

The Agency

Judicial Department

Agency Operations

Rhode Island has a unified court system composed of six statewide courts. The Supreme Court is the court of review, the Superior Court is the general trial court, and the Family, District, Traffic Tribunal, and Workers' Compensation Courts are trial courts of special jurisdiction.

The entire system in Rhode Island is state-funded with the exception of probate courts, which are the responsibility of cities and towns, and the municipal courts, which are local courts of limited jurisdiction. The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court is the executive head of the state court system and has authority over the judicial budget. The Chief Justice appoints the State Court Administrator and an administrative staff to handle budgetary and general administrative functions. Under the direction of the Chief Justice, the Court Administrator has control of judicial appropriations for all state courts, except those as provided otherwise by law. Each court has responsibility over its own operations and has a chief judge who appoints an administrator to handle internal court management.

The state budget officer's duties and powers relating to budgetary controls and personnel requests of the judicial department are purely ministerial, concerned only with the availability of the funds. Under current law, itemized estimates of the financial needs of the Judiciary are submitted, without revision, by the budget officer to the Governor on or before October 1 for inclusion in the budget. In turn, under current law, the Governor includes in the budget recommendation to the General Assembly the financial needs of the Judiciary without revision.

Statutory History

The Judicial is one of the three departments of government defined in the Rhode Island Constitution. The powers and jurisdictions of the six courts are identified in the Rhode Island General Laws as follows: Title 8 Chapter 1, Supreme Court; Title 8 Chapter 2, Superior Court; Title 8 Chapter 8, District Court; Title 8 Chapter 10, Family Court; Title 8 Chapter 8.2, Traffic Tribunal; and Title 28 Chapter 30, Workers' Compensation Court.

The budgetary and finance controls of the Judiciary are identified in the Rhode Island General Laws as follows: Title 8 Section 8-15-4, Appointment of Court Administrator and Assistants; Title 35 Section 35-3-1, Budget Officer – General Powers and Duties; Title 36 Section 36-4-2.1, Exemption from Merit System; Title 36 Section 36-4-16.4, Salaries of Directors, Judges, and Workers' Compensation Judges; Title 36 Section 36-6-1, Controller – Duties in General; and Title 37 Section 37-8-1, State House – State Office Building – Courthouses.

The Budget

Judicial Department

	FY 2005	FY 2006	FY 2007	FY 2008
	Actual	Actual	Revised	Recommended
Expenditures by Program				
Supreme Court	27,635,559	29,552,327	31,751,861	31,535,243
Superior Court	17,338,089	18,732,920	19,557,840	19,889,819
Family Court	16,267,256	18,116,051	18,368,022	19,070,772
District Court	8,289,058	9,352,764	9,697,797	10,331,649
Traffic Tribunal	6,219,620	6,741,082	6,591,551	6,879,070
Workers' Compensation Court	5,832,619	6,601,063	7,140,436	7,387,455
Total Expenditures	\$81,582,201	\$89,096,207	\$93,107,507	\$95,094,008
Expenditures By Object				
Personnel	64,744,298	68,796,190	73,760,572	77,059,190
Operating Supplies and Expenses	8,412,256	9,722,443	8,908,505	7,229,867
Aid To Local Units Of Government	-	-	-	-
Assistance, Grants and Benefits	5,186,967	7,547,651	5,602,692	5,710,959
Subtotal: Operating Expenditures	\$78,343,521	\$86,066,284	\$88,271,769	\$90,000,016
Capital Purchases and Equipment	3,141,305	3,029,923	4,835,738	5,093,992
Debt Service	97,375	-	-	-
Operating Transfers	-	-	-	-
Total Expenditures	\$81,582,201	\$89,096,207	\$93,107,507	\$95,094,008
Expenditures By Funds				
General Revenue	71,715,433	76,968,262	80,842,834	83,526,524
Federal Funds	2,604,779	3,026,152	2,879,609	1,578,692
Restricted Receipts	6,730,331	7,631,617	8,346,584	8,518,792
Other Funds	531,658	1,470,176	1,038,480	1,470,000
Total Expenditures	\$81,582,201	\$89,096,207	\$93,107,507	\$95,094,008
FTE Authorization	743.5	742.0	732.5	728.5
Agency Measures				
Minorities as a Percentage of the Workforce	9.0%	9.9%	10.9%	11.5%
Females as a Percentage of the Workforce	66.0%	66.0%	66.0%	66.0%
Persons with Disabilities as a Percentage of the Workforce	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%

