

# Municipal Court Judges

THE CITY OF  
COLUMBUS

## Department Description

The Franklin County Municipal Court is established pursuant to section 1901.01 of the Ohio Revised Code and traces its origin to the creation of the Columbus Municipal Court in 1916. The geographic jurisdiction of the court is all of Franklin County and those portions of the City of Columbus that extend beyond the boundaries of Franklin County. The Court has 14 judges in the General Division and one judge in the Environmental Division. Judges serve six-year terms unless appointed or elected to fill a vacancy. Annually, they elect one of their peers to serve as the Administrative and Presiding Judge.

The judges preside over civil, criminal, and traffic cases and conduct both jury and non-jury trials. In jury trials, judges interpret the law and the jury determines factual matters. In non-jury trials, by far the more common method, judges have the dual role of interpreting the law and determining the facts. The judges also conduct criminal arraignments and initial appearances on felony cases, set bond on criminal charges, issue search warrants, and impose sentence when a defendant is found guilty of a traffic or criminal charge. The judges hear civil cases where the amount in controversy is \$15,000 or less and cases that are transferred from the Small Claims Division to the regular docket of the court.

## Department Mission

*Judiciary:* To safeguard the constitutional rights of all citizens and to provide equal access to all; professional, fair, and impartial treatment; timely disposition of cases without unnecessary delay; and a just resolution of all court matters.

*Administration:* The mission of Court Administration is to oversee the operations and employees of the Court, implement the policies and procedures established by the judiciary and the legislature in a professional and dedicated manner, and to ensure accessibility, fairness, accountability, and courtesy in the administration of justice.

Budget Summary				
Fund	2023 Actual	2024 Actual	2025 Budget	2026 Proposed
General Fund	25,729,461	28,445,949	28,814,860	28,967,882
Computer Fund	77,247	170,677	395,848	541,519
<b>Department Total</b>	<b>\$ 25,806,708</b>	<b>\$ 28,616,626</b>	<b>\$ 29,210,708</b>	<b>\$ 29,509,401</b>

## Municipal Court Judges

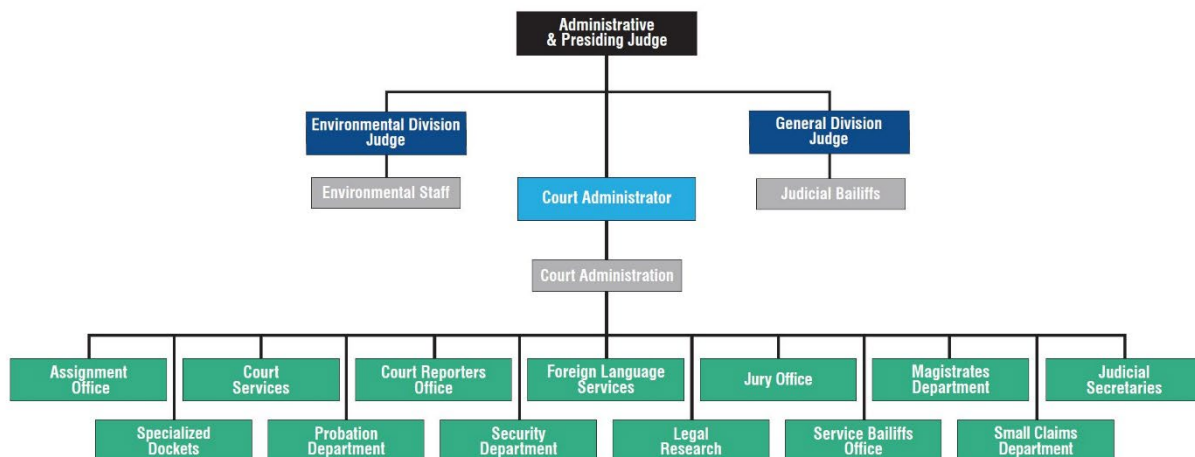
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The jurisdiction and powers of the Environmental Division differ from those of the General Division in several important respects. The Environmental Division has exclusive jurisdiction to enforce local codes and regulations affecting real property, such as fire and building codes. The Environmental Division has injunctive powers, and there is no monetary limit on the cases that fall within the Environmental Division's exclusive jurisdiction.

