

STATE OF TEXAS

RESOLUTION

of the

TEXAS JUDICIAL COUNCIL

**Judicial Compensation and Benefits Committee Cost of Living Adjustment
Recommendations**

WHEREAS, the Texas Judicial Council was created under Chapter 71, Texas Government Code and is charged with improving the administration of justice; and

WHEREAS, the Council has charged its Judicial Compensation and Benefits Committee with studying judicial compensation and benefits; and

WHEREAS, judicial compensation is incredibly important to attract the most highly qualified individuals in the state, from a diversity of life and professional experiences, to serve in the judiciary without unreasonable economic hardship and with judicial independence unaffected by financial concerns; and

WHEREAS, in September 2025 the base salary of a district court judge, \$175,000, as set by the Texas Legislature, went into effect; and

WHEREAS, during the past 35 years the base pay has been adjusted only eight times; and

WHEREAS, the frequency and amount of increases to the base pay have been unpredictable; and

WHEREAS, as a result of the inconsistent adjustments, since 1999 there have been double digit increases needed to “play catch up”; and

WHEREAS, just before the most recent increase, the base pay had fallen behind every state except West Virginia; and

WHEREAS, according to the OCA Report on Judicial Salaries and Turnover, the number of judges voluntarily leaving office has steadily increased since 2005; and

WHEREAS, when looking at the various factors influencing a judge's decision, more than 60% of respondents indicated that salary was a major factor in declining to seek reelection in the most recent election period; and

WHEREAS, this was up from 26% from the previous election period, and more than half of these judges indicated that a change in salary would have influenced their decision to leave; and

WHEREAS, Texas needs a mechanism to more consistently address judicial compensation and remedy the inconsistent and unpredictable nature of judicial pay increases; and

WHEREAS, Texas has adjusted the base pay of a District Judge only once in the past 10 years while the average amongst the other 10 most populous states was 7.2 times; and

WHEREAS, 28 other states and the federal government have a mechanism to more regularly address judicial compensation; and

WHEREAS, the base pay of a Texas District Judge ranks 39th in the nation, falling from 34th after the 25% increase in FY 2026; and

WHEREAS, instituting a permanent cost of living adjustment to the base pay of a District Court Judge tied to the Consumer Price Index would create a systematic and reliable approach to judicial compensation; and

WHEREAS, maintaining a competitive salary is necessary to attract new judges to the bench but just as important to retain experienced jurists;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Texas Judicial Council respectfully recommends that the Legislature establish a permanent cost of living adjustment for judges tied to the consumer price index to prevent the erosion of judicial salaries to inflation.



Honorable Jimmy Blacklock
Chairman, Texas Judicial Council

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Judicial Compensation and Benefits Committee Judicial Retirement Recommendations

WHEREAS, the Texas Judicial Council was created under Chapter 71, Texas Government Code and is charged with improving the administration of justice; and

WHEREAS, the Council has charged its Judicial Compensation and Benefits Committee with studying judicial compensation and benefits; and

WHEREAS, judges and justice who retired from active service before September 1, 2005, and judges and justices who retired on or after September 1, 2019, have not received any increase in their retirement benefits and are experiencing the effects of inflation and loss of purchasing power in connection with their retirement; and

WHEREAS, although the 89th Legislature increased judicial compensation through Senate Bill 293 (SB 293), which delinked judicial salaries from legislative retirement, SB 293 also amended Section 834.102 of the Government Code, which relates to the calculation of the service retirement annuity for Judicial Retirement Service (JRS) Plan One annuities; and

WHEREAS, SB 293 prohibited the use of any increase in the base salary for a district judge in calculating a JRS 1 annuity where the judge retired before September 1, 2025; and

WHEREAS, the bill also extended the applicability of the FY 2025 base salary to future JRS 1 annuity computations;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Texas Judicial Council respectfully recommends that the Legislature instruct ERS to recalculate the annuities of annuitants in JRS 2 to make a one-time permanent annuity adjustment, institute a cost-of-living adjustment, and repeal the statute (Government Code Section 834.102(e) and (f)) that made the 89th increase to the base salary of a district judge inapplicable to JRS 1 retirees.

