

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE FISCAL NOTE

BILL NO. Senate Bill 361

PRINTER NO. 635

AMOUNT

\$600,000 to \$708,000 in FY 2023-24

FUND

General Fund

DATE INTRODUCED

February 10, 2023

PRIME SPONSOR

Senator J. Ward

DESCRIPTION

Senate Bill 361 amends §911(a) (relating to Courts of Common Pleas) of Title 42 (Judiciary and Judicial Procedure) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, by increasing the number of Judges of the Courts of Common Pleas in five Judicial Districts within the Commonwealth.

Specifically, this legislation increases the number of Judges of the Courts of Common Pleas in the following Judicial Districts:

Judicial District:	County:	Current Number of Judges:	Additional Judges:	New Number of Judges:
Eighth	Northumberland	3	1	4
Fifteenth	Chester	14	1	15
Twentieth	Huntingdon	1	1	2
Twenty-sixth	Columbia & Montour	2	1	3
Fiftieth	Butler	6	1	7

The new judgeships for the fifteenth (Chester) and the twentieth (Huntingdon) Judicial Districts will be filled by appointment by the Governor with the advice and consent of two-thirds of the members elected to the Senate of Pennsylvania. The new judgeships for the eighth (Northumberland), twenty-sixth (Columbia & Montour) and fiftieth (Butler) Judicial Districts shall be established on January 1, 2026, and shall be initially filled by election at the 2025 municipal election.

This act shall take effect immediately.

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FISCAL IMPACT:

This legislation provides that two of the judgeships shall be deemed to be vacancies occurring on the effective date of the statute and shall be filled by appointment by the Governor. However, the remaining three judgeships shall be established on January 1, 2026, and shall be initially filled by election at the 2025 municipal election.

According to the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC), the FY 2023-24 cost per Judge of the Courts of Common Pleas will be approximately \$327,000, including salary and benefits. This cost does not include the annual county court reimbursement grant, calculated at a statutory rate of \$70,000 per judgeship. Enactment of this legislation will have a fiscal impact on Commonwealth funds in the amount of \$600,000 to \$708,000 in FY 2023-24 and may have an impact on local government funds for additional courtroom space and staffing.

Future salary and benefit costs for the additional judgeships are difficult to estimate due to variables, such as future pension contribution rates and annual salary increases, which are based on the latest 12-month change to the Consumer Price Index (CPI). However, using the FY 2023-24 salary and benefit cost and the annual county court reimbursement grant, the addition of five judgeships will increase Commonwealth costs by at least \$1.985 million on a fully annualized basis once all the new judgeships are filled.