

Department of Legislative Services
 Maryland General Assembly
 2026 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

Senate Joint Resolution 2 (The President)(By Request - Judicial Compensation Commission)

Budget and Taxation

Judicial Compensation Commission - Recommendations

This joint resolution proposes that judicial salaries increase (and an annual stipend be paid to specified administrative judges) for fiscal 2027 through 2030, pursuant to the recommendation of the Judicial Compensation Commission. Salaries recommended by the commission take effect automatically unless the resolution is adopted or amended by the General Assembly within 50 days of its introduction.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: General fund expenditures increase by \$3.4 million in FY 2027. The Judiciary’s proposed FY 2027 budget includes sufficient funding for this purpose, as discussed below. Out-years reflect the impact of future increases proposed in the joint resolution over current salary amounts. FY 2031 expenditures assume no additional salary increases after FY 2030. Revenues are not affected.

(\$ in millions)	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030	FY 2031
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
GF Expenditure	3.4	5.7	8.9	12.0	12.0
Net Effect	(\$3.4)	(\$5.7)	(\$8.9)	(\$12.0)	(\$12.0)

Note: () = decrease; GF = general funds; FF = federal funds; SF = special funds; - = indeterminate increase; (-) = indeterminate decrease

Local Effect: Minimal increase in local government expenditures in the counties that tie the salaries of local officials to judicial salaries. Revenues are not affected.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The current salaries and recommended salaries for each year are shown in **Exhibit 1**.

Exhibit 1 Current and Proposed Judicial Salaries

<u>Position</u>	<u>Current</u>	<u>FY 2027</u>	<u>FY 2028</u>	<u>FY 2029</u>	<u>FY 2030</u>
Supreme Court					
Chief Justice	\$255,433	\$261,333	\$267,233	\$273,133	\$279,033
Associate Justice	236,433	242,333	248,233	254,133	260,033
Appellate Court					
Chief Judge	226,633	232,533	238,433	244,333	250,233
Associate Judge	223,633	229,533	235,433	241,333	247,233
Circuit Courts					
Judge	214,433	220,333	226,233	232,133	238,033
District Court					
Chief Judge	223,633	229,533	235,433	241,333	247,233
Associate Judge	201,333	207,233	213,133	219,033	224,933

Source: Department of Legislative Services

Current Law/Background: The Judicial Compensation Commission, established in 1980, is required to review judicial salaries and make recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly once every four years. The General Assembly may amend a joint resolution from the commission to decrease, but not increase, any of the commission's salary recommendations. The General Assembly may not reduce a judge's salary below its current level. Failure to adopt or amend the joint resolution within 50 calendar days of its introduction results in adoption of the salaries recommended by the commission. If the General Assembly rejects any or all of the commission's recommendations, the affected judges' salaries remain unchanged, unless modified by other provisions of law.

General State employee salary increases apply to judges only in years in which judges' salaries are not increased in accordance with a resolution from the commission's recommendations.

The following officials have salaries that are tied to judicial salaries:

- the State Prosecutor and the Public Defender – not less than that of a circuit court judge;
- members of the Workers’ Compensation Commission (WCC) – at least equal to a District Court judge, with the chair’s salary being at least \$1,500 higher than the members’ salaries; and
- local officials of various counties – for example, numerous State’s Attorneys have salaries that are set at a percentage of a circuit or District Court judge’s salary.

Salaries for judges were last increased by Joint Resolutions 3 and 4 of 2022, which increased by \$10,000 each year the salaries for all judges in fiscal 2023 through 2026. To develop the current proposal, the commission met two times in December 2025 and once in January 2026 to consider salary recommendations and annual stipends for administrative judges, and finalized its recommendations as specified in this resolution in January 2026.

State Expenditures: If the resolution is implemented, general fund expenditure increase by \$3,416,089 in fiscal 2027. While the proposal primarily increases expenditures for the Judiciary, other State agencies are impacted as discussed below.

Judiciary

This joint resolution proposes that the salaries of all Maryland judges (324) be increased over a four-year period by \$23,600 (\$5,900 per judge per year) and that, in addition to the judge’s annual salary, an annual stipend of \$7,500 be paid to the Chief Judge of the Appellate Court of Maryland and to a judge that serves as an administrative judge for a circuit court or the District Court.

General fund expenditures therefore increase by \$3,340,099 in fiscal 2027 to account for increased salaries, fringe benefits, and annual stipends. In addition to the impact from higher judicial salaries for sitting judges, the Judiciary consistently relies on using retired judges to supplement current resources. The commission’s proposal also impacts the cost of using these recalled judges, whose compensation is based on existing judicial salaries pursuant to statute. Based on the Judiciary’s utilization of retired judges, it advises that the proposal is expected to increase costs by \$774,963 in fiscal 2027 (reflected in the total shown above). Although magistrate compensation is not under the purview of the commission, the Judiciary’s internal policy sets magistrate salaries at no less than 90% of a District Court judge’s salary. Accordingly, the expenditure increase above includes increased compensation for magistrates. The fiscal 2027 budget as introduced was submitted prior to the commission’s final recommendations and includes \$6.6 million to fund salary increases in fiscal 2027. Accordingly, the fiscal 2027 budget as introduced contains more than sufficient funding for the increases reflected in the resolution.

