

Harris County Justice Courts

BUDGET MANAGEMENT PRESENTATION | JANUARY 11, 2022

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PURPOSES OF THE COURTS

- Promote justice in individual cases
- **Promote public perceptions of justice in individual cases**
- **Provide an impartial forum for resolution of legal disputes**
- Protect individuals against the arbitrary use of governmental power
- Provide a formal record of legal status
- Deter criminal behavior
- Rehabilitate individuals convicted of crimes
- Provide for the separation of convicted individuals from society where necessary
- Protect vulnerable populations — abused and neglected children and adults — from abuse of power in any form
- Promote coordination among justice, public health, social service and other agencies to address common problems underlying the court's criminal and civil caseload like substance abuse and mental health issues

MISSION OF THE JUSTICE COURTS

The purpose of the Justice Court is to do justice. Thus, the Court strives to provide a forum for the expeditious resolution of civil and criminal matters before the Court, all while providing fair notice and meaningful opportunities to be heard.

While handling a large volume of cases covering a wide range of topics, and often dealing with unrepresented litigants, the Court conducts proceedings without unnecessary expense or undue formalism, yet still requires the appropriate dignity and adherence to statutory and rule based procedures.

The Court strives to serve the people of Harris County by providing efficient and accessible administration of justice and by treating all persons who participate in the judicial process with fairness and respect.

VISION OF THE JUSTICE COURTS

The Justice Courts will serve the public by ensuring justice that is fair, impartial, timely, and accessible to all.

A justice court system that is:

- Accessible to the community and those who come before the court
- Effective in its ability to carry out its constitutional duties
- Efficient in its adherence to established principles of time standards and caseflow management
- An established source of visioning and strategic planning for the Harris County justice community
- Consistent with the purposes and responsibilities of courts

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Departments:

311	312	321	322
331	332	341	342
351	352	361	362
371	372	381	382

Programs and Services

Civil Proceedings

Criminal Proceedings

Administration & Support Services

2021 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Conversion and upgrade to Odyssey 2019 (now running on most recent version of case management system)
- Implementation of electronic signatures in Odyssey and use of signature pads
- Replacement of credit card readers / POS application
- Continued use of remote / in person / hybrid hearings
- Continued compliance with changing Supreme Court orders regarding eviction and other cases in justice courts, along with implementation of legislative changes that took effect September 1, 2021
- Resumption of jury trials in some courts

PERFORMANCE GOALS AND MEASURES

Court Activity and Performance Measures

- Cases filed
- Cases disposed / clearance rate
- Age of cases
- For criminal – cases disposed by DSC / deferred disposition or dismissed
- For civil – cases disposed by party / alternative resolution
- Jury trials held

Technology and Court Access Measures

- Remote / web payments taken
- E-file submissions
- Website hits

PERFORMANCE GOALS AND PROGRESS

New cases filed since January 1, 2021 through October 31, 2021:

85,525 civil and 227,645 criminal (projected to have a 4% increase over 2020 filings)

Clearance rate in 2021:

83% for civil and 86% for criminal (COVID-19 impacts)

Percentage of criminal cases disposed without a conviction:

Ranges from 6% - 72% (will depend on type of case)

Percentage of civil cases resolved prior to trial:

Ranges from 26% - 67%

PERFORMANCE GOALS AND PROGRESS

Website hits:

20% projected increase in 2021 over 2020

E-file submissions:

31% projected increase in 2021 over 2020

Remote / web payments taken:

27% - 71% (will depend on type of case)

BUDGET REQUESTS

Proposal	Cost	Results and Outcomes
Fill existing full and part time positions:		
JP 5-1 (6 FT and 2 PT)	\$248,022 (FY22) \$432,640 (FY22-23)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More adequately staffed courts will not only reduce unnecessary exposure to the criminal (and civil) justice system, but will also allow the courts to cultivate a diverse and effective Harris County workforce and provide outstanding customer service.• More clerks to process cases will also allow the courts to promote justice and, more importantly, the public perception of justice, in individual cases, as well as provide for more expeditious resolution of cases to improve case clearance rates and age of caseload metrics.
JP 6-1 (1 PT)	\$10,388 (FY22) \$18,006 (FY22-23)	
JP 6-2 (1 FT)	\$45,082 (FY22) \$73,258 (FY22-23)	

