



SUPREME COURT OF KANSAS
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Special Committee on State Employee and Board Member Compensation

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Chairman Waymaster and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear today and discuss the judicial branch's FY 2024 compensation budget requests. One of the toughest decisions legislators make is prioritizing state spending. The judiciary thanks you for your support increasing judicial branch employee salaries to 2021 market rate and the continued support to raise judge pay.

The judicial branch's FY 2024 budget includes two salary-related requests. First, it seeks an 8.5 percent increase in employee pay. For decades, the court system could not offer market rate pay to attract and retain employees. It took years to overcome, and your hard work culminated in bringing those wages to 2021 market rate. We do not want increased cost of living to erode your effort, so our budget seeks an increase to employee wages which mirrors the increase in the consumer price index. This requests offsets inflationary pressures eroding our market rate salaries and helps retain our valuable employees. Your local district court staff are the face of the courthouse. They also hold significant responsibilities, including the handling of public funds and supervising offenders in our hometowns. Their salaries must remain competitive to attract and retain the highly qualified candidates we need.

Second, the budget asks for a 15.29 percent increase in judge pay. This increase would bring Kansas district court judges to the average adjusted salary of our four neighboring states. The judicial branch and our judges remain incredibly grateful for the increases in the past two sessions. But the judicial salaries the court system offers is not attracting the number of well qualified candidates Kansans expect.

For almost a decade, Kansas judge pay remained the same. During this same period, attorney salaries continued to increase. As a result, the salary Kansas offers for judge positions became uncompetitive. While we have made significant steps in addressing this issue, the gap

between what the state offers judicial candidates and what well qualified attorneys command in the private and public sectors hamstrings recruitment. Kansas judges are required to make important decisions that affect parental rights, business transactions, and life-altering judgments. The salaries for judges must reflect the importance of these duties required of the position and to entice professionally diverse candidates to the bench.

Regarding the committee's invitation for boards to submit compensation testimony, no judicial branch board provided any. The judicial branch provides reimbursement for travel for individuals who sit on committees but does not budget for compensation. The Board of Law Examiners is the only entity that receives a small stipend for grading the bar exam. This stipend is paid from bar exam fees.

Thank you for your time.