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Honorable Jimmy Blacklock
Chairman, Texas Judicial Council

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Family Representation Committee Quality of Representation Recommendations

WHEREAS, the Texas Judicial Council was created under Chapter 71, Texas Government Code and is charged with improving the administration of justice; and

WHEREAS, the Council has charged its Family Representation Committee with studying the representation of parents and children in child welfare cases; and

WHEREAS, termination of parental rights is one of the most serious consequences courts can render against someone and is often referred to as the death penalty of civil cases; and

WHEREAS, the severity of these cases demands that families involved have access to high-quality counsel; and

WHEREAS, the need for quality counsel extends beyond the trial courts and into appellate level advocacy, where parents face the last attempt available to preserve their parental rights; and

WHEREAS, in a suit filed by a governmental entity requesting termination of the parent-child relationship, the Family Code affords a child and an indigent parent an attorney; and

WHEREAS, the current system for delivering court-appointed counsel to indigent parents and children in appeals of termination cases is provided through a decentralized county-based model; and

WHEREAS, each county is required to recruit, retain, and pay attorneys who are qualified and willing to accept these court-appointments for appeals; and

WHEREAS, many counties struggle to find qualified attorneys who are willing and able to accept these appointments; and

WHEREAS, in their biennial Family Protection Representation Plan submitted to the Texas Indigent Defense Commission (TIDC) in 2025, over 60% of the counties in the state reported access to three or fewer attorneys available to accept court-appointed appeals in child

welfare cases, with 8 counties reporting 0 attorneys, 59 counties reporting one attorney, 46 counties reporting 2 attorneys, and 48 counties reporting 3 attorneys; and

WHEREAS, pay throughout the state is inconsistent, with some counties paying hourly rates and some paying flat rates; and

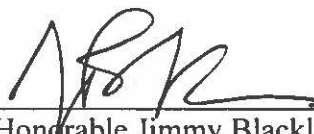
WHEREAS, the creation of a statewide appellate Managed Assigned Counsel (MAC) program funded by the state providing appellate counsel in child welfare cases will address both the capacity and quality issues that currently exist in the system; and

WHEREAS, the program will relatedly remove pressure on local courts to find attorneys who are both qualified and willing to accept these appeals; and

WHEREAS, state funding to support the work will allow for pay to be standardized throughout the State, which will eliminate the problem of certain counties offering below-market compensation, and thus attorneys being less willing (or unwilling) to handle appeals in those counties; and

WHEREAS, a structured statewide program would offer a resource for support and training to attorneys handling this type of work across the state, which would lead to improvements at the trial level in addition to at the appellate level;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Texas Judicial Council respectfully recommends that the Legislature establish and fund a statewide appellate Managed Assigned Counsel program to improve the quality of legal representation in child welfare cases.



Honorable Jimmy Blacklock
Chairman, Texas Judicial Council

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TEXAS JUDICIAL COUNCIL

Family Representation Committee Funding Recommendations

WHEREAS, the Texas Judicial Council was created under Chapter 71, Texas Government Code and is charged with improving the administration of justice; and

WHEREAS, the Council has charged its Family Representation Committee with studying the representation of parents and children in child welfare cases; and

WHEREAS, Texas statutes require that certain parents and most children have access to a court-appointed attorney in cases filed by DFPS; and

WHEREAS, Texas currently has an issue with both quality and quantity of attorneys in this type of case; and

WHEREAS, although these court-appointments are mandated in Texas statute, the state does not provide financial support for this work, requiring counties to shoulder this financial burden alone; and

WHEREAS, counties have varying financial abilities to cover these costs, resulting in inconsistent pay for the work throughout the state; and

WHEREAS, state funding is needed to fill the gap and ensure that parents and children have access to this critical legal representation; and