BUDGET REQUESTS

Proposal	Cost	Results and Outcomes
<p>Merit based salary incentives:</p> <p>JP 4-1</p> <p>Longevity pay incentives:</p> <p>JP 8-1</p>	<p>\$35,000 (FY22) \$59,900 (FY22-23)</p> <p>\$175 (FY22) \$600 (FY22-23)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The justice courts aim to attract, train, and retain qualified clerks, and this can be achieved through opportunities for professional and educational advancements and financial incentives. • Increased incentives pay would provide an opportunity for the courts to cultivate a diverse and effective Harris County workforce and provide outstanding customer service, all while competing with the private sector. • Employees who are satisfied and feel appreciated financially will better serve the courts in assuring the public perception of justice in individual cases.

BUDGET REQUESTS

Proposal	Cost	Results and Outcomes
Education incentives:		
JP 8-1	\$1,050 (FY22) \$1,800 (FY22-23)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The justice courts aim to attract, train, and retain qualified clerks, and this can be achieved through opportunities for professional and educational advancements and financial incentives.• Increased incentives pay would provide an opportunity for the courts to cultivate a diverse and effective Harris County workforce and provide outstanding customer service, all while competing with the private sector.• Employees who are better educated will better serve in promoting justice in individual cases.
Training for judges and clerks (including mileage costs for travel to training):		
JP 8-1	\$13,500 (FY22) \$23,142 (FY22-23)	

BUDGET REQUESTS

Proposal	Cost	Results and Outcomes
Increased postage costs: JP 4-1	\$35,000 (FY22) \$65,000 (FY22-23)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New procedural requirements for both civil and criminal cases require additional notices be sent to defendants and litigants. Previously, courts could rely on rollover funds to increase their postage budgets.• General office supplies are increasing in cost due to inflation and supply chain issues. To provide the expected level of customer service, the courts need additional funding for general supplies.• Notices, both required or sent as a courtesy, not only provide outstanding customer service, but also can reduce unnecessary exposure to the criminal (and civil) justice systems by avoiding unnecessary default judgments, additional nonappearance charges, or the issuance of warrants for arrest.
Inflation costs for office supplies: JP 8-1	\$5,000 (FY22) \$8,571 (FY22-23)	

BUDGET REQUESTS

Proposal	Cost	Results and Outcomes
Technology upgrades:		
JP 8-1	\$5,000 (FY22) \$8,572 (FY22-23)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Technological upgrades help to provide outstanding customer service and reduce unnecessary exposure to the criminal (and civil) justice systems by increasing the public's access to the courts. Giving additional information to the public, having increased means by which the public can appear in court without necessitating a physical in-person appearance, and providing means for alternative resolution to cases all help with meeting the purposes of the courts.
Conference room table and chairs:		
JP 8-1	\$4,000 (FY22) \$0 (FY22-23)	

BUDGET REQUESTS

Proposal	Cost	Results and Outcomes
Safety screeners: JP 8-1	 \$75,000 (FY22) \$128,571 (FY22-23)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Court security is always a top priority for the courts in order to provide a safe, accessible venue for parties to resolve disputes or for defendants to appear in court.• JP 8-1 already has the equipment for metal detector screening upon entry to the courthouse annex, but lacks the screening personnel to man the detectors.

BUDGET REQUESTS

Total justice court budget (combined for all 16 departments):

\$27,883,942

Total increased budget requests for FY 2022 (from JP 4-1, JP 5-1, JP 6-1, JP 6-2, JP 8-1):

\$477,217 (only a 1.7% increase over current budget)

2022: A LOOK AHEAD

- Odyssey 2019 upgrade allows us to implement further technological enhancements:
 - Allows us to pilot Modria Online Dispute Resolution system (projected in March 2022)
 - Plans to implement e-notices and text message reminders through Odyssey (no date)
- Development of further reports to track and assess performance metrics
- Continued efforts to address eviction issues in light of the pandemic
- Resumption of jury trials in all courts to address the backlog from COVID-19 pandemic
- Implementation of new court costs in civil filings (in January 2022) and new rules of civil procedure (anticipated to take effect in May 2022)