

# Federal Funding of the D.C. Court System

*What are the D.C. Courts? How are they funded? And what are current funding needs?*

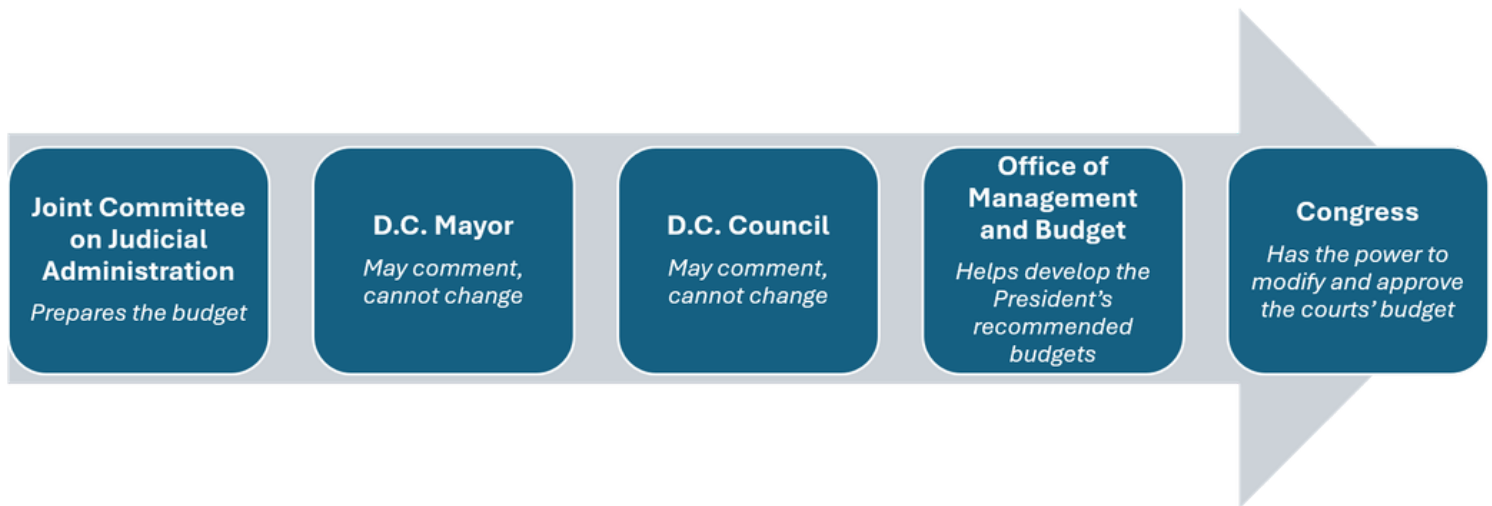
## 1. What are the D.C. Courts?

The D.C. Courts are the local courts designed to handle cases that originate in the District of Columbia and involve D.C. laws, including:

- **D.C. Superior Court**, which handles all local trials, including criminal, family and delinquency, and civil matters, like probate, tax, business, landlord-tenant, small claims, and traffic cases.
- **D.C. Court of Appeals**, the highest court for the District and functions similarly to a state supreme court.
- The **Court System**, which handles management matters such as administration, budgeting, training, court reporting, IT, capital projects, human resources, and more.

