



Ohio Judicial Conference

The Voice of Ohio Judges

SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE

May 5, 2011

TESTIMONY ON SUB. HOUSE BILL 153

FY 2012 & 2013 BUDGET

OHIO JUDICIAL CONFERENCE

Chairman Widener and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

Mark R. Schweikert, Executive Director of the Ohio Judicial Conference. Before I joined the Judicial Conference, I served on the Court of Common Pleas and the Municipal Court of Hamilton County. I have worked in court or judicial capacities for over 35 years.

Also present is our Fiscal Officer Jayma Umbstaetter and our Legislative Services Coordinator Donna Childers and our Judicial Services Coordinator Kristin Schultz.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you today about the Ohio Judicial Conference and its budgetary needs.

The Ohio Judicial Conference is an integral and separate agency within the judicial branch of government. By statute, all 724 Ohio judges are members of the Judicial Conference. Obviously the majority are local trial court judges. Our statutory purpose is to:

- *Continually study the co-ordination of the work of the several courts of Ohio;*
- *Encourage uniformity in the application of the law, rules, and practice throughout the state and within each division of the courts as an integral part of the judicial system of the state;*
- *Promote an exchange of experience and suggestions respecting the operation of the judicial system;*
- *Consider the business and problems pertaining to the administration of justice and to make recommendations for its improvement; and*
- *Prepare judicial impact statements for the Ohio General Assembly.*

The Ohio Judicial Conference is where Ohio judges come together to exchange ideas, discuss issues affecting courts and judges, and make recommendations for the improvement of the administration of justice. It is also where our small staff of 10 dedicated and multi-talented individuals, provide a wide array of essential services and information to judges, the General Assembly, various Executive Branch offices, professional associations and the public.

The work of the Judicial Conference is accomplished by our 22 standing committees involving hundreds of Ohio judges. The Executive Committee, which sets Judicial Conference policy, is comprised of approximately 50 judges, including our elected Officers, the chairs and co-chairs of our standing committees, the Chief Justice and the Administrative Director of the Supreme Court, and the leaders of the six judicial associations. Currently, Judge Thomas Swift of the Trumbull County Probate Court serves as the Chair of the Conference.

The Judicial Conference works with the General Assembly, the Supreme Court of Ohio, the Governor's office, the Ohio State Bar Association, the Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections, the Attorney General, and other

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executive branch agencies and private organizations on current issues regarding the administration of justice. Also, we sponsor, in cooperation with such agencies, programs and collaborative events to deal with current issues of mutual importance.

We appreciate the fact that so many legislators see the Judicial Conference as a resource. During FY2010-11, to date, we have prepared seven judicial impact statements, 105 legislative letters, and judges have testified at least 11 times before legislative committees. We believe that our ability to quickly provide you with good information about Ohio's justice system and judicial impact statements benefits us both.

Our Budget

Our budget was flat for 4 years prior to 2008. The Chief Justice, in cooperation with the Governor asked that we further reduce spending, which we did lapsing 7.1% in 2008 and 4.9% in 2009. In the current biennium, our budget was reduced by 24%. We returned 1.4% at the close of Fiscal Year 2010 and expect to return a similar amount at the close of Fiscal Year 2011. We have made these adjustments by leaving one position unfilled and replacing staff through attrition at lower salaries. We do not expect further attrition within our small office within the next biennium.

The current budget request reflects a direction from the Chief Justice and the Governor that we pursue a 10% reduction in the GRF budget for fiscal years 2012 and 2013. Our spending from the GRF fund has continued to decrease since 2007, and as I indicated earlier we expect our 2011 spending to be below the appropriation as well. In addition to personnel management we have increased reliance on non GRF funds.

The Conference generates some revenue through conference fees, dues, and royalties, deposited into the General Services Fund, which we use to fund many of the activities of the Conference, particularly the expenses of our committees, meetings, publications and website. In addition to general inflation these expenditures have grown due to the increase in the mileage reimbursement, increased contractual services related to Ohio Jury Instructions, and event costs. We are requesting a flat appropriation to the General Services Fund for both 2012 and 2013.

With a 10% reduction in General Revenue and a flat appropriation to the General Services fund we will face an overall 7% reduction in funding for this biennium. As we approach the new fiscal year we are anticipating these changes and are looking for ways to manage expenses. We have already eliminated printing and mailing costs with some of our publications and have expanded reliance on our website as our principle communication tool. We have reached out to the Ohio Supreme Court to continue to identify opportunities to coordinate services we provide. We expect to move some personnel costs to the General Services Fund and look for ways to increase revenue to that fund in order to avoid reductions in personnel.

In addition to our traditional services, particular challenges that lay ahead include:

- Assisting local courts with operational impact of state budget reductions
- Expanding innovation and efficiency in local courts and at the Judicial Conference
- Promoting public confidence in the courts despite funding concerns

I hope I have outlined for you a picture of a sensibly managed, small professional agency that produces a tremendous amount of work for a relatively modest contribution from the state general fund. Thank you very much for allowing me to speak today. I will be glad to answer any questions you might have.

Respectfully Submitted:



Mark R. Schweikert, Executive Director
Ohio Judicial Conference