Each week, a different judge is assigned to the Duty Session to handle a variety of responsibilities, which include applications for search warrants, motions to dismiss filed by the prosecutor, cognovit notes, motions to excuse jurors, probable cause hearings, motions for default judgments filed in unassigned cases, and the performance of civil wedding ceremonies.

The court administrator is the chief executive officer and reports to the judges of the court, primarily through the Administrative and Presiding Judge. The court administrator is responsible for developing and implementing policies and procedures and directs and supervises all administrative and operational court functions, which include the following areas: budget and finance, purchasing, facilities, security, human resources, magistrates, jury, case assignment, probation services, service bailiffs, small claims, court reporters, interpreters, vehicle immobilization, court-appointed counsel, and court services.

## Franklin County Municipal Court Judges



## Strategic Priorities for 2026

Advance the Pretrial Services Program developed by the Department of Probation Services (DOPS) through a multi-year probation improvement and incentive grant from the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction Services. These program enhancements will follow the recommendations that were made by the National Institute of Corrections and will continue to follow the best practice standards outlined by the American Bar Association and the National Association of Pretrial Service Agencies. One specific program enhancement will be the incorporation of the domestic violence population. The goals of the Pretrial Services Program are to reduce the length of incarceration for pretrial detainees, specifically those with significant mental health issues, and reduce the number of pretrial issuance of failure to appear warrants and order-ins.

Build the relationship with Job and Family Services that offers a benefits specialist on-site several days per week to assist probationers with enrollment in Medicaid, Food Stamps, Cash and Child Care Assistance, and Supplemental Security Income. Seek additional community resources that are available and beneficial to defendants/probationers.

Increase the capacity of residential programming options for moderate, and high-risk defendants, specifically, for the female population. These residential options include supported housing, residential alcohol and drug treatment, and halfway house services that provide a variety of substance abuse treatments, cognitive behavioral programming, supported employment, and recovery coaches.

Collaborate with community partners and the jail to increase access to medication-assisted treatment options for opiate-dependent defendants. Grant funding will be sought to provide further resources to better support the supervision and treatment needs of this population.

Implement a differentiated Batterer Intervention Programming Response based on an individual's assessed risk level, offering Batterer Intervention Programming specifically geared toward defendants who identify as gender and sexual minorities.

Finalize an updated Officer Field Work and Safety Training Program that incorporates a formalized training and law enforcement component to address the safety of the officers and heightens a swift response to high-risk defendants in the community.

Complete development and implementation of a Behavioral Management System to assist in a more appropriate and efficient response to both non-compliant and pro-social behaviors in an effort to promote sustained behavior change.

Furnish a Court-Wide Probation Case Management System that will allow the DOPS to better track outcomes, provide more thorough data analyses to funding sources, and inform continued strategic planning.

Facilitate testing the electronic search warrant and subpoena application for use by the judge assigned to the Duty Room. The goal of this project is to eliminate, to the extent possible, the need for law enforcement officers to physically drive to court during business hours or after-hours to the judge's location to have the warrant issued. Once in use county-wide, this process should provide significant resource efficiencies to law enforcement agencies.

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## **Strategic Priorities for 2026 (Cont.)**

Partner with the Ohio Supreme Court on the implementation and evaluation of video language interpreting in the courtrooms. The five Specialized Dockets are certified by the Supreme Court of Ohio and continue to follow the best practices established by the commission and the most current evidence-based practices. The Specialized Docket Department serves between 275-350 high-risk/high-need participants each week via the five specialized dockets, two educational programs, and forensic restorations. The dockets include the LINC; formerly titled Mental Health Program, Alcohol and Drug Addiction Program (ADAP), Changing Actions to Change Habits (CATCH), Military and Veteran Service (MAVS), and the Opiate Extension Program (OEP). The Franklin County Municipal Court Specialized Docket Department is the largest in Ohio and one of the largest in the nation.