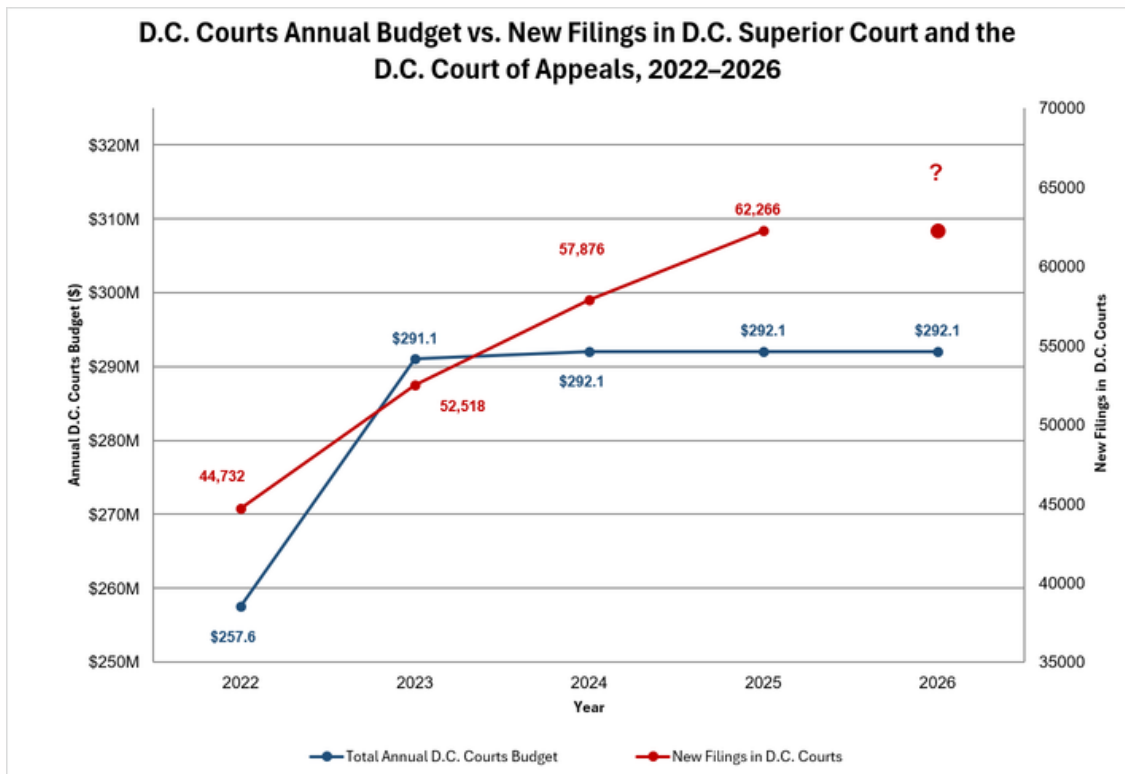
## 2. How are the D.C. Courts Funded?

In D.C., judges are appointed by the President and the Courts are funded by Congress rather than the District government. The 1970 *D.C. Court Reform and Criminal Procedure Act* created the structure of the D.C. Court system and established a Joint Committee on Judicial Administration, which is tasked with evaluating the courts' operational and capital project needs and developing a budget recommendation every year.



## 3. What are the funding needs of the D.C. Courts in Fiscal Year (FY) 2027?

**From FY 2023 to FY 2025, civil and domestic relations case filings in D.C. Superior Court have increased 33% and criminal case filings have increased 160%. In the Court of Appeals, criminal appeals increased 65% and motions filed increased by 30%.** The budget, however, has remained flat during that time. Now, for FY 2027, the Joint Committee has recommended a \$298.1M operating budget, a 13% increase over FY 2026, to address the significant increases in cases, court workloads, and rising security threats. The D.C. Courts also need an additional \$6.5 million for Defender Services to ensure appointed attorneys can be paid and meet their constitutional mandate to represent individuals in serious criminal prosecutions.



#### 4. What would be the impacts of a budget cut right now?

At the same time that the Joint Committee recommends a budget increase greater than the flat budget of the last four years, the House of Representatives proposes cutting the D.C. Courts' FY 2027 overall budget by \$18 million from last year. **The House's proposal creates a \$66 million gap between what the Joint Committee says is needed for operations in FY 2027.**

Absent the requested funding, the D.C. Courts may not be able to maintain adequate technology, infrastructure, and staffing levels for positions including courtroom clerks, interpreters, juvenile probation officers, and security personnel. Strains on the D.C. Courts can ultimately lengthen case processing times and decrease the ability to fulfill the courts' vital mission to protect rights and liberties, uphold and interpret the law, and resolve disputes fairly and effectively in the District of Columbia. Under-resourced courts may, over time, also undermine public confidence in the legal system.

#### Differences Between Prior and Requested D.C. Courts' Budgets And 2027 House of Representatives Proposal

|                                   | Operating Budget | Capital Budget | Total Budget  |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|----------------|---------------|
| D.C. Courts' FY26 Enacted Budget  | \$262,816,000    | \$29,252,000   | \$292,068,000 |
| D.C. Courts' Proposed FY27 Budget | \$298,115,000    | \$169,980,000  | \$468,095,000 |
| FY27 House Markup                 | \$231,679,000    | \$42,298,000   | \$273,977,000 |

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#### Our Mission

Council for Court Excellence's (CCE's) mission is to bring people together to conduct research, educate, and advocate to make D.C.'s unique legal systems more just, equitable, and accountable to the community.



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