The Program

Judicial Department Supreme Court

Program Operations

The Supreme Court Program includes the budget for the Supreme Court itself, the Administrative Office of State Courts, and the Law Library.

The Supreme Court portion of the budget covers the justices, their secretarial and legal staff, the law clerk program, and the Supreme Court Clerk's Office. Through this portion of the budget the Supreme Court fulfills its role as the final court of review for the state courts. The Court also renders advisory opinions to the legislative and executive branches of government; issues writs of habeas corpus, mandamus, certiorari and certain other prerogative writs; and regulates the admission and discipline of members of the Rhode Island Bar.

Administrative services include all budget, personnel and purchasing functions; computer services; facility management, which includes the maintenance of courthouse facilities; programming for judicial education; the collection of court-ordered restitution, fines, fees and costs; and research and statistical analysis.

The Law Library is the only complete, public legal reference service in Rhode Island, and it operates under the Supreme Court. The Library has over 110,000 volumes and also provides access to computer aided legal research.

Other major activities of the Supreme Court include domestic violence prevention, mandatory continuing legal education, victim rights information, alternative dispute resolution, disciplinary counsel, the interpreter program.

Program Objectives

Provide timely review of all decisions appealed from the state courts.

Provide overall administrative direction to the state courts.

Regulate the admission of attorneys to the Rhode Island Bar.

Statutory History

The Supreme Court is the only constitutionally established court and is identified in Article X of the Rhode Island State Constitution. The organization, jurisdiction and powers of the Supreme Court are described in Title 8 Chapter 1 of the Rhode Island General Laws, and the administrative authority of the court is established by Title 8 Chapter 15. Other statutes relating to the Supreme Court include Title 8 Chapters 3 through 7 of the Rhode Island General Laws.

The Budget

Judicial Department Supreme Court

	FY 2005 Actual	FY 2006 Actual	FY 2007 Revised	FY 2008 Recommended
Expenditures by Subprogram				
Supreme Court Operations	24,980,850	26,367,562	28,484,202	28,169,554
Defense of Indigents	2,654,709	3,184,765	3,267,659	3,365,689
Total Expenditures	\$27,635,559	\$29,552,327	\$31,751,861	\$31,535,243
Expenditures By Object				
Personnel	18,248,675	16,901,673	19,597,440	20,389,647
Operating Supplies and Expenses	5,051,221	6,307,195	5,997,436	4,709,802
Aid To Local Units Of Government	-	-	-	-
Assistance, Grants and Benefits	1,223,848	3,506,218	1,393,579	1,404,134
Subtotal: Operating Expenditures	\$24,523,744	\$26,715,086	\$26,988,455	\$26,503,583
Capital Purchases and Equipment	3,060,814	2,837,241	4,763,406	5,031,660
Debt Service	51,001	-	-	-
Operating Transfers	-	-	-	-
Total Expenditures	\$27,635,559	\$29,552,327	\$31,751,861	\$31,535,243
Expenditures By Funds				
General Revenue	25,456,768	26,830,351	29,216,903	28,812,316
Federal Funds	749,421	221,246	290,330	121,590
Restricted Receipts	897,712	1,030,554	1,206,148	1,131,337
Other Funds	531,658	1,470,176	1,038,480	1,470,000
Total Expenditures	\$27,635,559	\$29,552,327	\$31,751,861	\$31,535,243
Program Measures				
Disposition Rate of Appeal Cases	98.0%	94.0%	98.0%	100.0%

The Program

Judicial Department Superior Court

Program Operations

The program budget for Superior Court includes the operation of the Superior Court itself, administrative services, and the operation of the clerks' offices.