Apply unique sentencing strategies managed by the Environmental Division for those convicted of code violations related to rental properties and hoarding activities that will benefit neighborhoods and communities. It will continue to provide helpful information to the public and area agencies through its website [www.EnvironmentalCourt.us](http://www.EnvironmentalCourt.us).

## **2026 BUDGET NOTES**

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The 2026 general fund budget totals \$28,967,882. The general fund supports both personnel and non-personnel costs. Specifically:

- General fund money continues to offset a portion of the costs associated with the Learning to Identify and Navigate Change (LINC; formerly titled Mental Health Program), ADAP, CATCH, MAVS, and OEP programs.
  - The 2026 general fund budget continues support of the Environmental Court's Community Service Program, which provides a sentencing alternative for those individuals who are charged with non-violent offenses.
  - The 2026 budget includes funding for contracts for interpretation services, mediators, and behavioral science specialists.
  - The Court's costs for security services are largely paid from a special revenue account funded by court costs, not by the city's general fund, with the exception of an after-hours security contract.
  - The majority of the Court's technology costs are paid from the Court's computer fund rather than the general fund. The computer fund is budgeted for 2026 at \$541,519.
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Financial Summary by Area of Expense						
Division	2023 Actual	2024 Actual	2025 Budget	2025 Projected	2026 Proposed	
<b>Municipal Court Judges</b>						
General Fund						
Personnel	\$ 22,390,266	\$ 24,615,071	\$ 25,671,239	\$ 26,299,557	\$ 26,586,306	
Materials & Supplies	211,049	204,387	181,000	165,494	110,075	
Services	2,598,146	3,136,491	2,472,621	2,831,826	2,026,501	
Capital	40,000	-	-	-	-	
Transfers	490,000	490,000	490,000	490,000	245,000	
<b>General Fund Subtotal</b>	<b>25,729,461</b>	<b>28,445,949</b>	<b>28,814,860</b>	<b>29,786,877</b>	<b>28,967,882</b>	
Computer Fund						
Personnel	-	-	126,448	-	108,266	
Materials & Supplies	6,738	49,048	85,000	71,236	155,055	
Services	70,509	121,629	184,400	163,836	278,198	
<b>Computer Fund Subtotal</b>	<b>77,247</b>	<b>170,677</b>	<b>395,848</b>	<b>235,072</b>	<b>541,519</b>	
<b>Department Total</b>	<b>\$ 25,806,708</b>	<b>\$ 28,616,626</b>	<b>\$ 29,210,708</b>	<b>\$ 30,021,949</b>	<b>\$ 29,509,401</b>	

Department Personnel Summary								
Fund	2023 Actual		2024 Actual		2025 Budget		2026 Proposed	
	FT	PT	FT	PT	FT	PT	FT	PT
<b>General Fund</b>								
Municipal Court Judges	228	5	234	5	247	10	246	7
<b>Computer Fund</b>								
Municipal Court Judges	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>228</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>248</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>247</b>	<b>7</b>

## Municipal Court Judges

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Operating Budget by Program					
Program	2025		2026		
	Budget	FTEs	Proposed	FTEs	
Administration	\$ 4,006,949	10	\$ 3,167,079	8	
Assignment	1,507,060	16	1,515,619	15	
Computer Services	1,312,582	7	1,442,398	7	
Court Reporters	603,120	8	593,122	8	
Environmental Court	808,874	7	892,481	7	
General Court	3,646,463	38	3,921,650	38	
Home Incarceration/Work Release	467,020	3	421,211	3	
Internal Services	214,481	0	276,249	0	
Jury Office	430,528	2	347,022	2	
Legal Research	467,802	3	491,368	3	
Magistrate Court	1,573,505	14	1,671,684	14	
Probation	8,812,976	81	8,920,015	86	
Security Services	2,215,739	25	2,333,512	21	
Service Bailiffs	854,145	15	947,616	15	
Specialty Docket Court	244,444	2	261,507	2	
Support Services	1,240,268	11	1,211,660	10	
Dispute Resolution	188,429	2	215,012	2	
Self Help Resource Center	616,323	5	880,196	6	
<b>Department Total</b>	<b>\$ 29,210,708</b>	<b>248</b>	<b>\$ 29,509,401</b>	<b>247</b>	

For additional financial information related to the Municipal Court Judges, please refer to the municipal court computer fund contained within the special revenue funds section. Program descriptions begin on the following page.

