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MARYLAND JUDICIAL COUNCIL LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

MEMORANDUM

TO: Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
FROM: Legislative Committee
Suzanne D. Pelz, Esq.
410-260-1523
RE: Senate Bill 358
Queen Anne's County – Circuit Court Judgeships
DATE: January 28, 2026
(2/3)
POSITION: Explanation of Non-Support

The Maryland Judiciary appreciates the Committee's consideration of all requests for new judgeships. Although the Judiciary will continue to review and assess the needs of an additional judgeship in Queen Anne's County, the methodology long used by the Judiciary to justify requests for new judgeships does not reflect a certified need for a judgeship in Queen Anne's County at this time.

The Judiciary uses a standard methodology to determine what locations have a certified need for a judgeship. The underlying model for establishing judicial officer need that is currently in use comes from the National Center for State Courts (NCSC). The model in use now was last fully updated in 2017, with a subsequent partial update in 2022, *State of Maryland Limited Scope Workload Adjustment for District and Circuit Court Judicial Officers*. As recommended by the NCSC, this model relies predominately on new case filings in the three most recent fiscal years: Fiscal Years 2023, 2024, and 2025. As reflected in the Judiciary's submission this year, the model identified a certified need for five additional judgeships.

While the model relies on case weights, the NCSC recognizes that other qualitative factors can be considered as well, including local court practices and variations in

policies among the State's Attorneys. Four circuit court jurisdictions in which the model did not identify a certified need requested additional judgeships. One of those is St. Mary's County. For reasons more fully explained in our submission and in future testimony before this Committee, the Judiciary has requested a new judgeship in St. Mary's County based on factors relevant to workload in that jurisdiction that are not accounted for in the model.

The Judiciary has not requested a new judgeship in the three other counties, including Queen Anne's County. Although each has made a good case for needing additional resources, the Judiciary has not identified sufficient factors relevant to workload in those jurisdictions that are not accounted for in the model. As a result, consistent with past practice and representations to the General Assembly, the Judiciary is not requesting additional judgeships in those jurisdictions and did not include additional PINs or funding for those counties in its budget submission.

Nonetheless, the Judiciary recognizes limitations of the current model and to update our model and ensure it is an accurate, current reflection of need, we have contracted with the NCSC to complete a new full-scale model update. The new workload assessment study will include a full judicial officer time study to help ensure that the case weights used to determine judicial workload are reflective of current practices. Results are expected to be available for use in the Fiscal Year 2028 judicial need certification analysis.

The Judiciary will continue to review and assess the need for judgeships across all jurisdictions.

cc. Hon. Stephen Hershey
Judicial Council
Legislative Committee
Kelley O'Connor