Legislative Services Agency
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Fiscal Services Division

Fiscal Topic

Judgeships

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District Courts

Iowa has a unified trial court system, with exclusive, general, and original jurisdiction of all actions, proceedings, remedies, and civil, criminal, probate, and juvenile cases, except in cases where exclusive or concurrent jurisdiction is conferred upon some other court, tribunal, or administrative body. There is one District Court in each county, and the counties are organized into eight judicial districts. Each district has a Chief Judge, who is selected by the Iowa Supreme Court. The following judgeships are established within the District Courts:

District Court Judge

- Jurisdiction (Iowa Code section 602.6202) — Civil, criminal, juvenile, probate, and small claims cases.
- Apportionment (Iowa Code section 602.6201) — The Supreme Court prescribes a formula to determine the number of District Judges who will serve in each judicial election district. The formula must be based upon a model that measures and applies an estimated case-related workload formula of judicial officers and is to account for administrative duties, travel time, and other judicial duties not related to a specific case.

District Associate Judge

- Jurisdiction (Iowa Code section 602.6306) — Civil (less than $10,000), involuntary commitment or hospitalization proceedings, indictable misdemeanors, Class D felony violations and other felony arraignments, temporary or emergency protective orders, certain probate matters, and juvenile court. The judges can make court appointments and set hearings in criminal matters and have jurisdiction over any proceeding in which a magistrate has jurisdiction (see magistrate section below).
- Apportionment (Iowa Code section 602.6301) — The number of District Associate Judges is determined by a formula based on an estimated case-related workload of judicial officers. Under Iowa Code section 602.6302, a District Associate Judge may be appointed in lieu of magistrates appointed under Iowa Code section 602.6403. Prior to 2026 Iowa Acts, chapter 1063 (Judicial Officers, Magistrates, and Senior Magistrates — Appointing Commissions, Vacancies, Areas of Service, Elections, and Compensation Act), an apportionment of three or more magistrates were required in the county for this appointment.

Associate Juvenile Judge

- Jurisdiction (Iowa Code section 602.7103) — Conduct juvenile court proceedings; issue warrants, nontestimonial identification orders, and contempt arrest warrants for adults in juvenile court proceedings; and issue orders, findings, and decisions as the judge of the juvenile court.
- Apportionment — Not determined by a formula.

Associate Probate Judge

- Jurisdiction (Iowa Code section 633.20D) — Conduct probate court proceedings; issue no-contact or protective orders, injunctions, and contempt orders for adults in probate court proceedings; and issue orders, findings, and decisions as the judge of the probate court.
- Apportionment — Not determined by a formula.

Magistrate

- Jurisdiction (Iowa Code section 602.6405) — Simple misdemeanors, traffic and ordinance violations, search warrant proceedings, county and municipal infractions, small claims ($6,500 or less), and disposition of livestock or another animal (valued less than $10,000).
- Apportionment (Iowa Code section 602.6401) — Prior to 2026 Iowa Acts, chapter 1063, 206 magistrates were apportioned by statute. Iowa Code section 602.6401 now specifies that the Supreme Court prescribes a case-related workload formula for the State Court Administrator to determine and allot magistrates among the judicial districts.

Business Court

The Business Court, effective September 1, 2026, consists of two judges equivalent to District Judges, per 2026 Iowa Acts, chapter 1133 (Business Court — Establishment, Jurisdiction, and Procedure Act). The court handles complex commercial litigation and shares jurisdiction with the District Court over cases involving $200,000 or more in compensatory damages, or those primarily seeking injunctive or declaratory relief within defined corporate subject matters.

Court of Appeals

The Court of Appeals consists of one Chief Judge and eight Associate Judges. Working primarily in panels of three, the court hears cases referred by the Supreme Court.

Supreme Court

The Supreme Court consists of one Chief Justice and six justices. The Supreme Court has general appellate jurisdiction and exercises supervisory and administrative control over the Judicial Branch pursuant to Article V of the Constitution of the State of Iowa. All appeals from the District Courts are filed in the Supreme Court, which determines which cases it will refer to the Court of Appeals and which cases it will decide without referral. The Supreme Court also has the discretion to accept applications for further review of decisions by the Court of Appeals. The Supreme Court is the highest court in the State, and its opinions are binding on all other Iowa State courts.

Senior Judges

A Supreme Court, Court of Appeals, District, District Associate, full-time Associate Juvenile, or full-time Associate Probate Judge may become a Senior Judge serving a two-year term upon Supreme Court approval under Iowa Code section 602.9203(2). To be eligible to become a Senior Judge, under Iowa Court Rule 22.12(1), an applicant must be at least 62 years of age at the time they assume the role unless they achieved 20 years of judicial service prior to January 1, 2018. Additionally, in accordance with Iowa Code section 602.1612, a retired judge cannot engage in legal practice, as doing so makes them permanently ineligible for assignment to temporary judicial duty. Once appointed, the Senior Judge must be available to perform judicial duties as assigned by the Supreme Court for an aggregate period of 13 weeks annually. Under Iowa Court Rule 22.12(8), Senior Judges are subject to a cumulative service limit of six years unless they have achieved 20 years of judicial service prior to January 1, 2018. In accordance with 2025 Iowa Acts, chapter 101 (Judicial Branch Administration and Judicial Officers Act), Senior Judges may serve until reaching age 84, at which point the Supreme Court may grant up to two successive one-year reappointments.

Senior Magistrates

A retired magistrate may be appointed by the Supreme Court to a two-year term as a senior magistrate if the magistrate meets specific qualifications, including filing a written election within six months of retirement, as outlined in new Iowa Code sections 602.9301 and 602.9302. Senior magistrates must agree to perform assigned duties for up to five weeks annually, with eligibility for reappointment to two-year terms, or up to two one-year terms upon reaching age 84, at the discretion of the Supreme Court.

Judicial Salaries

Prior to the 2026 Legislative Session, all judicial salaries were determined by the General Assembly, as required by Iowa Code sections 602.1501 and 602.9204(1)(a), and funded by the operating budget of the Judicial Branch. The amount of each salary was set in Session Law. For example, the FY 2026 salaries for all judgeship positions were set by 2025 Iowa Acts, chapter 158 (FY 2026 Judicial Branch Appropriations Act).

During the 2026 Legislative Session, 2026 Iowa Acts, chapter 1200 (FY 2027 Standing Appropriations Act), the General Assembly amended Iowa Code section 602.1401 to allow judicial salaries to be established through the Supreme Court's pay and benefits plan and funded by the Judicial Branch operating budget appropriated by the General Assembly.

Related Statutes and Administrative Rules

Iowa Code chapter 602
Iowa Court Rules chapter 22

Additional Information

For additional information, visit the Iowa Judicial Branch at iowacourts.gov/iowa-courts.

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