

# GENERAL DISTRICT COURT SERVICES

## DESCRIPTION

The General District Court hears civil, criminal and traffic matters. The Court exercises original jurisdiction over all misdemeanor cases and conducts preliminary hearings in felony cases to determine probable cause. In addition, the Court hears all traffic cases and certain violations of the County Code. The Court also has jurisdiction over most civil matters not exceeding \$25,000; and jurisdiction in personal injury and wrongful death cases not exceeding \$50,000. The average monthly caseload for the Court is 7,300 new cases. This represents a 17.7% increase over last year’s caseload. In addition to new cases, each month the clerk’s office processes an average of 2,000 witness subpoenas, 250 requests for certified copies of prior convictions, 130 requests for restricted licenses, 60 protective orders, 760 garnishments, and 500 requests for civil abstracts. The clerk’s office also assists citizens with phone inquiries and in-person visits averaging 4,000 phone calls and 2,000 walk-ins monthly.

There are five judges serving in this court (currently one seat is vacant), each having been appointed by the General Assembly for a term of six years. The judges, clerk, and deputy clerks are all paid directly by the Commonwealth. The County provides space, furniture, supplemental salary, and support for the General District Court, including two part-time County employees.

## OBJECTIVES

- To process cases for the public to facilitate the swift administration of justice, while providing a fair and equitable judicial process for all.
- To provide an orderly and comprehensive system of maintaining court records as required by law, and quickly update case files, so that accurate and current electronic case information is readily available.
- To maintain an accurate accounting of court funds.
- To continually add services to better serve the public.

## FISCAL YEAR 2024 SUMMARY

### Annual Fiscal Plan

Description	FY22 Actual	FY23 Original	FY24 Approved	Change 23 to 24
Personnel	\$ 196,833	\$ 243,289	\$ 260,513	7.1%
Operation	151,406	251,488	251,488	0.0%
Capital	0	0	0	0.0%
Total	<u>\$ 348,239</u>	<u>\$ 494,777</u>	<u>\$ 512,001</u>	<u>3.5%</u>
Personnel Complement*	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

\* Full-time personnel expenses are paid by the Commonwealth of Virginia. Personnel expenses in this budget reflect a salary supplement paid by the county.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

	Performance Measures			Change
	FY22	FY23	FY24	23 to 24
<b>*Workload Measures</b>				
Total New Cases Filed	87,322	88,936	91,351	2,415
Total New Criminal Cases Filed	13,130	14,260	14,550	290
Total New Involuntary Civil Cases Filed	1,392	1,484	1,546	62
Total New Civil Cases Filed	26,319	23,122	26,319	3,197
Total New Traffic Cases Filed	46,481	50,070	48,936	(1,134)
Number of Full-Time Judges	5	5	5	-

\*Note: These estimates are prepared by State Supreme Court Personnel.

BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS

The General District Court’s budget for FY24 totals \$512,001. The Personnel component of the budget will increase by \$17,224 for FY24, which is the result of a salary supplement provided to four new employees approved by the State Supreme Court. In 2019, the County began providing supplemental compensation for the state deputy clerks to assist with recruitment and retention within the General District Court Clerk’s Office. During the 2022 session, the General Assembly approved 120 new positions for the District Courts in Virginia. Of those 120 positions, Henrico General District Court was allocated an additional 4 positions based on workload statistics. The additional four fulltime positions are eligible to receive the salary supplement bringing the total employees receiving the supplement to 49. The salary supplement has enabled the clerk’s office to hire and retain qualified and well-trained staff. This support continues in the FY24 budget.

The operating budget remains flat from the previous fiscal year. The operating component is utilized to support the daily activities of the General District Court, which consists of five courtrooms and administrative offices occupied by five judges, 49.8 state employees and two part-time County employees. The salary and benefit costs of the five judges and 49.8 employees are paid by the Commonwealth of Virginia and are not reflected in this budget apart from the supplemental compensation described above. The salaries of the two part-time County employees are paid by the County and are reflected in the budget.

DEPARTMENTAL HIGHLIGHTS

In 2020, Henrico Mental Health received a state grant to begin a Mental Health Diversion Program (MHDP) which has been operating in the Henrico General District Court since that time. The program is designed to address cases in which an individual has a significant mental illness (SMI) and their criminal conduct is related to their SMI. Given the closure of mental health facilities which has resulted in a lack of bedspaces in hospitals for individuals with SMIs, our jail has unfortunately seen a marked increase in the number of these individuals being held, especially those that are homeless and not receiving treatment.

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When an incarcerated individual is found eligible for the MHDP program, a release plan is put in place that includes housing and a treatment plan. The cases are monitored by the MHDP team and court to confirm compliance with the program, and the individuals reappear in Court periodically until their case concludes. The program has had remarkable success, with individuals returning to the community with housing, treatment, and medication. Each of the individuals who have successfully completed the program have also found employment and most have reconnected with family that they had not been in communication with for many years.

Recently, with the full support of the County, the Court has applied to the Supreme Court of Virginia for the formation of a Behavioral Health Docket, which once approved will increase the number of individuals who will be eligible to receive services through this specialized court process. This is a great opportunity to offer to individuals who may not be incarcerated after arrest but are still in need of mental health support and services. There is a dedicated team which consists of a Judge, a prosecutor, defense counsel representative, specially trained CIT police officers, and members from both Henrico Mental Health and Community Corrections. Specialized training was completed before submission of the application, and there are plans to have the docket in place shortly after the New Year. All the team members have agreed to begin this process on an in-kind basis which will initially limit how many participants may be eligible. The hope is that as the success of the docket is proven the department will be able to obtain funding which will allow the program to expand.