

Redbook

LBO Analysis of Executive Budget Proposal

Court of Claims of Ohio

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LBO Redbook

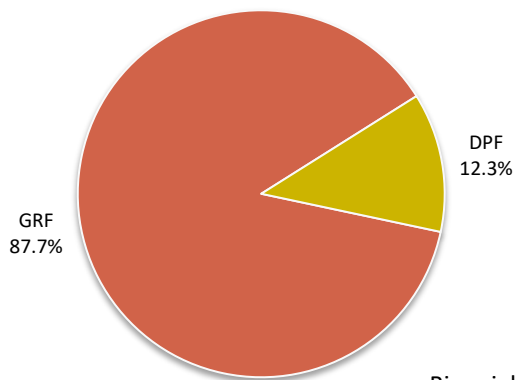
Court of Claims of Ohio

Quick look...

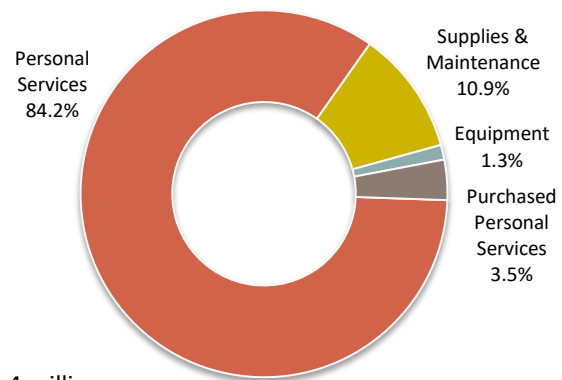
- The Court of Claims hears claims against the state, handles public records claims, and hears appeals of Attorney General crime victims compensation decisions.
- Total budget recommendations: \$5.1 million in FY 2026 and \$5.3 million in FY 2027.
 - Sources of the budget: GRF (87.7%) and state non-GRF (12.3%).
 - 84.2% of the Court’s budget is proposed for personal services (payroll).

Fund Group	FY 2024 Actual	FY 2025 Estimate	FY 2026 Introduced	FY 2027 Introduced
General Revenue (GRF)	\$9,732,447	\$4,690,000	\$4,463,374	\$4,668,266
Dedicated Purpose (DPF)	\$500,236	\$597,107	\$624,900	\$652,622
Total	\$10,232,683	\$5,287,107	\$5,088,274	\$5,320,888
% change	--	-48.3%	-3.8%	4.6%
<i>GRF % change</i>	--	-51.8%	-4.8%	4.6%

**Chart 1: CLA Budget by Fund Group
FY 2026-FY 2027 Biennium**



**Chart 2: CLA Budget by Expense Category
FY 2026-FY 2027 Biennium**



Biennial total: \$10.4 million

Agency overview

The Court of Claims, established in 1975, is the only statutory court with statewide jurisdiction. Prior to its creation, there was no forum for civil actions filed against the state of Ohio. The Court of Claims’ duties include:

- Adjudicating civil actions filed against the state;

- Hearing appeals from decisions made by the Attorney General on claims allowed under the Victims of Crime Law;
- Hearing complaints alleging a denial of access to public records; and
- Acting as the state’s fiduciary agent for processing claims of wrongful imprisonment.

Staffing

Tables 1 and 2 below display staffing levels in terms of full-time equivalent (FTE) staff positions maintained by the Court from FY 2023 projected through FY 2024. Table 1 reflects the number of FTEs for the Court’s two major programs: (1) Civil, which includes civil actions against the state, public records adjudication, and wrongful imprisonment claims, and (2) Victims of Crime. Table 2 represents FTEs by type of appointment. It should be noted that a number of employees are part time. For this reason, the numbers may not illustrate a physical portrayal (i.e., head count) of the Court’s staffing.

Program	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025*	FY 2026*	FY 2027*
Civil	24.4	24.3	24.2	24.2	24.2
Crime Victims	3.4	3.4	3.5	3.5	3.5
Total	27.8	27.7	27.6	27.6	27.6

*Estimates; totals may not sum due to rounding

The Court resides in Franklin County and consists of judges who sit by temporary assignment of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. The Chief Justice may appoint incumbent justices or judges of the Supreme Court, courts of appeals, or courts of common pleas, or retired justices or judges eligible for active duty pursuant to Division (C) of Section 6 of Article IV of the Ohio Constitution. The appointments to the Court are temporary, lasting roughly three months. Many of the judges, however, are reappointed for multiple terms. Typically, a case is heard by a single judge. For complex cases, a three-judge panel may be seated. For civil complaints filed for \$10,000 or less, the Clerk of the Court or Deputy Clerk may decide the case (appealable to an appointed judge).

