





April 3, 2025

**MEMORANDUM**

TO: Wala Blegay, Chair  
Health, Human Services and Public Safety Committee (HHSPS)

THRU: Joseph R. Hamlin   
Director of Budget and Policy Analysis

FROM: Roger Banegas   
Legislative Budget and Policy Analyst

RE: Orphans' Court  
Fiscal Year 2026 Budget Review

**Budget Overview**

The FY 2026 Proposed Budget for the Orphans' Court is \$610,500. This is a decrease of \$21,800, or 3.4%, under the FY 2025 Approved Budget. This is primarily due to a decrease in the fringe benefit rate from 32.8% to 30.0% to align with projected costs and a reduction due to a partial lapse of a position.

| Category           | FY 2024<br>Actual | FY 2025<br>Approved | FY 2025<br>Estimated | % Change -<br>Est vs App | FY 2026<br>Proposed | Change<br>Amount  | Percentage<br>Change |
|--------------------|-------------------|---------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| Compensation       | \$ 420,080        | \$ 432,300          | \$ 428,300           | -0.9%                    | \$ 420,200          | \$(12,100)        | -2.8%                |
| Fringe Benefits    | 122,354           | 142,000             | 120,100              | -15.4%                   | 126,100             | (15,900)          | -11.2%               |
| Operating Expenses | 57,183            | 58,000              | 61,200               | 5.5%                     | 64,200              | 6,200             | 10.7%                |
| <b>Total</b>       | <b>\$ 599,617</b> | <b>\$ 632,300</b>   | <b>\$ 609,600</b>    | <b>-3.6%</b>             | <b>\$ 610,500</b>   | <b>\$(21,800)</b> | <b>-3.4%</b>         |

Authorized Staffing Count - General Fund

|              | FY 2025 Approved | FY 2026 Proposed | Change Amount | Percentage<br>Change |
|--------------|------------------|------------------|---------------|----------------------|
| Full-Time    | 8                | 8                | 0             | 0.0%                 |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>8</b>         | <b>8</b>         | <b>0</b>      | <b>0.0%</b>          |

**Staffing Changes and Compensation**

- The FY 2026 Proposed Budget includes authorization for eight (8) full-time General funded positions, which remains consistent with the FY 2025 approved staff level.

- The FY 2026 General Fund compensation is proposed at \$420,200, which represents a decrease of \$12,100, or 2.8%, under the FY 2025 Budget. This decrease is due to the anticipated salary lapse for the unfunded general Law Clerk I position and the partial lapse (25%) of the Community Developer position, along with the annualization of FY 2025 and planned FY 2026 salary adjustments.
- As of March 13, 2025, the Court reported two (2) vacant positions, a Law Clerk I, which is unfunded in FY 2025, and a Community Developer I, which was vacated on 10/18/2024 with an estimated salary lapse of \$43.6K.

### **Fringe Benefits**

- Fringe benefit expenditures are proposed at \$126,100, which is a decrease of \$15,900, or 11.2%, under the FY 2025 Approved Budget.
- A five-year trend analysis of fringe benefit expenditures is included below.

| <b>Fringe Benefits Historicial Trend</b> |                           |                           |                           |                              |                             |
|--|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
|  | <b>FY 2022<br/>Actual</b> | <b>FY 2023<br/>Actual</b> | <b>FY 2024<br/>Actual</b> | <b>FY 2025<br/>Estimated</b> | <b>FY 2026<br/>Proposed</b> |
| Compensation                             | \$ 348,393                | \$ 398,050                | \$ 420,080                | \$ 428,300                   | \$ 420,200                  |
| Fringe Benefit Expenditures              | \$ 96,358                 | \$ 113,270                | \$ 122,354                | \$ 120,100                   | \$ 126,100                  |
| As a % of Compensation                   | 27.7%                     | 28.5%                     | 29.1%                     | 28.0%                        | 30.0%                       |
| Annual % Change                          | 10.4%                     | 17.6%                     | 8.0%                      | -1.8%                        | 5%                          |

