

FY 2027 Judicial Branch Budget Presentation

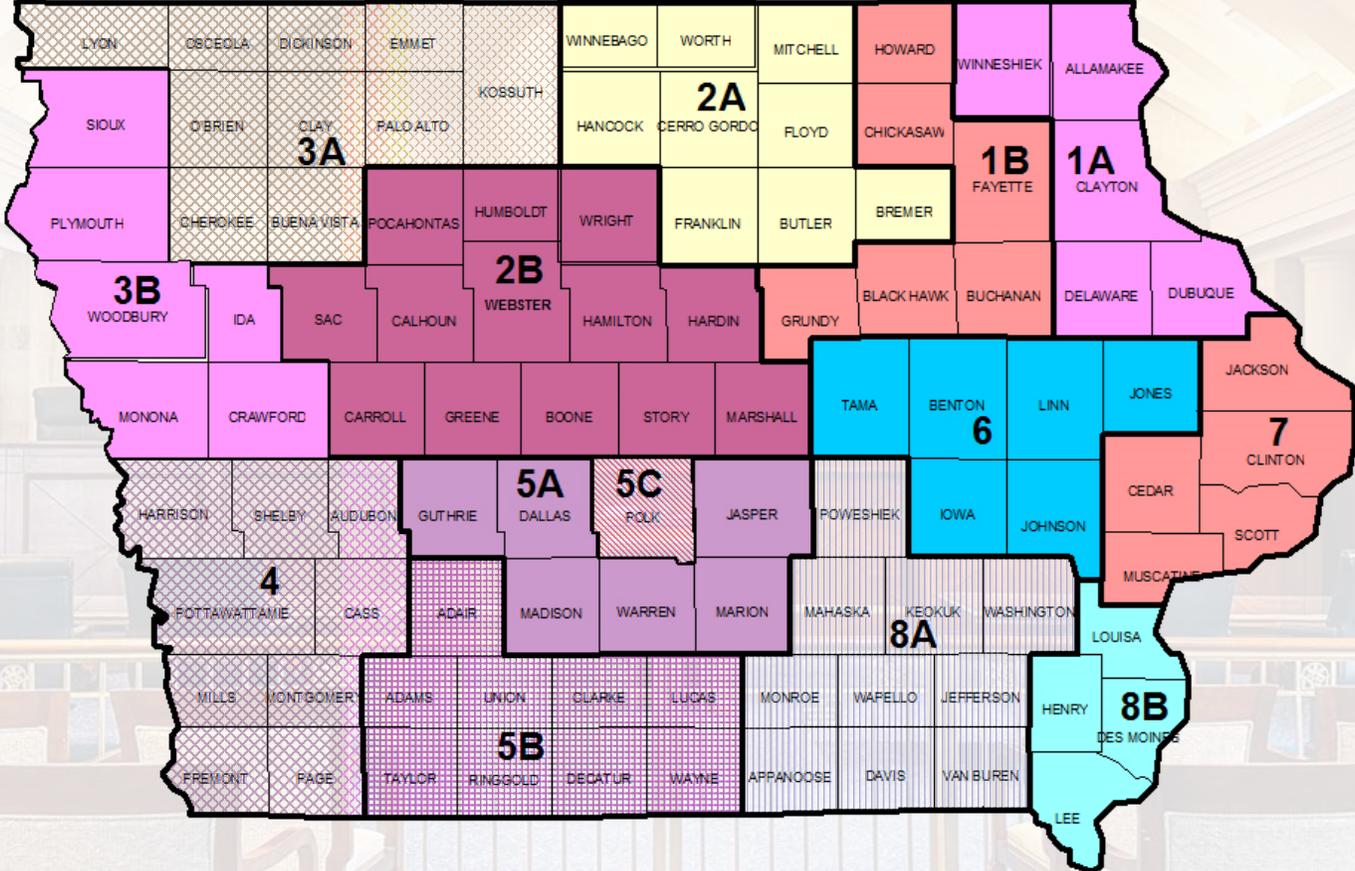
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Agenda

- Judicial Branch Overview
- FY 2027 Judicial Budget Request
- Magistrate Modernization Plan

Judicial Election Districts



Division of Funding

State funding:

- Judges and court staff
- Information technology
- Continuing education

County funding:

- Courthouses
- Court security
- 100% of Furniture and Equipment for county-initiated renovation or new build

Accomplishments in FY 2026

- In order to help students and teachers prepare for the upcoming America 250 Celebration, the Iowa Supreme Court traveled to the Quad Cities to hear oral arguments involving a case with constitutional issues at Bettendorf High School. A video of the arguments is posted to the judicial branch webpage as part of a one-stop resource for students and teachers to better understand the importance of the United States and Iowa Constitutions. The page presents educational videos and podcasts about the Iowa Constitution.
- The Iowa Court of Appeals are now live streaming and archiving oral argument videos so people can watch the arguments at their convenience.

