

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 beginning July 1, the Court now has jurisdiction in personal injury and wrongful death cases not exceeding \$50,000. The average monthly caseload for the Court is 6,200 new cases. In addition to new cases, the clerk's office processes an average of 2,200 witness subpoenas, 250 requests for certified copies of prior convictions, 75 requests for restricted licenses, 60 protective orders, 650 garnishments, and 500 requests for civil abstracts. The clerk's office also assists citizens with phone inquiries and in-person visits averaging 4,100 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 2023 SUMMARY

Annual Fiscal Plan

Description	FY21 Actual	FY22 Original	FY23 Approved	Change 22 to 23
Personnel	\$ 176,739	\$ 213,147	\$ 243,289	14.1%
Operation	163,427	251,488	251,488	0.0%
Capital	0	0	0	0.0%
Total	\$ 340,166	\$ 464,635	\$ 494,777	6.5%
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 22 to 23
	FY21	FY22	FY23	
*Workload Measures				
Total New Cases Filed	74,278	84,846	79,691	(5,155)
Total New Criminal Cases Filed	13,481	13,473	13,735	262
Total New Involuntary Civil Cases Filed	1,432	1,425	1,451	26
Total New Civil Cases Filed	23,121	23,217	21,461	(1,756)
Total New Traffic Cases Filed	36,244	46,731	43,044	(3,687)
Number of Full-Time Judges	5	5	5	-

*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 FY23 totals \$494,777. The personnel component of the budget will increase by \$30,142 for FY23. The operating budget remains flat from the previous fiscal year.

In 2019, the County began providing supplemental compensation for the 37 state deputy clerks in order to assist with recruitment and retention within the General District Court Clerk's Office. During the 2021 session, the General Assembly approved 120 new positions for the District Courts in Virginia. Of those 120 positions, Henrico General District Court was allocated 7.8 positions. The additional seven fulltime positions are eligible to receive the salary supplement bringing the total employees receiving the supplement to 44. The salary supplement has enabled the clerk's office to hire and retain qualified and well-trained staff. This support continues in the FY23 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 44.8 employees. 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

Although some caseload averages decreased since FY20, that decrease is attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic and the terms set by the Virginia Supreme Court in its Judicial Emergency Orders.

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the General District Court implemented new procedures to ensure the safety of the public and staff members. 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 including screening individuals entering the courthouse, requiring a mask covering the mouth and nose, social distancing, and limiting entrance to the courthouse to only

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litigants and witnesses. Clerk's office hours were reduced to limit constant exposure and allow time for additional cleaning measures, but 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.

In June 2021, many of those pandemic-related limitations and restrictions were lifted. While individuals entering the courthouse are still screened, required to distance, and wear a mask covering the mouth and nose, the clerk's office has returned to normal operating hours. We have also maintained the additional dockets to address the backlog and we continue to use audio and video communications to minimize jail transports and accommodate individuals who are unable to safely appear in court.