Superior Court has four locations: Providence/Bristol, Kent, Washington, and Newport Counties. It has jurisdiction over all felony cases and misdemeanor cases which have been appealed or waived from the District Court. The Court also hears all civil cases where the amount at issue exceeds \$10,000, equity cases wherein injunctive relief is sought, civil cases that are appealed from the District Court, and all probate and zoning appeals. The Superior Court has concurrent original jurisdiction with the District Court in all other actions at law in which the amount in controversy exceeds \$5,000 yet does not exceed \$10,000. The administrative office of the Court handles all case scheduling, supervises the court secretaries and stenographers, and provides other administrative services.

Each court location has a clerk's office which is responsible for maintaining the records of the court. This includes creating files for each case, filing all papers that are received, updating the record in each case to reflect court proceedings and the papers that have been filed, and maintaining and marking all exhibits of evidence.

Other major programs include jury selection, court-annexed arbitration, court ordered restitution, and administration of jurors' fees and expenses. In FY 1995, a Gun Court was established to adjudicate offenses involving guns and the planning process began for the Adult Drug Court. In FY 2002, the Adult Drug Court was established preceded by the FY 2001 establishment of the Business Calendar.

Program Objectives

Provide timely and fair adjudication of all cases within the jurisdiction of the Superior Court.

Maintain a complete and accurate record for all cases that are filed with the Superior Court.

Provide a written transcript of any proceeding or appeal.

Statutory History

The Superior Court is a statutorily authorized court. The jurisdiction and sessions of the court, and the role and responsibilities of the clerks, secretaries and stenographers of the court are outlined in Title 8 Chapters 2 through 7 of the Rhode Island General Laws.

The Budget

Judicial Department Superior Court

	FY 2005 Actual	FY 2006 Actual	FY 2007 Revised	FY 2008 Recommended
Expenditures by Subprogram				
Superior Court Operations	15,901,095	17,290,731	17,905,514	18,192,921
Jury Operations	1,436,994	1,442,189	1,652,326	1,696,898
Total Expenditures	\$17,338,089	\$18,732,920	\$19,557,840	\$19,889,819
Expenditures By Object				
Personnel	14,429,210	15,883,780	16,860,742	17,161,085
Operating Supplies and Expenses	1,183,016	1,143,352	1,014,207	1,006,160
Aid To Local Units Of Government	-	-	-	-
Assistance, Grants and Benefits	1,693,006	1,674,613	1,682,891	1,722,574
Subtotal: Operating Expenditures	\$17,305,232	\$18,701,745	\$19,557,840	\$19,889,819
Capital Purchases and Equipment	14,631	31,175	-	-
Debt Service	18,226	-	-	-
Operating Transfers	-	-	-	-
Total Expenditures	\$17,338,089	\$18,732,920	\$19,557,840	\$19,889,819
Expenditures By Funds				
General Revenue	17,150,564	18,397,716	18,914,635	19,889,819
Federal Funds	187,525	335,204	643,205	-
Total Expenditures	\$17,338,089	\$18,732,920	\$19,557,840	\$19,889,819
Program Measures				
Percentage of Felony Cases Annually Disposed of Within 180 Days	72.0%	70.0%	72.0%	75.0%
Disposition Rate of Civil Cases	110.0%	111.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The Program

Judicial Department Family Court

Program Operations

The program budget for Family Court includes the operation of the Court itself, the administrative office of the Court, the clerks' offices, and the operation of several ancillary programs, including juvenile intake services, the Family Counseling Unit, the Collections Unit and the Court Appointed Special Advocate Unit.

