

MINUTES
JOINT FINANCE-APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

DATE: Wednesday, January 28, 2026
TIME: 8:00 A.M.
PLACE: Room C310
MEMBERS: Senators Co-Chair Grow, Woodward, Cook, Bjerke, Hart, Carlson, Zuiderveld, Galloway, Ward-Engelking, Wintrow
Representatives Co-Chair Tanner (14), Miller, Furniss, Petzke, Manwaring, Mitchell, Price, Bruce, Harris, Green
**ABSENT/
EXCUSED:** Senator Co-Chair Grow, Representative Mitchell

Co-Chair Tanner (14) called the meeting to order at 8:00 a.m.

Ms. Janica Bisharat, Senior Analyst, LSO Budget & Policy, provided an overview of Court Operations in the Judicial Branch, including its organizational structure. She also examined the consolidated fund analysis, the five-year appropriations and expenditures chart, and budget enhancements for FY 2025 and FY 2026.

Ms. Bisharat presented the FY 2027 enhancement requests for Court Operations and explained a 1% Change in Employee Compensation (CEC) salary placeholder was included for calculation purposes, though judicial salaries were set in statute and the Governor recommended no compensation changes. She noted a late request from Court Operations for an additional \$801K from the Senior Magistrate Judges Retirement Fund to cover retirement bonuses and service purchases for retiring judges; sufficient funds were available to meet this request. She also noted a \$78K General Fund request from the Second District Court Appointed Special Advococation (CASA) program.

In response to a committee question, **Ms. Bisharat** explained the revised request was submitted due to the timing of magistrate judge retirements, as the information was not available until January 2026.

Ms. Sara Omundson, Administrative Director of Courts, made a brief presentation. She explained a retirement bonus created in Idaho Code led to seven magistrate retirements, with six requesting a purchase of service, including four at the maximum level, requiring additional spending authority from an available dedicated fund. She also noted recent funding losses, including federal defunding of a domestic violence court, termination of peer support services affecting mental health courts, and the end of Safe and Sober Housing Services.

In response to committee questions, **Dir. Omundson** observed the retirement bonus achieved its purpose by encouraging magistrate judges to complete their elected terms instead of retiring early, resulting in more end-of-term retirements than typical.

Dir. Omundson answered committee questions about the implementation of the Governor's holdback instructions. She explained reverted funds came primarily from General Fund dollars originally appropriated for court technology software; these costs were shifted to a dedicated fund in addition to salary savings from unfilled court reporter positions. She explained the original cybersecurity project positions were funded through ARPA at the Legislature's direction.

In response to committee questions, **Dir. Omundson** explained mental health courts served high-risk individuals as an alternative to prison, combining treatment with accountability through frequent court appearances, drug testing, and support from peer specialists.

Ms. Bisharat provided an overview of the Guardian Ad Litem program in the Judicial Branch; this division provides grant funding for court-appointed special advocate programs across seven judicial districts, totaling \$3M in FY 2026. The Second Judicial District CASA program requested an additional \$78K from the General Fund to support their program.

Ms. Zenita Delva, Executive Director, Second Judicial District CASA Program, made a brief presentation. She explained the Second Judicial District CASA program requested \$78K to stay compliant with state law, maintain staff and volunteers, and provide office space, training, and liability coverage.

In response to committee questions, **Dir. Delva** explained Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funding had steadily decreased from nearly \$100K to \$40K over the past 12 years.

Sen. Bjerke noted the VOCA Fund was declining due to reduced prosecutions and lower fine collections and indicated the fund was nearly depleted.

ADJOURN: There being no further business to come before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 9:01 a.m.

Representative Tanner (14)
Chair

Alyson Jackson
Secretary