR needs and responsibilities
  - Review and consider the leadership structure on a regular basis; realign and adjust as necessary to meet the needs of the court and to address new demands
- Establish formal committees and advisory positions
  - Involve and assign judges and staff from all levels
  - Establish committees that meet regularly to plan and implement goals
    - Template Committee
      - develop templates and forms
      - select forms, templates, and languages for translation
    - Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee
    - Safety Committees – one for each division as required by Labor & Industries
    - Technology Committee, with potential subcommittees
      - Communication
        - Website
        - SharePoint
      - Court Operations
        - Document management system
        - Case management system
    - Budget Committee
    - Long-Range Planning and Long-Range Implementation Committee(s)
    - Facilities and Siting Committee
  - Designate bench advisors or form ad hoc (as needed) committees for other areas
    - Probation
    - Staff training, education (establish budget), and leadership training
    - Interpreter and ADA Issues
      - translate forms
      - expand resource list and protocols for rare languages
      - ensure we have appropriate equipment
- Enhance existing programs
  - Probation
  - Dispute resolution
  - Jail alternatives
  - Expand therapeutic courts
- Support judicial education
  - Regularly include presentations at bench meetings for topics of concern; examples include bail reform, protection orders, etc.
  - Expand pro tem recruitment and augment pro tem training

- Promote court innovation and be proactive

**FOUR: DIVISION CONSISTENCY AND UNIFICATION**

- Consider and plan for future siting options for District Court
  - Make decisions and set goals for District Court siting recommendations
  - Meet with executive and council to discuss siting after developing a plan
- Create and implement division consistency
  - Establish uniform practices and procedures
  - Create universal practice and procedure manuals
  - Create uniform calendars
  - Create universal handouts for unrepresented litigants
  - Create rules for uniform data entry
- Design and use electronic forms and templates
  - Create electronic court templates for court-wide, universal use
  - Create electronic probation and therapeutic court templates
  - Create uniform electronic forms for use of all staff
- Establish style guidelines and branding
- Be innovative, maximize efficiency and cost-effectiveness, and make data-based decisions without sacrificing access to justice
- Balance caseloads from division to division

**Five: FACILITIES, SAFETY AND HEALTH**

- Ensure the health and safety of our staff, judges, court participants, and the public
- Meet ADA requirements and endeavor to meet ADA needs even when not required
- Make improvements to our facilities in the following areas:
  - Reconfigure in-court clerk workstations
  - Modernize HVAC systems
  - Bring fire protection systems including fire alarms and sprinklers up to code
  - Remodel restrooms
  - Install security cameras as needed
  - Remodel kitchens
  - Install new carpets
  - Remove file storage when document management system is implemented
  - Purchase and install ergonomic workstations

**SIX: TECHNOLOGY**

- Improve technology for court-wide use
  - Purchase a document management system to implement electronic court and probation files
  - Employ a new case management system when provided by AOC
  - Design and implement a SharePoint website for internal court use
- Improve technology in the courtroom

- Purchase and install new audio and video equipment to improve the virtual hearing experience
- Improve the way we utilize Zoom or any other virtual platform
- Enhance technology for trials
- Install and refine the use of a new recording system for hearing recordings
- Improve technology for court users and the public
  - Ensure we are using the best internet and broadband necessary to meet our needs
  - Provide text alerts for court hearing dates and probation meetings
  - Increase and improve the use of social media
  - Improve online resources for requesting court hearing recordings, court records and public records
  - Continually improve and update our public website, and implement additional features
    - Allow online *ex parte*, contested, and mitigation hearings
    - Offer online scheduling for court hearings
    - Offer online submission of protection order petitions and other forms
    - Improve the online payment system
- Provide Extensive Technology Training
  - Judges
  - Staff
  - Pro Tems
- Improve access to data and metrics; make data-based decisions

**2022 DISTRICT COURT VACANCIES**

<b>Regular FTE Positions</b>	<b>Date Vacated</b>	<b>DCT #</b>	<b>Date Posted</b>
Legal Process Assistant II	3/1/2022	DCT3120R	8/23/2022
Legal Process Assistant II	8/1/2022	DCT3290R	8/23/2022
Legal Process Assistant II	8/16/2022	DCT3148R	8/23/2022
Legal Process Assistant II	9/14/2022	DCT3160R	8/23/2022
Legal Process Assistant II	10/3/2022	DCT3335R	8/23/2022
Probation Program Coordinator	9/23/2022	DCT3310R	9/15/2022
District Court Commissioner	1/1/2023	DCT3105R	
<b>Project FTE Positions</b>			
<b>Project FTE Positions</b>	<b>Date Vacated</b>	<b>DCT #</b>	<b>Date Posted</b>
Case Manager	New Position	DCT1307P	9/16/2022
Legal Process Assistant I	New Position	DCT1304R	
Legal Process Assistant I	New Position	DCT1305R	
Legal Process Assistant I	New Position	DCT1306R	
Legal Process Assistant I	New Position	DCT1303R	