The Family Court handles all criminal cases involving juveniles; juvenile status offenses, such as truancy and disobedience; all cases where parents have been charged with neglect, abandonment or abuse of their children; and other miscellaneous cases involving children, such as child marriages and paternity issues. The Court also hears all divorces and issues stemming from a divorce, such as orders for child support and temporary allowances.

The Court has offices in Providence, Kent, Newport and Washington Counties. There are clerks' offices in each of these locations, and the office staff is responsible for preparing all court calendars and maintaining records of the court. All papers are filed with the clerk's office, and which sets up a file for each case and maintains an up-to-date record of what has happened in court and the papers that have been filed.

Because of the special nature of the Family Court, it provides a variety of services to families. For example, the Family Counseling Unit provides alcohol counseling and supervises visitation, in addition to providing investigative and mediation services to the court. Likewise, the Child Support Collections Unit handles the collection and disbursement of child support payments. Specialty courts include the Juvenile Drug Court, the Family Treatment Drug Court, the Domestic Violence Court, the Truancy Court, and the Juvenile Re-entry Court.

Program Objectives

Adjudicate the cases within the jurisdiction of the Family Court in a timely and fair manner.

Provide counseling and other assistance to families involved in litigation before the court.

Statutory History

The Family Court is authorized by statute. The composition and jurisdiction of the Family Court is identified in Title 8 Chapter 10 of the Rhode Island General Laws.

The Budget

Judicial Department Family Court

	FY 2005 Actual	FY 2006 Actual	FY 2007 Revised	FY 2008 Recommended
Expenditures By Object				
Personnel	15,136,706	16,969,853	17,491,058	18,184,371
Operating Supplies and Expenses	639,687	580,166	405,450	404,953
Aid To Local Units Of Government	-	-	-	-
Assistance, Grants and Benefits	458,303	464,063	471,514	481,448
Subtotal: Operating Expenditures	\$16,234,696	\$18,014,082	\$18,368,022	\$19,070,772
Capital Purchases and Equipment	16,336	101,969	-	-
Debt Service	16,224	-	-	-
Operating Transfers	-	-	-	-
Total Expenditures	\$16,267,256	\$18,116,051	\$18,368,022	\$19,070,772
Expenditures By Funds				
General Revenue	14,601,073	15,646,349	16,421,948	17,613,670
Federal Funds	1,666,183	2,469,702	1,946,074	1,457,102
Total Expenditures	\$16,267,256	\$18,116,051	\$18,368,022	\$19,070,772

Program Measures

Percentage of Wayward/Delinquent Cases Suitable for Non-Judicial Processing Diverted or Referred to Court Within 45 Days	36.0%	75.0%	75.0%	78.0%
Percentage of Wayward/Delinquent Cases Requiring Court Involvement Adjudicated Within 180 Days	70.0%	72.0%	75.0%	75.0%
Percentage of D/N/A Cases Adjudicated Within 180 Days of Filing	72.0%	70.0%	72.0%	75.0%
Percentage of Juvenile Termination of Parental Rights Cases Adjudicated Within 180 Days	63.0%	58.0%	60.0%	65.0%
Percentage of Domestic Cases Disposed of Within 365 Days	99.5%	99.5%	100.0%	100.0%

The Program

Judicial Department District Court

Program Operations

The District Court consists of a chief judge, and administrative judge and associate judges. The court is also served by two magistrates. The program budget for the District Court includes the cost of operation for the court itself and the operation of the clerk's offices. The District Court handles all misdemeanor cases, all civil cases where the amount in dispute is under \$5,000, trespass and ejection cases between landlords and tenants, and all small claims, which includes certain civil cases where the amount in dispute is under \$2,500. The District Court also holds hearings on commitments under the mental health and drug abuse laws and handles certain agency appeals. The court has four locations, in Providence, Kent, Newport and Washington Counties, with a clerk's office at each location. The clerks' offices maintain all the records for the court. As with the other courts, all papers are filed in the clerk's office. The office creates a file for every case and maintains an up-to-date record on what has happened in the case. In addition, the Pretrial Services Unit was established in FY 2002 to provide pre-arraignment and post-arraignment services to defendants.