Other Impacted Agencies

The commission's recommendation of a \$5,900 increase for circuit court judges in fiscal 2027 also increases the salaries of the State Prosecutor and the Public Defender by that amount. Including fringe benefits, the total increase in fiscal 2027 to fund both of these salary increases is \$12,665.

The 10 members of WCC, whose salaries correspond with that of a District Court judge, also each receive the \$5,900 increase. Accordingly, general fund expenditures increase by \$63,325 in fiscal 2027 for salaries and benefits.

Out-year Expenditures

Out-year expenditures for the Judicial Branch, as well as other State agencies affected by the resolution, reflect the salary and fringe benefit costs due to the salary increases (and stipends) proposed through fiscal 2030. By fiscal 2030, when the salary is fully implemented, total general fund expenditures for the Judiciary as well as other State agencies affected by the resolution increase by \$12,037,113. **Exhibit 2** shows the projected cost of adopting the commission's recommendations over the next four-year period. Of note, because the salary plan proposed by the commission represents lower increases than that assumed in the most recent valuation assumption for the Judicial Retirement System, the impact of the salary increases is offset by a reduction in pension costs. While there is a modest reduction in fiscal 2027, the impact is primarily realized beginning in fiscal 2028 (after the next valuation to set contribution rates occurs). In addition, because the Judicial Compensation Commission may make additional recommendations (in future years), the fiscal 2031 estimate generally remains constant with that of fiscal 2030 and is not shown separately in the exhibit. The projected fiscal impact also does not factor in the costs of any additional judgeships that may be added.

Exhibit 2
Fiscal Impact of Judicial Compensation Commission Recommendations

	<u>Total Judgeships</u>	<u>Current Salary</u>	<u>FY 2027</u>	<u>FY 2028</u>	<u>FY 2029</u>	<u>FY 2030</u>
Supreme Court						
Chief Justice	1	\$255,433	\$261,333	\$267,233	\$273,133	\$279,033
Associate Justice	6	236,433	242,333	248,233	254,133	260,033
Appellate Court						
Chief Judge	1	226,633	232,533	238,433	244,333	250,233
Associate Judge	14	223,633	229,533	235,433	241,333	247,233
Circuit Court						
Chief Judge	1	223,633	229,533	235,433	241,333	247,233
Associate Judge	124	201,333	207,233	213,133	219,033	224,933
Magistrate						
Magistrate	70	181,200	186,510	191,820	197,130	202,440
Incremental Salaries ⁽¹⁾ and Annual Stipend						
			2,631,600	2,631,600	2,631,600	2,631,600
Incremental Fringe Benefits/Pensions for Non-Judge Employees						
			29,090	28,824	28,559	31,683
Incremental Fringe Benefits/Pensions – Judges ⁽²⁾						
			(19,564)	(889,564)	30,046	20,436
Incremental Compensation for Senior/Recalled Judges ⁽⁴⁾						
			774,963	774,963	774,963	774,963
Incremental Fiscal Impact			\$3,416,089	\$2,545,823	\$3,465,558	\$3,458,682
Cumulative Fiscal Impact			\$3,416,089	\$5,678,899	\$8,861,444	\$12,037,113

⁽¹⁾ Includes salary increases for the Public Defender, State Prosecutor, and members of the Workers' Compensation Commission, whose salaries are tied by statute to judicial salaries. Does not include costs for any local officials whose salaries are tied to judicial salaries but are funded locally. Also includes salary increases for magistrates who have salaries tied to the salary of a District Court judge based on Judiciary policy.

⁽²⁾ Impact on judicial pensions is based on an actuarial estimate prepared based on the recommended salary increases.

⁽³⁾ Based on Judiciary estimate – compensation for senior/recalled judges is tied to judicial salaries by statute.

Source: Bolton Partners, Inc.; Maryland Judiciary; Department of Legislative Services

Local Expenditures: Salaries of local officials (mostly State’s Attorneys) in numerous counties are directly or indirectly tied to the salaries of judges. Salary expenditures accordingly increase in such jurisdictions to reflect the increased compensation for judges.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

Designated Cross File: HJ 6 (The Speaker)(By Request - Judicial Compensation Commission) - Appropriations.

Information Source(s): Judiciary (Administrative Office of the Courts); Office of the Public Defender; State Prosecutor’s Office; Bolton Partners, Inc.; Department of Legislative Services

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js/jkb

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