

SUPREME COURT OF VERMONT
OFFICE OF THE COURT ADMINISTRATOR

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Senator Jane Kitchel, Chair
Senate Appropriations Committee, Room 5
Representative Mitzi Johnson, Chair
House Appropriations Committee, Room 42
Statehouse, 115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633

Dear Chairs Kitchel and Johnson:

On behalf of the Vermont Supreme Court and Patricia Gabel, the State Court Administrator, please find this response to the Governor's recommended Budget Adjustment Act (BAA) and proposed \$224,138 reduction to the Judiciary's FY 2015 appropriation in Section B.204 of the original FY 2015 Appropriations Act.

The Judiciary's plan to meet this reduction is to extend and increase the existing vacancy savings policy, by which we hold positions vacant for an extended period before they can be recruited. We will identify and take action on other savings opportunities as they are identified. We believe these steps will allow the Branch to manage the fiscal year from a financial standpoint. However, given the timing of the BAA, and the nature of the Branch's operations, the Branch will have very little financial leeway to manage regular operations or ability to handle large unexpected expenses. In those circumstances, as a last resort, a furlough would likely be the only means to achieve the necessary savings.

The reduction and vacancy savings response will disrupt our operations and may well impact the timeliness with which the courts can meet the needs of Vermonters who rely on the court system -- but we believe we can keep the adverse impact within acceptable levels under the extraordinary circumstances facing the State. The ongoing vacancy savings efforts have taken—and will continue to take -- their toll on the Branch in terms of operational effectiveness and staff morale. Moreover, for FY 2016 and beyond, the Judiciary's cost pressures (annualization of Pay Act; health insurance increases; sheriffs' costs; etc.) – as well as the restoration of this reduction and the July rescission as one-time reductions -- will not go away. Some combination of necessary additional General Fund support and support for technology such as a new Case Management System to increase the Branch's efficiency is required to match the resources to the needs of an effective court system.

Regarding the language and proposed \$500,000 FY 2016 reduction in Section 70 of the Governor's proposed BAA, the Judiciary will provide its response shortly under separate cover.

Representative Mitzi Johnson, Chair
Senator Jane Kitchel, Chair
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If you have any questions about our response, please feel free to contact us.

Very truly yours,



Matt Riven
Chief of Finance and Administration

cc:

Representative Maxine Grad, Chair
House Judiciary Committee

Senator Richard Sears, Chair
Senate Judiciary Committee

Supreme Court Justices
Patricia Gabel, Esq., State Court Administrator

Steve Klein, Director, Joint Fiscal Office
Maria Belliveau, Joint Fiscal Office
Stephanie Barrett, Joint Fiscal Office

Jim Reardon, Commissioner of Finance
Sarah Clark, Deputy Commissioner of Finance
Emily Byrne, Budget Director
Heather Campbell, Budget Analyst