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# 2026 PROGRAM GUIDE

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## **ADMINISTRATION**

To carry out non-judicial policies of the Court including personnel management, fiscal management, purchasing, the appointment of counsel for indigent defendants, liaison with other courts, governmental entities and private agencies, public information and report management, settlement week, and secretarial services.

## **ASSIGNMENT**

To control case flow management by making individual case assignments to judges; to prepare individual judges' and magistrates' court sheets and broadsheets; to notify plaintiffs, defendants, prosecutors, attorneys, and suburban solicitors of all court hearings; to schedule and maintain an up-to-date status of all active cases assigned to the judges and magistrates; and process all motions and pleadings.

## **COMPUTER SERVICES**

To provide services for updating and maintaining technological needs for the Municipal Court.

## **COURT REPORTERS**

To provide a verbatim record of all court proceedings; to read back any and all portions of Court proceedings; to prepare verbatim transcripts of court proceedings, and to maintain records on court exhibits.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL COURT**

To protect the health, safety, and aesthetics of the properties and environments of our neighborhoods and communities through fair, tough, and compassionate adjudication and mediation.

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**GENERAL COURT**

To coordinate activities in the courtrooms of judges and magistrates including scheduling cases and providing information to the public regarding the status of pending cases.

**HOME INCARCERATION/WORK RELEASE**

To provide a cost-effective alternative sentencing option to traditional jail incarceration, consistent with public safety.

**INTERNAL SERVICES**

To account for the internal service charges of the department necessary to maintain operations.

**JURY OFFICE**

To summon citizens to serve as jurors, randomly select jurors, postpone and reschedule jury service, and maintain information.

**LEGAL RESEARCH**

To research and prepare memoranda of issues pending before the court, maintain the law library, review new case law to ensure the Court's compliance with the decisions, review pending legislation that may affect the court, advise the judges and employees regarding new legal developments and applications of current law to court procedures, and update local court rules.

**MAGISTRATE COURT**

To assist the judges by presiding over a variety of legal proceedings, making findings of fact and legal rulings, and rendering decisions, most of which are subject to final approval by a judge. Specific duties of the magistrates include hearing traffic arraignments, evictions, rent escrow proceedings, and post-judgment collection matters, small claims cases, parking violation appeals, and any other matters specifically referred to them by the judges.



**PROBATION**

To provide administration, regular supervision, non-reporting probation services, and the following programs: domestic violence, chemical abuse, multiple OVI (Operating a Vehicle Impaired) offender, sex offender, investigation services, community service, restitution, and no convictions.

**SECURITY SERVICES**

To ensure the safety of court staff and the visiting public. Security services are provided 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, so that law enforcement and the public have access to file warrants and clerk bonds and to make payments.

**SERVICE BAILIFFS**

To assist litigants and attorneys by efficiently handling and delivering court documents and the timely enforcement of judgment remedies.

**SPECIALTY DOCKET COURT**

To provide a cost-effective alternative sentencing option to traditional jail incarceration for prisoners with mental illnesses.

**SUPPORT SERVICES**

To provide support to the Court in the areas of appointed counsel, interpretation services, vehicle sanctions, and other court services related to the scheduling of court dates, the processing of requests to extend the time to pay fines and court costs, the rescheduling of court-ordered incarcerations, and the administration of limited driving privileges.

**DISPUTE RESOLUTION**

To provide mediation services for the Court and public. The program provides mediation services for individuals and businesses who wish to resolve their disputes and avoid filing a small claims case.

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### **SELF HELP RESOURCE CENTER**

To enhance the Social Worker pilot that began through CARES dollars provided by the City of Columbus during the pandemic. This pilot provides additional assistance to defendants who appear in eviction court and need additional direction from behavioral, social, and community services. The work of the Self Help Resource Center has served as a model for other courts in the nation. Additionally, the Self-Help Resource Center provides assistance with the Opportunity Port program, which seeks to simplify the record sealing application process and expand access to legal support services for Columbus residents with a criminal record.