Appointment Types	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025*	FY 2026*	FY 2027*
Permanent Staff	27.4	27.2	27.6	27.6	27.6
Judges	0.5	0.5	0.7	0.7	0.7
Total	27.8	27.7	28.3	28.3	28.3

*Estimates

Analysis of FY 2026-FY 2027 budget proposal

R.C. 107.03(B) states that “no alterations shall be made in the [budget] requests for the legislative and judicial branches of the state filed with the director of budget and management” Therefore, the Governor has made no alterations to the budget request submitted by the Court of Claims.

The Court’s budget consists of five appropriation line items (ALIs), three of which are supported by the GRF, and two by Dedicated Purpose Fund (DPF) line items. The table and Chart 1 shown in the preceding “**Quick look**” section present the recommended appropriations by fund group. As shown on Chart 1, the proposed budget provides \$5.1 million in FY 2026 and \$5.3 million in FY 2027, of which 87.7% is supported by the GRF, and 12.3% by state non-GRF.

As shown in Chart 2 in the “**Quick look**” section, the largest expense category for the Court, at 84.2%, is personal services (payroll). The next largest expense category, at 10.9%, is supplies and maintenance. The remaining two categories, purchased personal services and equipment, account for 3.5% and 1.3%, respectively.

As mentioned above, the Court’s budget is funded by five line items, one of which – Wrongful Imprisonment Compensation – is appropriated on an as-needed basis. Each of these line items is discussed further below.

Operating Expenses (ALI 015321)

FY 2022 Actual	FY 2023 Actual	FY 2024 Actual	FY 2025 Estimate	FY 2026 Introduced	FY 2027 Introduced
GRF ALI 015321, Operating Expenses					
\$2,697,825	\$2,926,671	\$2,599,052	\$3,109,000	\$3,318,213	\$3,468,684
% change	8.5%	-11.2%	19.6%	6.7%	4.5%

The expenses of operating the Court, primarily the Court’s Civil Division, are paid with money appropriated to this GRF line item. Historically, the majority of this line item – between 80% and 90% – is expended for personal services (payroll).

Wrongful Imprisonment Compensation (ALI 015402)

FY 2022 Actual	FY 2023 Actual	FY 2024 Actual	FY 2025 Estimate	FY 2026 Introduced	FY 2027 Introduced
GRF ALI 015402, Wrongful Imprisonment Compensation					
\$8,534,147	\$8,911,372	\$6,154,335	\$500,000	\$0	\$0
% change	4.4%	-30.9%	-91.9%	-100.0%	0.0%

The Court of Claims acts as the state’s fiduciary agent for processing claims of wrongful imprisonment. When a wrongful imprisonment judgment has been rendered in a court of common pleas, the Controlling Board, upon certification by the Court of Claims, transfers the sum necessary to pay that judgment to the Court’s GRF line item 015402, Wrongful Imprisonment

Compensation. Since the Controlling Board provides the money for such judgments on an as-needed basis, the Court's line item does not receive a direct appropriation through the main operating appropriations act enacted by each General Assembly. However, once the expenditure is made, the amounts are tracked as spending by the Court.

Public Records Adjudication (ALIs 015403 and 015604)

FY 2022 Actual	FY 2023 Actual	FY 2024 Actual	FY 2025 Estimate	FY 2026 Introduced	FY 2027 Introduced
GRF ALI 015403, Public Records Adjudication					
\$910,408	\$1,003,656	\$979,059	\$1,081,000	\$1,145,161	\$1,199,582
DPF Fund 5TE0 ALI 015604, Public Records					
\$9,200	\$1,200	\$6,000	\$2,000	\$2,800	\$2,800
Public Records Total	\$1,004,856	\$985,059	\$1,083,000	\$1,147,961	\$1,202,382
% change	9.3%	-2.0%	9.9%	6.0%	4.7%

The expenses of the Court's Public Records Adjudication Program, which hears complaints alleging a denial of access to public records, is funded by the two line items displayed in the table immediately above. From September 2016, when the program went into effect, through FY 2021, it was funded solely with money appropriated from the GRF.