Program Objectives

Adjudicate the cases within the jurisdiction of the District Court in a timely and fair manner.

Maintain a complete and accurate record for every case.

Statutory History

The District Court is a statutorily authorized court. The powers and jurisdiction of the Court are defined in Title 8 Chapter 8 of the Rhode Island General Laws.

The Budget

Judicial Department District Court

	FY 2005 Actual	FY 2006 Actual	FY 2007 Revised	FY 2008 Recommended
Expenditures By Object				
Personnel	7,157,522	8,188,559	8,623,652	9,193,243
Operating Supplies and Expenses	316,183	329,617	191,606	237,934
Aid To Local Units Of Government	-	-	-	-
Assistance, Grants and Benefits	806,437	808,963	880,137	898,070
Subtotal: Operating Expenditures	\$8,280,142	\$9,327,139	\$9,695,395	\$10,329,247
Capital Purchases and Equipment	1,602	25,625	2,402	2,402
Debt Service	7,314	-	-	-
Operating Transfers	-	-	-	-
Total Expenditures	\$8,289,058	\$9,352,764	\$9,697,797	\$10,331,649
Expenditures By Funds				
General Revenue	8,287,408	9,352,764	9,697,797	10,331,649
Federal Funds	1,650	-	-	-
Total Expenditures	\$8,289,058	\$9,352,764	\$9,697,797	\$10,331,649
Program Measures				
Percentage of Misdemeanor Cases Disposed of Within 60 Days	88.0%	88.0%	90.0%	90.0%

The Program

Judicial Department Traffic Tribunal

Program Operations

The Traffic Tribunal was created effective July 1, 1999. It is the successor to the Administrative Adjudication Court. It consists of associate judges and magistrates. It is supervised by the Chief Judge and the Administrative Magistrate of the District Court.

The Traffic Tribunal hears and determines civil traffic violations. It has exclusive jurisdiction over certain offenses and concurrent jurisdiction with the municipal courts over others. The Traffic Tribunal hears certain administrative appeals for the Registry of Motor Vehicles. The appeals panel of the Traffic Tribunal hears appeals from the Traffic Tribunal and the municipal courts. The Traffic Tribunal does not hear those offenses committed in places within the exclusive jurisdiction of the United States, or criminal motor vehicle offenses such as driving so as to endanger resulting in death, and driving while under the influence of liquor and drugs, which, which state law specifies will be heard under the jurisdiction of other courts. The Traffic Tribunal currently sits at its mail facility at 345 Harris Avenue, Providence but expects to relocate to its new facility in Cranston in January 2007; the Traffic Tribunal also sits in Wakefield and Woonsocket.

Program Objectives

Adjudicate the cases within the jurisdiction of the Traffic Tribunal in a timely and fair manner.

Maintain a complete and accurate record for every case.

Statutory History

The powers and jurisdiction of the Traffic Tribunal are defined in Title 8 Chapter 8.2 of the Rhode Island General Laws. The 1999 session of the General Assembly passed S932 entitled the Rhode Island Traffic Safety and Accountability Act of 1999. This act abolished the Administrative Adjudication Court effective July 1, 1999 and created the Traffic Tribunal.

