

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 where less than twenty-five thousand dollars is involved. The average monthly caseload for the Court is 9,600 new cases. In addition to new cases, the Clerk's Office processes an average of 3,000 witness subpoenas, 300 requests for certified copies of prior convictions, 100 requests for restricted licenses, 50 protective orders, 900 garnishments, 800 requests for civil abstracts, and 300 writs of evictions monthly. 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, 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.

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 2022 SUMMARY

Description	FY20 Actual	FY21 Original	FY22 Approved	Change 21 to 22
Personnel ¹	\$ 182,796	\$ 213,147	\$ 213,147	0.0%
Operation	183,035	238,914	251,488	5.3%
Capital	0	0	0	0.0%
Total	\$ 365,831	\$ 452,061	\$ 464,635	2.8%
Personnel Complement ²	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

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

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

	Performance Measures			Change 21 to 22
	FY20	FY21	FY22	
*Workload Measures				
Total New Cases Filed	111,560	115,898	98,474	17,424
Total New Criminal Cases Filed	16,851	15,670	14,039	1,631
Total New Civil Cases Filed	38,497	35,305	34,753	552
Total New Traffic Cases Filed	54,785	63,570	48,290	15,280
Number of Full-Time Judges	5	5	5	0

*Note: These estimates are prepared by State Supreme Court Personnel. The statistics are reduced based on reductions in caseload data caused by the pandemic. All caseload measures are expected to increase once the pandemic diminishes.

BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS

The General District Court’s budget for FY2021-22 totals \$464,635. The personnel component of the budget will remain flat for FY2021-22. The operating budget for FY2021-22 will increase by \$12,574 to restore cuts made previously due to the health emergency created by COVID-19.

In 2019, the county began providing supplemental compensation for the thirty-seven state Deputy Clerks in order to assist with recruitment and retention within the General District Court Clerk’s Office. This support continues in the FY2021-22 budget.

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 and 37 employees. The fifth judge was appointed by the General Assembly during the 2015 session and began November 1, 2015. The permanent staff of the General District Court is comprised of state employees. Thus, salary and benefit costs are paid by the Commonwealth of Virginia and are not reflected in this budget apart from the supplemental compensation described above.

DEPARTMENTAL HIGHLIGHTS

The General District Court implemented new procedures to ensure the safety of the public and staff members during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although some types of processes decreased slightly during the past fiscal year as access to the court and clerk’s office was limited, the Court remained operational and provided essential services to the public. The Court implemented safety protocols which were in accordance with both the Governor’s State of Emergency and the Judicial Emergency Orders enacted by the Virginia Supreme Court. These protocols included the screening of all individuals entering the courthouse for both fever and potential exposure to COVID-19. Any individuals who had a fever or exposure were denied access, and their cases were continued on the court’s docket. In addition, all persons aged 10 or over entering the courthouse were required to wear a face covering that covered the nose and mouth. Clerk’s office hours were reduced to limit constant exposure and allow time for additional cleaning measures. To further ensure the safety of the litigants and to maintain proper social distancing given the

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limited amount of public space, only litigants and witnesses were allowed in the courthouse. Court staff members set up a table at the entrance to the courthouse to direct incoming parties to the proper location. Courtrooms were limited to 15 individuals per courtroom, which included litigants, witnesses, attorneys and police officers. Six-foot distancing was required of all occupants. Additional dockets were added to accommodate the number of cases that could be tried given the capacity restrictions. Moreover, the Court expanded their capability to conduct video and telephonic hearings, allowing litigants access to justice without having to enter the courthouse. Drop boxes were placed at the entrance of the courthouse to allow parties to safely file documents without entering the courthouse.