DPF line item 015604, Public Records, draws its appropriation from the Public Records Fund (Fund 5TE0), which consists of all filing fees for public records cases. From FY 2020-FY 2024, revenue credited to the fund ranged roughly \$1,600 to \$3,000 annually.

CLA Victims of Crime (ALI 015603)

FY 2022 Actual	FY 2023 Actual	FY 2024 Actual	FY 2025 Estimate	FY 2026 Introduced	FY 2027 Introduced
DPF Fund 5K20 ALI 015603, CLA Victims of Crime					
\$534,212	\$545,675	\$494,236	\$595,107	\$622,100	\$649,822
% change	2.1%	-9.4%	20.4%	4.5%	4.5%

This line item pays for: (1) the compensation of judges of the Court of Claims necessary to hear and determine appeals from the Office of the Attorney General, and (2) the compensation of any personnel of the Court of Claims needed to administer their appellate duties and responsibilities. Its appropriation is supported by cash transferred by the Office of Budget and Management from the Victims of Crime/Reparations Fund (Fund 4020), which is used by the Office of the Attorney General.

Facts and figures

The Court of Claims serves four primary functions: (1) to adjudicate civil actions filed against the state, (2) to hear appeals from decisions made by the Attorney General on claims allowed under the Victims of Crime Law, (3) to hear complaints alleging a denial of access to public records, and (4) to act as the state’s fiduciary agent for processing claims of wrongful imprisonment.

Claims against the state for money damages

The Court’s Civil Division is responsible for hearing all civil claims filed against the state of Ohio and its agencies. Claims can be adjudicated administratively, or by referees and judges, as described in more detail below.

Administrative determinations. In civil actions against the state for \$10,000 or less, the clerk may administratively determine a claim and render judgment. A majority of the civil actions are handled administratively.

Judicial determinations. A judge must decide any case involving claims greater than \$10,000. In most cases, a single judge will hear a case, but the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Ohio may assign a panel of three judges to a civil action that presents novel or complex issues of law and fact. While a motion may be filed requesting that a panel of three judges hear a particular case, few cases are eligible for a hearing before a panel of three judges.

Referees. Whenever the Chief Justice believes an equitable resolution of a case will be expedited, the Chief Justice may appoint referees (also known as magistrates) in accordance with Civil Procedure Rule 53 to hear the case. For disputes arising between the state and a contractor concerning the terms of a public improvement contract let by the state, the Supreme Court is required to appoint a referee, or a panel of three referees.¹

The Court’s decisions in these civil matters may be appealed. Cases that were originally determined by the clerk of the Court (involving \$10,000 or less) may be appealed to a judge of the Court. The decision of the judge is final. Cases that were originally heard by a judge of the Court (over \$10,000) may be appealed to the Tenth District Court of Appeals in Franklin County, and further appealed to the Supreme Court of Ohio.

Details on the filing and disposition of civil cases from FY 2020-FY 2024 for both administratively processed claims and judicially processed claims are summarized in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Civil Case Filings, Fiscal Years 2020-2024					
Type of Action	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024
Administratively processed claims (less than \$10,000)					
Cases Filed/Reinstated	523	368	539	451	499
Cases Terminated	764	423	411	555	459

¹ The referees need not be attorneys, but must be persons knowledgeable about construction contract law, a member of the Construction Industry Panel of the American Arbitration Association, or an individual or individuals deemed qualified by the Chief Justice to serve.

Table 3. Civil Case Filings, Fiscal Years 2020-2024					
Type of Action	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024
Judicial Review	60	58	40	55	41
Judicially processed claims (\$10,000 and over)					
Cases Filed/Reinstated	240	207	228	255	258
Cases Terminated	262	233	243	226	260
Stay/Interlocutory Appeals	40	32	61	50	49
Trials/Hearings Held	26	35	32	23	23
Conferences Held	351	367	328	282	310

Victims of crime appeals

In 1976, the Victims of Crime Compensation Program was enacted and its administration was assigned to the Court. Under the program, individuals suffering personal injury as the result of criminal conduct were eligible to apply for compensation. This compensation included, but was not limited to, psychiatric care/counseling, medical expenses, work loss compensation, and unemployment benefits loss. Dependents could also receive awards for economic loss, replacement services loss, and certain funeral expenses in the case of a homicide. The maximum award was \$50,000 per victim, per criminal incident.