### **Operating Expenses**

- In FY 2026, operating expenses are proposed at \$64,200, which is an increase of \$6,200, or 10.7% over the FY 2025 Approved Budget. The accompanying table compares the FY 2026 Proposed Budget operating expenditures with the FY 2025 Approved Budget operating expenditures.

| <b>Operating Objects</b> | <b>FY 2025<br/>Approved</b> | <b>FY 2026<br/>Proposed</b> | <b>FY 2025 - FY 2026</b> |                 |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
|                          |                             |                             | <b>\$ Change</b>         | <b>% Change</b> |
| Office Automation        | \$ 49,100                   | \$ 55,300                   | \$ 6,200                 | 12.6%           |
| General Office Supplies  | 6,600                       | 7,300                       | 700                      | 10.6%           |
| Membership Fees          | 1,200                       | 800                         | (400)                    | -33.3%          |
| Telephone                | 1,100                       | 800                         | (300)                    | -27.3%          |
| <b>TOTAL</b>             | <b>\$ 58,000</b>            | <b>\$ 64,200</b>            | <b>\$ 6,200</b>          | <b>10.7%</b>    |

- In two (2) categories, the FY 2026 Proposed Budget level increases from the FY 2025 Approved Budget. In two (2) categories, the FY 2026 Proposed Budget levels decrease compared to the approved FY 2025 levels. Office automation increased by 12.6% over the FY 2025 budget due to an increase in the technology allocation charge, and general office

supplies increase by 10.6%, which is being offset by a decrease in telephone and membership fees to align with historical spending.

## **HIGHLIGHTS**

### **Workload/Performance Trends**

- The Orphans' Court is a public office established under the Constitution of Maryland. The Court hears all contested matters involving the decedent's estates and supervises all those probated estates judicially. The Court approves accounts and awards personal representatives' commissions and attorney's fees when applicable. The Court also has concurrent jurisdiction with the Circuit Court in guardianships of minors and their property. All matters involving the validity of wills and the transfer of property in which legal questions and disputes occur are resolved by the Orphans' Court.
- The Court projects its caseload related to estates and guardianships to be 14,150 cases in FY 2026. These cases include hearings, pleadings, estates opened, hearing notices, orders, and writs issued.
- The Court reports that, as of March 14, 2025, 3,698 estate cases are open, and 1,198 estate cases have been closed in FY 2025. From FY 2022 – FY 2025 (YTD), 13,017 estate cases have been opened, and 8,079 have been closed.
- The Court reports that, as of March 18, 2025, 31 guardianship cases are open, and 41 guardianship cases have been closed in FY 2025. From FY 2022 – FY 2025 (YTD), 184 guardianship cases have been opened, and 202 have been closed.
- The County's current [Orphans' Court judges](#) are as follows:
  - Chief Judge Wendy A. Cartwright
  - Associate Judge Athena Malloy Groves
  - Associate Judge Jason A. DeLoach
- The Court has continued to struggle with funding for staffing, has not received funding for its vacant Law Clerk position for several years, and is currently only receiving 75% funding for FY 2026 for its vacant Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) position. The Court will not be able to hire for the ADR position for FY 2025, because of the lapse in funding for FY 2026. Without these two (2) positions, the Court is not able to schedule additional hearing dockets (in addition to its current three (3) days per week), process, and handle ADR cases, in addition to any other needs of the Court.
- The Court believes it has all its technology needs current for judges, staff, and the courtroom.
- The Court continues to offer and refer cases to its ADR program, although it has been hindered without funding and staffing for the ADR position. The ADR program provides

litigants with an opportunity for mediation to resolve probate matters. For FY 2024, the Court referred 10 cases. For FY 2025, the Court has seven (7) pending cases with zero (0) cases removed, sent, or settled.