WHEREAS, at least 28 states, including Florida and California, provide some state funds to support legal representation in child protection cases; and

WHEREAS, the Legislature granted the Texas Indigent Defense Commission (TIDC) authority to fund family protection representation during the 88th Legislative Session; and

WHEREAS, although TIDC has had funding ability since September of 2023, no dedicated state funds have been provided by the Legislature to support this work; and

WHEREAS, any state funding provided for family protection representation would be helpful in providing critical support to a struggling family representation system; and

WHEREAS, that state funding should be offered in addition to current county spending, not in place of county spending; and

WHEREAS, to adequately meet the need for quality representation, the counties and the state should both provide financial support for the work;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Texas Judicial Council respectfully recommends that the Legislature provide funding to TIDC to support grants to counties (to supply funding beyond what the counties already invest) to improve the quality of legal representation in child welfare cases. Recipients of grant funding should be required to implement quality improvements as a condition of the grant.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Blacklock', written over a horizontal line.

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Judicial Resources Committee Court Security Recommendations

WHEREAS, the Texas Judicial Council was created under Chapter 71, Texas Government Code and is charged with improving the administration of justice; and

WHEREAS, the Council has charged its Judicial Resources Committee with studying existing judicial resources and whether enhancements are needed; and

WHEREAS, during FY 2026 there were 142 threats reported to the Judicial Security Division and 11 court security incidents involving a judge's or court personnel's home address; and

WHEREAS, concerns remain that the judicial privacy protections afforded by statute are inconsistently applicable across familial relationships which sometimes results in inadvertent exposure for a judge because they reside with someone who does not have privacy protection; and

WHEREAS, threats to non-residing family members are on the rise nationally; and

WHEREAS, there are certain government databases where a judge's information continues to be exposed such as boat registrations and sales tax permit holders; and

WHEREAS, the Courthouse Security Fund is a portion of the local consolidated court costs collected in all criminal cases and certain civil cases; and

WHEREAS, the expenditures of the funds are under the exclusive control of county's commissioner's court and must be used for certain purposes, including screening tools, security infrastructure, security training, and security personnel; and

WHEREAS, HB 16, 89th Second Special Session, modified Government Code Section 74.0922 and made it one of the duties of a Court Security Committee to meet at least once annually and develop and submit recommendations to the commissioner's court on the uses of resources and expenditures of funds; and

WHEREAS, the committees lack access to information regarding the funds balance, collections, or expenditures or whether counties are following those committee recommendations; and

WHEREAS, requiring submission to the Office of Court Administration Judicial Security Division will provide transparency in the use of the funds as well as allow committees to quickly determine collections to make realistic recommendations; and

WHEREAS, a judicial branch photo identification would serve as a standardized wallet size card to verify a judge's credentials for the purposes of address confidentiality and license to carry eligibility and it would standardize courthouse admission for judges that serve multiple counties or judges who sit as visiting judges, ensuring consistent credential verification and efficient access to secured areas; and

WHEREAS, during FY 2025, more than 2,100 court security incidents were reported to the Judicial Security Division, a 97% increase over FY 2024; and

WHEREAS, the Division often does not receive information regarding whether a reported threat was investigated, referred to another agency, closed without action, or resulted in an arrest or prosecution; and

WHEREAS, requiring investigating law enforcement agencies to report the outcome of threat investigations to the Division would improve the accuracy of threat data, help identify recurring threats and trends, and strengthen statewide court security planning; and

WHEREAS, security in courthouses is of paramount importance; and

WHEREAS, in a recent survey of Child Protection Courts, multiple judges reported inconsistent security practices including the lack of security screening at courthouse entry points and no bailiffs assigned to courtrooms; and

WHEREAS, Maryland and Colorado recently convened legislatively created task forces including law enforcement, county officials, and judges to recommend minimum standards for courthouse security; and