From 1976 until July 1, 2000, the Court's Victims of Crime Division handled all claims for compensation from the Victims of Crime Fund. The Office of the Attorney General then investigated the claim and filed a finding of fact and recommendation with the Court.

At the start of FY 2001, the Victims of Crime Compensation Program underwent a transformation with the enactment of S.B. 153 of the 123rd General Assembly. Under the act, responsibility for administering the program was transferred from the Court of Claims to the Office of the Attorney General. The transfer significantly changed the role that the Court plays in these cases. Whereas before, the Court rendered the initial decisions on compensation cases and was responsible for disbursing reparation awards, this responsibility was transferred to the Office of the Attorney General. The Court still handles the appeals process.

Details on the filing and disposition of victims of crime appeals from FY 2020-FY 2024 are summarized in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Victims of Crime Appeals, Fiscal Years 2020-2024					
Type of Action	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024
Cases Filed/Reinstated	22	27	40	34	31
Cases Terminated	17	19	45	38	37
Trials/Hearings Held	10	15	18	23	17
Conferences	4	53	19	21	9

Public records adjudication

The enactment of S.B. 321 of the 131st General Assembly, which became effective September 28, 2016, created an adjudication and mediation program for public records request disputes within the Court of Claims. Under prior existing law, unchanged by the act, an individual is permitted to file a mandamus action in the court of common pleas to resolve a public records request dispute. The act permits an individual to file an action with the Court of Claims or a mandamus action with a court of common pleas, but not both. In either instance, a judgment may be appealed to the proper appellate court. The act requires clerks for the courts of common pleas to act as clerks for the Court of Claims in their respective counties for any public records complaints filed in the Court of Claims, although a complainant may file directly with the Clerk of the Court of Claims.

Under the act, except for a court that hears a mandamus action, the Court of Claims is the sole and exclusive authority in Ohio that adjudicates or resolves complaints based on alleged violations of the Public Records Law. The Clerk of the Court of Claims is required to designate one or more current employees or hire one or more individuals to serve as special masters to hear complaints. The Clerk may assign administrative and clerical work associated with complaints to current employees or may hire such additional employees as may be necessary to perform such work.

Details on the filing and disposition of public records request disputes from FY 2020-FY 2024 are summarized in Table 5 below.

Type of Action	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024
New Cases Filed	69	74	80	83	118
Cases Terminated	60	72	78	94	108
Judicial Reviews	9	17	17	24	24
Mediations Held	88	83	115	115	82

Wrongful imprisonment claims

The Court of Claims acts as the state's fiduciary agent for processing claims of wrongful imprisonment. Money to pay any such claims is transferred to the Court on an as-needed basis by the state's Controlling Board.

Pursuant to R.C. 2743.48(E)(2), upon presentation of requisite proof to the Court, a wrongfully imprisoned individual is entitled to receive a sum of money that equals the total of each of the following amounts:

- The amount of any fine or court costs imposed and paid, and the reasonable attorney's fees and other expenses incurred by the wrongfully imprisoned individual in connection with all associated criminal proceedings and appeals, and, if applicable, in connection with obtaining the individual's discharge from confinement in the state correctional institution;

- For each full year that the individual was imprisoned in the state correctional institution for the offense of which the individual was found guilty, \$40,330, or the adjusted amount determined by the Auditor of State (\$68,808.38 for CY 2025 and CY 2026). For partial years, the share is prorated;
- Any loss of wages, salary, or other earned income that directly resulted from the individual's arrest, prosecution, conviction, and wrongful imprisonment; and
- The amount of certain cost debts the Department of Rehabilitation and Correction recovered from the wrongfully imprisoned individual.

H.B. 411 of the 132nd General Assembly requires the Court to deduct any known debts owed by a wrongfully imprisoned individual to the state or a political subdivision or any award or recovery from a related civil rights action that the individual actually collected from the money that the individual otherwise would be awarded and pay those deducted amounts to the state or political subdivision.

Table 6 below shows the total amount of money that the Court has disbursed to make wrongful imprisonment settlements from FY 2013-FY 2024.

Table 6. Wrongful Imprisonment Settlement Disbursements, FY 2013-FY 2024	
Fiscal Year	Total Disbursed
2013	\$379,128
2014	\$721,560
2015	\$2,962,101
2016	\$8,357,100
2017	\$4,129,947
2018	\$0
2019	\$2,049,267
2020	\$825,000
2021	\$4,519,815
2022	\$8,534,147
2023	\$8,911,372
2024	\$6,154,335