

Department of Legislative Services
 Maryland General Assembly
 2026 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

Senate Bill 543

(Chair, Judicial Proceedings Committee)(By Request -
 Maryland Judicial Conference)

Judicial Proceedings

Judgeships - Circuit Court and District Court

This bill alters the number of resident judges of the circuit court by adding one additional judgeship in St. Mary’s County. The bill also creates one additional District Court judgeship in District 11 (to be appointed from Washington County).

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: General fund expenditures increase by \$786,900 in FY 2027 for two additional judges and associated staff; future year expenditures reflect annualization. The FY 2027 budget as introduced includes funding for this purpose. Revenues are not affected.

(in dollars)	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030	FY 2031
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
GF Expenditure	786,900	995,800	1,013,600	1,032,200	1,051,300
Net Effect	(\$786,900)	(\$995,800)	(\$1,013,600)	(\$1,032,200)	(\$1,051,300)

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

Local Effect: St. Mary’s County expenditures increase by approximately \$85,500 in FY 2027 and by \$114,000 annually thereafter for staff and ongoing operating costs. Revenues are not affected.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law/Background: There are 176 circuit court judges in the State, including 3 in St. Mary's County.

For purposes of the operation and administration of the District Court, the State is divided into 12 districts. District 11, which has 5 judges, includes Frederick and Washington counties. Of these judges, 3 are from Frederick County and 2 are from Washington County.

To support the General Assembly's role in establishing new judgeships, the Chief Judge of the Supreme Court of Maryland annually certifies to the General Assembly the need for additional judges in the State. The Judiciary uses best practices developed by the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) to calculate judicial need, which take into account the amount of judicial work generated on average per case filing within each distinct case type. Using the model developed by NCSC, judicial need for fiscal 2027 was primarily based on average and type of new case filings in the most recent three years (fiscal 2023 through 2025). The certification of judicial workloads indicates a projected need of five additional judges throughout the State; the Judiciary is requesting one judge position for St. Mary's County Circuit Court and one judge position for the District Court (to be appointed from Washington County). An additional circuit court judgeship was last created by Chapters 756 and 757 of 2024, which added one circuit court judge in Prince George's County. Additional District Court judgeships were last created by Chapter 749 of 2019, which added one District Court judge each in St. Mary's County and Anne Arundel County, and two District Court judges each in Prince George's County and Baltimore County, for a total of six District Court judges.

State Expenditures: General fund expenditures increase by \$786,861 in fiscal 2027, which accounts for the bill's October 1, 2026 effective date. This estimate reflects the cost of creating one circuit court judgeship in St. Mary's County and the associated positions of one courtroom clerk and one law clerk with the judgeship (a total of three positions). The estimate also reflects the cost of creating one new District Court judgeship and the associated positions of one courtroom clerk and two contractual bailiffs (a total of four positions, including two contractual employees). The estimate includes salaries and fringe benefits, as well as operating expenses for the District Court. The fiscal 2027 budget as introduced includes funding for these positions.

Positions	5.0
Contractual Positions	2.0
Salaries and Fringe Benefits	\$750,298
Operating Expenses – District Court*	<u>36,563</u>
Total FY 2027 State Expenditures	\$786,861

(* Because counties are generally responsible for funding certain operating expenses of the circuit courts, expenditures for operating expenses for St. Mary’s County are reflected in the fiscal estimate below)

Future year expenditures generally reflect full salaries with annual increases and employee turnover. The Department of Legislative Services notes, however, that this estimate only reflects the current salary (fiscal 2026 – \$214,433) for a circuit court judge, and the current salary (fiscal 2026 – \$201,333) for a District Court judge. Pursuant to statute, future increases in judicial salaries depend on any recommendations proposed by the Judicial Compensation Commission and subsequent action by the General Assembly. Legislation (Senate Joint Resolution 2 and House Joint Resolution 6 of 2026) proposing increases in judicial salaries from fiscal 2027 through 2030 has been introduced this session. General fund expenditures therefore may increase beyond what is estimated in this fiscal and policy note to the extent that judicial salaries are increased.

This estimate does not include any health insurance costs that could be incurred for specified contractual employees under the State’s implementation of the federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

Local Expenditures: St. Mary’s County anticipates expenditures of approximately \$85,481 in fiscal 2027 for costs associated with operating expenses and hiring one full-time administrative assistant and one part-time bailiff to support the new circuit court judgeship; expenditures increase by at least \$114,000 annually thereafter.

Additional Information

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

Designated Cross File: HB 493 (Chair, Judiciary Committee)(By Request - Maryland Judicial Conference) - Judiciary.

Information Source(s): St. Mary’s County; Judiciary (Administrative Office of the Courts); Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 17, 2026
sj/jkb

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