WHEREAS, a similar study by OCA would help identify current practices, assess security needs across diverse courthouse settings, and provide an informed foundation for future statewide guidance on courthouse security;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Texas Judicial Council respectfully recommends that the Legislature:

1. Amend statutes protecting the personally identifiable information (PII) of a judge's family to include the first degree of consanguinity, first degree of affinity, or a person residing with the judge, reducing gaps created by differing statutory definitions of protected family members. The Legislature should amend statutes to restrict other governmental databases publicly revealing PII of judges and court employees;
2. Require the County Auditor, or other individual designated by the commissioner's court of a county, to submit to OCA's Court Security Division the annual balance, collections, and expenditures of all Court Security Funds;
3. Create a statewide standardized Judicial Branch identification badge for judges to ensure efficient and secure identification; and
4. Require the law enforcement agency investigating a threat reported to the Judicial Security Division under Code of Criminal Procedure Article 102.017(f) to notify the Division of the outcome of the investigation.



Honorable Jimmy Blacklock
Chairman, Texas Judicial Council

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Judicial Resources Committee Court Space and Facilities Recommendations

WHEREAS, the Texas Judicial Council was created under Chapter 71, Texas Government Code and is charged with improving the administration of justice; and

WHEREAS, the Council has charged its Judicial Resources Committee with studying existing judicial resources and whether enhancements are needed; and

WHEREAS, the Business Court is experiencing difficulties when securing courtroom space for trials and hearings and many counties in which the Business Court sits are already operating at or near courthouse capacity; and

WHEREAS, Government Code Section 25A.017(d) entitles a county to reimbursement from the state at market rates for courtroom use but reimbursement alone has not consistently resulted in courtroom availability; and

WHEREAS, assigning responsibility to the Local Administrative Judge would create a clear point of accountability for coordinating courtroom access within the county; and

WHEREAS, directing Business Court reimbursement funds to projects benefiting the judiciary, including training, staffing, and facility improvements, would align incentives with that responsibility and encourage cooperation in making courtroom space available for Business Court proceedings; and

WHEREAS, the 15th Court of Appeals has experienced challenges in securing courtroom space for oral arguments within the Capitol Complex; and

WHEREAS, the 15th Court of Appeals serves a unique, statewide function and the court will add new justices and support personnel in the coming years, which will result in the court exceeding its current chambers capacity; and

WHEREAS, the Texas Demographic Center estimates that Texas has added approximately 2.4 million residents over the past five years, and much of that growth has been concentrated in the state's most populous counties and has required significant long-range planning for public infrastructure and government services; and

WHEREAS, counties routinely develop plans for transportation, utilities, emergency management, and other major capital investments; and

WHEREAS, judicial infrastructure planning often occurs only after population growth and increasing caseloads have rendered existing facilities inadequate; and

WHEREAS, counties bear primary responsibility for funding and constructing court facilities and effective planning for future judicial needs must originate at the local level; and

WHEREAS, in many rapidly growing counties, courthouse facilities have not kept pace with the need for new courts, resulting in shortages of courtrooms, chambers, and judicial support space; and

WHEREAS, requiring the state's largest counties to prepare periodic Judicial Infrastructure Plans would promote long-term planning for future courthouse space needs, including facilities to be used by statutory county courts, appellate courts, and the Business Court; and

WHEREAS, OCA currently prepares workload analyses that evaluate the need for additional courts based on existing case filings; and

WHEREAS, expanding those analyses to incorporate projected population and caseload trends, and including statutory county courts, would provide counties with better information to support their infrastructure planning efforts; and

WHEREAS, providing these analyses directly to county judges would further assist local officials in anticipating future judicial resource and facility needs;

WHEREAS, a similar study by OCA would help identify current practices, assess security needs across diverse courthouse settings, and provide an informed foundation for future statewide guidance on courthouse security;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Texas Judicial Council respectfully

recommends that the Legislature:

