

# News Release



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## **Remarks of Glenn A. Grant, Acting Administrative Director of the Courts, Before the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee**

Good afternoon, Chairman Sarlo, Vice Chair Greenstein, and the other members of the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee.

On behalf of Chief Justice Stuart Rabner and the justices of the Supreme Court, and on behalf of our judges and staff, it is my privilege to speak to you today about the Judiciary and the proposed budget for the upcoming fiscal year.

With me today are Assignment Judges Michael Toto from Middlesex, Sheila Venable of Essex, Michael Blee of Atlantic and Cape May counties, Robert Lougy of Mercer County, and Kevin Shanahan of Somerset, Hunterdon, and Warren counties. Also here today, from the Administrative Office of the Courts, are our Chief Financial Officer Todd McManus, who oversees the Judiciary's fiscal operations, and our Chief Information Officer Laks Kattalai.

I'd like to start off my remarks by expressing our appreciation for the progress made with respect to judicial vacancies. As of today, our court operates with 39 judicial vacancies, as compared to 58 vacancies at the start of 2024 and a peak of 78 vacancies in May 2022.

With the recent addition of new judges, we are once again able to conduct civil and matrimonial trials in all of our vicinages across the state. The final moratorium on such cases, in the Passaic Vicinage, was lifted on April 1.

Filling judgeships requires continued vigilance, and we stand ready to provide whatever assistance might be needed to reduce the number of vacancies even further.

Years of high vacancy rates, combined with the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on staffing levels, have significantly challenged the Judiciary's ability to conduct case management conferences, hearings, and trials. A growing and unmanageable backlog of court cases was the predictable result.

As of January 1, 2024, backlogged matters in the trial courts stood at 81,415, more than double the mark from June 2019.

In late March of this year, the Judiciary released its strategic plan for backlog reduction. The goal is to return to pre-pandemic backlog levels within the next three years. We are committed, as an organization, to do whatever is needed to resolve cases. Ultimately, the success of that plan will be contingent on the ability to continue to reduce the number of judicial vacancies and bring in new employees.

With that said, I want to commend our judges and our court staff for their resilience during these challenging times, and for ensuring the Judiciary's continued service to the public.

Collaboration across the three branches of government has been pivotal to our courts and operations and allowed our organization to continue to evolve in the ways we respond to the various needs of the people of New Jersey.

The most significant example of this would be the adoption of Criminal Justice Reform or CJR. Now in its eighth year, CJR has proven to be a fairer and more effective system than the former cash bail model. Part of its strength lies in its adaptability. We have recognized from the start that CJR would continually evolve according to evidence-based analysis. With that in mind, we support existing legislation that would enact the recommendations from the Second Joint Committee on Criminal Justice Reform to sustain the strengths of the current system and integrate further improvements.

For decades now, we have worked together to develop solutions that protect the public while offering criminal defendants the opportunity for rehabilitation and the opportunity to break generational cycles that only lead to more crime, more broken families, and greater expenditure of taxpayer dollars.

This forum provides an opportunity to acknowledge the strong working relationships between the Judiciary and the two houses of the Legislature, as well as our collaborations with just about every department and agency in the executive branch.

Two partnerships that are particularly relevant to today's discussions are connected to the Department of Human Services. Both Recovery Court and our mental health initiative would not be possible without the strong leadership of Commissioner Sarah Adelman and her team.

Recovery court, administered by the Judiciary in close partnership with DHS, continues to positively impact our communities in numerous ways.

Consider: the re-incarceration for adult offenders within three years from release from state prison is almost 30 percent. The re-incarceration for recovery court participants within three years of graduating from the program is less than 2 percent.

Think about that: 30 percent reoffending rate versus less than 2 percent. Those are numbers that create a ripple effect of positive results.

We've seen dramatic increases in the percentage of recovery court participants who gain employment, the percentage of recovery court participants who obtain drivers licenses, and the percentage of recovery court participants who secure medical benefits.

We also are working with local prosecutors, the Attorney General's office, and DHS to tackle the societal challenges associated with mental illness by using a recovery court model to connect defendants dealing with serious mental issues to needed treatment.

The Intensive Supervision Program, or ISP, groundbreaking when it was established in 1983, continues to demonstrate improved results, helping to provide resources for substance abuse, mental health needs, housing, education, vocational training, and employment assistance. ISP takes individuals who are in state prison and allows them to leave their prison sentence early and return to their community.

In Fiscal Year 2023, the cost of ISP to the state was approximately \$35,000 per person, as compared to \$76,000 for the cost of incarceration in state prison. That means the program saved the state approximately \$19 million over the course of the fiscal year – and equally important ISP participants had a lower re-arrest rate three years after graduation than those released directly from state prison did after three years.

The JOBS program (Judiciary Opportunities for Building Success) takes the positive results of those programs to the next logical step, helping connect those on probation, as well as recovery court and ISP, with connections to employers and job training. JOBS program partners include private corporations, public agencies, non-profit organizations, healthcare organizations, educational institutions, and government organizations. We owe a particular thanks to the Commissioner of the Department of Labor, Robert Asaro-Angelo, for his great support for the program and for providing funding that assists with training and education for participants in the program.

The last program I'd like to talk about is the Gun Violence Reduction Initiative, another collaborative effort that began in the Passaic Vicinage and has now expanded to nine additional vicinages. Through the program, the Judiciary works with community leaders, third-party agencies, and service providers to connect individuals placed on probation for gun-related offenses to appropriate resources and services.

The Probation Division reviews eligible cases for presentation to the Gun Violence Board, which recommends interventions, such as counseling, mentoring programs, job training, education, and other community-based services based on the individual's needs. To date, there are 316 participants currently in the initiative, and 226 are currently employed.

These evidence-based programs are all born from a collaboration that has existed among the three branches of government for decades, going back to the adoption of the state constitution in 1947.

Through these collaborative efforts and partnerships, we have not only resolved disputes impartially, but also developed initiatives that enhance public safety and community well-being. Working together, we've saved taxpayers' dollars while implementing thoughtful, evidence-based solutions that seek to improve lives and impact our communities in a positive manner.

Thank you once again for your time. We welcome any questions you may have on our budget and operations. Thank you.

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