



NEWS RELEASE

Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts

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Congress Approves Funding for Courts: Is it Enough?

Congress has approved and the President is expected to sign a Fiscal Year 2005 appropriation for the federal courts that will allow for no growth, but is not expected to force any additional lay-offs in the coming year.

“While the approved funding level is significantly short of our request, it does signal a recognition by Congress that the federal courts must continue to function, even in an extremely tight budgetary environment,” said Leonidas Ralph Mecham, Director of the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts.

In the past 12 months federal courts reduced their work force by six percent, slashing 1,350 jobs. In addition, more than 500 court employees have been furloughed and many courts have reduced their public hours in the clerks’ offices, cut back on drug testing and treatment programs, and frozen or dramatically reduced non-case related travel, training, and new contracts.

The FY 05 appropriation provides \$5.42 billion to operate the entire federal Judicial Branch of government. The Judicial Conference had requested a \$5.7 billion funding level for FY 05, which is less than two-tenths of one percent of the federal budget

Most Judiciary functions are funded through its Salaries and Expenses account. A minimum increase of 5.6 percent was needed in this account in FY 05 to continue basic services performed in FY 04. Instead, Congress, provided \$4.12 billion for FY 05, which is a 4.3 percent increase. It is anticipated that at this level of funding, further reductions in staffing and existing services will be avoided. However, it also is unlikely that the courts will be able to keep pace with their increasing caseload, especially in high growth areas like the Southwest Border.

“Our focus now turns to how best to proceed with extremely limited funding when caseloads are growing, while also keeping an eye on the budgetary storm clouds that already are gathering for Fiscal Year 06,” Mecham said. “The Judiciary cannot continue to effectively operate with such small funding increases. This is the third consecutive fiscal year in which courts will be funded well below their current services needs. Regrettably, this is beginning to adversely impact not just the courts, but the litigants and the public,” Mecham said.

In September 2004 the Judicial Conference of the United States agreed to implement a number of sweeping cost-containment measures, including a two-year moratorium on 42 federal courthouse construction projects. The Judiciary currently pays the General Services Administration about \$900 million in rent, which is 22 percent of the Judiciary’s budget. This and several other initiatives to control the rate at which Judiciary costs are growing will continue, as will the effort to educate Congress about the impact of lower than needed funding levels.

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