Accomplishments in FY 2026

- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services conducted a review of the Judicial Branch and Iowa Health and Human Services role in Iowa's Foster Care Program. In the sampling of 80 child welfare cases no errors or ineligible payments were found. All samples met all eligibility requirements.
- A new court interpreter scheduling and invoicing application (ISI) was implemented that streamlines and modernizes processes for scheduling interpreters and provides a more efficient way for invoice submission, and review, approval and payment of invoices for interpretation services.

FY 2027 Judicial Branch Request

Description	Amount
FY 26 Judicial Branch Appropriation	\$ 202,691,378
FY 27 New Funding Request Details:	
Across-the-Board 2.6% Increase to Judicial Branch Employees	\$ 2,953,114
Judicial Officer Salary Increase	\$ 2,256,477
Wage Compression of Long-Standing Judicial Employees	\$ 1,000,000
Total New Request	\$ 6,209,592

Current District Judge Salaries in Iowa and Neighboring States

State	Salary	Rank	Amount Above Iowa	% Above Iowa
Illinois	\$ 258,158	1	\$80,050	47.06%
Nebraska	\$ 211,299	19	\$41,191	24.21%
Minnesota	\$ 190,117	30	\$20,009	11.76%
Kansas	\$ 185,550	33	\$15,442	9.08%
South Dakota	\$ 183,694	35	\$13,586	7.99%
Missouri	\$ 180,602	37	\$10,494	6.17%
Wisconsin	\$ 179,754	38	\$9,646	5.67%
Iowa	\$ 170,108	43		

Current District Judge Salaries in Iowa and Neighboring States— Rank Adjusted for Cost of Living

State	Salary	Rank	Amount Above	
			Iowa	% Above Iowa
Illinois	\$ 258,510	1	\$ 84,122	48.24%
Nebraska	\$ 209,321	10	\$ 34,933	20.03%
Minnesota	\$ 186,824	21	\$ 12,436	7.13%
Kansas	\$ 188,686	20	\$ 14,298	8.20%
South Dakota	\$ 184,798	22	\$ 10,410	5.97%
Missouri	\$ 199,640	15	\$ 25,252	14.48%
Wisconsin	\$ 179,243	27	\$ 4,855	2.78%
Iowa	\$ 174,388	35		

Judicial Compensation: Recruitment Problem

- **Applicant Pool Declining**
- Nearly 70% decline (2003–2025)
- 2025 average: 5 applicants per district court vacancy
- **Inflation Impact**
- District Court Judges' real income down 16.6% (2010–2025)
- If adjusted for inflation:
 - Salary would be \$204,043
 - Currently \$170,108
 - \$33,935 gap

Competitive Disadvantage

Judicial salaries lag:

- Inflation
- County attorney compensation growth (Statutory limits)
- All neighboring states
- Iowa ranks **last among neighboring states**

Risk:

- Fewer applicants
- Loss of experienced judges
- Long-term system instability

Magistrate Modernization



Why Magistrate Modernization Is Needed

Current Challenges

- System inefficiency of a 40+ year statutory structure
 - Structure created before:
 - Electronic search warrants
 - Electronic proceedings
 - Statutory requirements of 206 magistrates and one judicial officer per county
- Workload disparity
 - Magistrate workload in some counties is **less than 2 hours per week**
 - All magistrates earn the same salary regardless of workload
 - \$46,621 salary + ~\$20,000 benefits
 - **Over \$2.5 million annually** tied to outdated statutory framework

Magistrate Modernization: Internal Changes

New Standard:

- 40% FTE workload target
 - Includes travel & other duties
 - Use of verified workload for all judicial officers.
- Maintains in-person coverage in all 99 counties by shifting to district service model – just like trial court judges.

Magistrate Modernization: Legislative Changes

- Eliminate statutory minimum of 206 magistrates
- Remove at least “one magistrate per county” requirement
- Shift to judicial district service model
- Consolidate magistrate appointing commissions:
 - 99 county commissions → 14 Judicial Election district commissions
- Authorize senior magistrates
- Increase magistrate salary to 40% of District Associate Judge salary
 - Results in a 36% salary increase for magistrates
- Effective July 1, 2027
 - Avoids forfeiting \$5+ million in delayed savings

Proposed Compensation Adjustments

- 5% increase for all judicial officers (except magistrates)
- Results in ~36% increase for magistrates
- Creates predictability
- Protects against continued erosion from inflation

Impact of Modernization

- Saves **over \$2.5 million annually**
 - Delivers net savings to taxpayers
- Creates predictability
- Maintains statewide coverage in all 99 counties
- Promotes equity in workload
- Improves accountability
- Eliminates structural inefficiencies
- Strengthens Iowa's justice system
- Consolidates governance structure

QUESTIONS

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss this request with you.

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