1. Assign to the Local Administrative District Judge in Government Code Section 74.092 the duty to coordinate courtroom space for Business Court trials within the county. As an incentive for cooperation, the Legislature should further require that state reimbursement paid to a county for Business Court facility use be available at the discretion of the Local Administrative District Judge for judicial training, court personnel training, staffing, and court facility improvements;
2. Encourage the State Preservation Board to make the Capitol's historic courtrooms available for oral arguments before the statewide 15th Court of Appeals. The Legislature should also ensure that the 15th Court of Appeals has adequate chambers and support space within the Capitol Complex to accommodate its planned expansion;
3. Require the 30 most populous counties to develop and submit a judicial infrastructure plan to the Texas Judicial Council every five years, addressing anticipated court facility needs. The OCA should develop a model infrastructure plan using a predictive analysis model that counties may use in preparing their plans; and
4. Expand the court caseload analysis report required under Government Code Section 72.039 to include statutory county courts and direct OCA to provide the report to county judges in affected counties.



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Judicial Resources Committee Court Efficiency and Staff Attorney Recommendations

WHEREAS, the Texas Judicial Council was created under Chapter 71, Texas Government Code and is charged with improving the administration of justice; and

WHEREAS, the Council has charged its Judicial Resources Committee with studying existing judicial resources and whether enhancements are needed; and

WHEREAS, the Presiding Judges of the Administrative Regions are appointed by the Governor to oversee the administration of justice in their regions and their primary duties are set out in Government Code Section 74.046, but they have many additional duties imposed by other statutes, including the oversight of the Children's Courts Program; and

WHEREAS, most regions have one administrative assistant, and when the assistant is absent due to vacation or illness, the region is without any support; and

WHEREAS, OCA has provided legal resources to the presiding judges as needed pursuant to its directive under Government Code Section 72.203 to consult and provide assistance to the presiding judges in the administration of their duties; and

WHEREAS, the responsibilities of the presiding judges have expanded significantly in recent years; and

WHEREAS, matters involving recusals, case transfers, high-conflict litigants, and other complex administrative issues increasingly require legal analysis and support; and

WHEREAS, the requests from the trial courts for legally sound research and most efficient approaches to court procedures have grown; and

WHEREAS, staff attorneys are a valuable judicial resource that can improve efficiency by assisting judges with legal research, drafting orders and jury charges, managing complex motions, and addressing other time-intensive legal tasks; and

WHEREAS, the use of staff attorneys in Texas courts is unsurprisingly centered in the largest counties and these positions are exclusively funded by the counties; and

WHEREAS, judges with staff attorney support report greater efficiency in carrying out judicial tasks; and

WHEREAS, between FY 2024 and FY 2026 the courts of appeal experienced a 29% increase in new cases filed; and

WHEREAS, the courts have seen growth in original proceedings, including petitions for writs of mandamus, as well as an increase in self-represented litigants and repeat filings by frequent litigants; and

WHEREAS, courts also report that the expanded use of artificial intelligence tools by self-represented litigants has increased the volume, length, and complexity of filings requiring review;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Texas Judicial Council respectfully recommends that the Legislature:

1. Support the OCA's exceptional item request to provide additional support to the judiciary by funding two additional resource attorneys and one administrative assistant to support the Presiding Judges of the Administrative Regions and state trial courts;
2. Establish a pilot grant program to fund staff attorney positions for trial courts. Interested courts would apply for funding and describe how the staff attorney would be used to improve court efficiency, case processing, or judicial productivity; and
3. Support the exceptional item request of the 14 Courts of Appeals to provide funding for additional staff attorneys.