The Budget

Judicial Department Traffic Tribunal

	FY 2005 Actual	FY 2006 Actual	FY 2007 Revised	FY 2008 Recommended
Expenditures By Object				
Personnel	5,215,045	5,511,342	5,515,523	6,154,379
Operating Supplies and Expenses	636,048	834,510	624,525	261,643
Aid To Local Units Of Government	-	-	-	-
Assistance, Grants and Benefits	354,376	379,145	446,573	458,118
Subtotal: Operating Expenditures	\$6,205,469	\$6,724,997	\$6,586,621	\$6,874,140
Capital Purchases and Equipment	9,855	16,085	4,930	4,930
Debt Service	4,296	-	-	-
Operating Transfers	-	-	-	-
Total Expenditures	\$6,219,620	\$6,741,082	\$6,591,551	\$6,879,070
Expenditures By Funds				
General Revenue	6,219,620	6,741,082	6,951,551	6,879,070
Total Expenditures	\$6,219,620	\$6,741,082	\$6,951,551	\$6,879,070
Program Measures				
Percentage of Summonses Disposed of within 60 Days	98.0%	98.0%	98.0%	98.0%

The Program

Judicial Department Workers' Compensation Court

Program Operations

The Workers' Compensation Court is a member of the unified judicial system and has the same authority and power to subpoena and to cite and punish for civil contempt as exists in the Superior Court. It hears and decides all controversies as they pertain to Workers' Compensation in an efficient, effective, and economical manner. Presently, it has nine judges and one chief judge as well as support staff which includes administrators, hearing reporters, and clerical staff. It is supported from the Workers' Compensation Administrative Fund.

Upon the filing of a petition for benefits arising out of a work-related injury case, a case file is set up and notices are sent to all parties. Before proceeding to a full evidentiary hearing, a judge conducts a pretrial conference, with a view of expediting the case and reducing the issues in dispute to a minimum. If the matter can not be resolved informally the judge must enter a pretrial order as to the right of the employee to receive benefits (approximately 70 percent of all litigation is concluded at this point).

Those cases not resolved at pretrial are heard by the same judge for trial. At the trial, a judge will hear all questions. The judge will then decide the merits of the controversy pursuant to the law and a fair preponderance of the evidence. From this decision a decree is entered. At this stage either party may appeal to the Appellate Division which consists of three judges, none of whom is the Trial Judge.

The Appellate Division judges review the transcript and the record of the case along with the appellant's reasons for appeal and such other briefs and memoranda of law. The Appellate Division then decides the matter and a final decree of the Appellate Division is entered. If either party is aggrieved by the decision of the Appellate Division, they may petition the Supreme Court for a writ of certiorari. Upon petition, the Supreme Court may review any decree of the Workers' Compensation Court.

Program Objectives

Hear all disputes regarding workers' compensation claims.

Decide all controversies efficiently, effectively, and economically.

Statutory History

Title 28, Chapters 29 through 38 of the Rhode Island General Laws include provisions relating to the Workers' Compensation Court.

The Budget

Judicial Department Workers' Compensation Court

	FY 2005 Actual	FY 2006 Actual	FY 2007 Revised	FY 2008 Recommended
Expenditures By Object				
Personnel	4,557,140	5,340,983	5,672,157	5,976,465
Operating Supplies and Expenses	586,101	527,603	675,281	609,375
Aid To Local Units Of Government	-	-	-	-
Assistance, Grants and Benefits	650,997	714,649	727,998	746,615
Subtotal: Operating Expenditures	\$5,794,238	\$6,583,235	\$7,075,436	\$7,332,455
Capital Purchases and Equipment	38,067	17,828	65,000	55,000
Debt Service	314	-	-	-
Operating Transfers	-	-	-	-
Total Expenditures	\$5,832,619	\$6,601,063	\$7,140,436	\$7,387,455
Expenditures By Funds				
Restricted Receipts	5,832,619	6,601,063	7,140,436	7,387,455
Total Expenditures	\$5,832,619	\$6,601,063	\$7,140,436	\$7,387,455
Program Measures				
Percentage of Workers' Compensation Cases that are Disposed of at Pretrial Within 90 Days	88.0%	87.0%	90.0%	90.0%
Percentage of Workers' Compensation Cases that are Disposed of at Trial Within 360 Days	83.0%	82.0%	84.0%	84.0%