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Chairman, Texas Judicial Council

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Judicial Resources Committee Judicial Professions Recommendations

WHEREAS, the Texas Judicial Council was created under Chapter 71, Texas Government Code and is charged with improving the administration of justice; and

WHEREAS, the Council has charged its Judicial Resources Committee with studying existing judicial resources and whether enhancements are needed; and

WHEREAS, since FY 2005 through the end of FY 2026, the number of certified shorthand reporters declined 12%, while the number of courts of record increased by 15%; and

WHEREAS, many courts, particularly in rural and non-urban areas, face challenges in recruiting and retaining official court reporters; and

WHEREAS, these workforce constraints affect both the availability and cost of creating the official record of court proceedings; and

WHEREAS, HB 16 of the 89th Second Special Session directed OCA to conduct a study on digital court recording, including cost, access, accuracy, and effectiveness; and

WHEREAS, presently, candidates to become a certified shorthand reporter must take a two-part exam developed and administered by the Texas Court Reporter Association under contract with the Judicial Branch Certification Commission; and

WHEREAS, judicial professions are overseen by the Judicial Branch Certification Commission,

WHEREAS, court recorders perform a fundamentally different role from certified shorthand reporters, and their qualifications should reflect those differences; and

WHEREAS, the cost of transcript and related fees are creating access to justice concerns for litigants; and

WHEREAS, transcript preparation fees vary substantially among courts and jurisdictions, yet fee information is not consistently available to the public; and

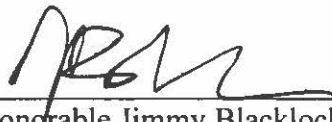
WHEREAS, digital court recording is already used in a variety of settings throughout Texas and other states; and

WHEREAS, a pilot grant program would allow courts to test digital recording systems in real-world courtroom environments and provide meaningful information regarding cost, reliability, operational challenges, transcript preparation, and the impact on court proceedings; and

WHEREAS, across all stakeholder groups participating in the study, there is strong agreement that a trained human must be present to monitor any recording, and that centralized multi-courtroom monitoring does not provide adequate protection to assure the accuracy of the digital recording;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Texas Judicial Council respectfully recommends that the Legislature:

1. Amend Government Code Section 154.103 to accept passing scores on skills tests offered by the National Court Reporters Association and the National Voice Reporters Association in lieu of passing Part A of the Texas certification examination (the skills test;
2. Require courts to post on their public website the fee schedule detailing all fees charged related to providing a transcript, including expedited service and copy fees; and
3. Establish a pilot grant program to support the use of digital court recording in interested trial courts and require participating courts to report on the benefits, challenges, costs, and operational impacts of digital recording systems.



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Judicial Resources Committee Court Fees Recommendations

WHEREAS, the Texas Judicial Council was created under Chapter 71, Texas Government Code and is charged with improving the administration of justice; and

WHEREAS, the Council has charged its Judicial Resources Committee with studying existing judicial resources and whether enhancements are needed; and

WHEREAS, inflation has reduced the effectiveness of existing court-cost funding streams; and

WHEREAS, the Legislature consolidated court fees for criminal cases effective 2020 and civil cases effective 2022; and

WHEREAS, the consolidated fees support different funds or accounts depending on whether the case is civil or criminal and depending on the level of the criminal offense; and

WHEREAS, as a result of variance in funds supported by specific case types or levels, raising a consolidated court cost for only one case type or level will not benefit all funds or even all funds directly supporting the judiciary; and

WHEREAS, many of the funds directly support the judiciary, including the Fair Defense Account, the Judicial Fund, Specialty Court Account, Statewide Electronic Filing System Account, Judicial and Court Personnel Training Account, Courthouse Security Fund, and the Jury Service Fund; and

WHEREAS, based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI), the buying power of these accounts are not keeping up with inflation; and

WHEREAS, the impact of inflation is especially true of the Judicial and Court Personnel Training Fund (Fund 540), which supports the continuing education of judges and other justice system actors in Texas; and

WHEREAS, continued limitations on fund replenishment could jeopardize Texas' place as a leader in judicial and legal education;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Texas Judicial Council respectfully recommends that the Legislature:

1. Increase the consolidated court costs to restore purchasing power eroded by inflation and preserve the level of services originally intended by the Legislature; and
2. Provide General Revenue funds for the initial training of all new judges, court personnel, and prosecutors.

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Honorable Jimmy Blacklock
Chairman, Texas Judicial Council