

Agency Name:	Judicial Department		
Agency Code:	B040	Section:	57



Fiscal Year FY 2026-2027

Agency Budget Plan

FORM A - BUDGET PLAN SUMMARY

**OPERATING
REQUESTS**
(FORM B1)

For FY 2026-2027, my agency is (mark "X"):	
☒	Requesting General Fund Appropriations.
☐	Requesting Federal/Other Authorization.
☐	Not requesting any changes.

**NON-RECURRING
REQUESTS**
(FORM B2)

For FY 2026-2027, my agency is (mark "X"):	
☒	Requesting Non-Recurring Appropriations.
☐	Requesting Non-Recurring Federal/Other Authorization.
☐	Not requesting any changes.

**CAPITAL
REQUESTS**
(FORM C)

For FY 2026-2027, my agency is (mark "X"):	
☐	Requesting funding for Capital Projects.
☒	Not requesting any changes.

PROVISOS
(FORM D)

For FY 2026-2027, my agency is (mark "X"):	
☐	Requesting a new proviso and/or substantive changes to existing provisos.
☐	Only requesting technical proviso changes (such as date references).
☒	Not requesting any proviso changes.

Please identify your agency's preferred contacts for this year's budget process.

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Phone</u>	<u>Email</u>
PRIMARY CONTACT:	Paul Magargle	(803) 734-0642	pmgargle@sccourts.org
SECONDARY CONTACT:	Carla Spires	(803) 734-0932	cspires@sccourts.org

I have reviewed and approved the enclosed FY 2026-2027 Agency Budget Plan, which is complete and accurate to the extent of my knowledge.

SIGN/DATE: TYPE/PRINT NAME:	<u>Agency Director</u> 	<u>Board or Commission Chair</u>
	Chief Justice John W. Kittredge	

This form must be signed by the agency head – not a delegate.

Agency Name:	Judicial Department
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BUDGET REQUESTS			FUNDING					FTES				
Priority	Request Type	Request Title	State	Federal	Earmarked	Restricted	Total	State	Federal	Earmarked	Restricted	Total
1	B1 - Recurring	Family Court Judges	675,000	0	0	0	675,000	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
2	B1 - Recurring	Circuit Court Judges and Staff	2,200,000	0	0	0	2,200,000	12.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	12.00
3	B2 - Non-Recurring	Case Management System Modernization	20,000,000	0	0	0	20,000,000	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
4	B2 - Non-Recurring	Renovation or Replacement of Bamberg County Courthouse	17,650,000	0	0	0	17,650,000	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
5	B1 - Recurring	Court Staff Interpreters and Bar Exam Interim Positions	0	0	0	0	0	5.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	6.00
TOTALS			40,525,000	0	0	0	40,525,000	17.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	18.00

Agency Name:	Judicial Department		
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FORM B1 – RECURRING OPERATING REQUEST

AGENCY PRIORITY	1
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Provide the Agency Priority Ranking from the Executive Summary.

TITLE	Family Court Judges
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Provide a brief, descriptive title for this request.

AMOUNT	General: \$675,000 Federal: \$0 Other: \$0 Total: \$675,000
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What is the net change in requested appropriations for FY 2026-2027? This amount should correspond to the total for all funding sources on the Executive Summary.

NEW POSITIONS	0.00
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Please provide the total number of new positions needed for this request.

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE REQUEST	Mark “X” for all that apply:	
		Change in cost of providing current services to existing program audience
	X	Change in case load/enrollment under existing program guidelines
		Non-mandated change in eligibility/enrollment for existing program
		Non-mandated program change in service levels or areas
		Proposed establishment of a new program or initiative
		Loss of federal or other external financial support for existing program
		Exhaustion of fund balances previously used to support program
		IT Technology/Security related
	X	HR/Personnel Related
		Consulted DTO during development
		Related to a Non-Recurring request – If so, Priority #

STATEWIDE ENTERPRISE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES	Mark “X” for primary applicable Statewide Enterprise Strategic Objective:	
		Education, Training, and Human Development
		Healthy and Safe Families
		Maintaining Safety, Integrity, and Security
		Public Infrastructure and Economic Development
	X	Government and Citizens

ACCOUNTABILITY OF FUNDS	NA
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What specific strategy, as outlined in the most recent Strategic Planning and Performance Measurement template of agency’s accountability report, does this funding request support? How would this request advance that strategy? How would the use of these funds be evaluated?

RECIPIENTS OF	South Carolina Judicial Branch (SCJB) Employees
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FUNDS

What individuals or entities would receive these funds (contractors, vendors, grantees, individual beneficiaries, etc.)? How would these funds be allocated – using an existing formula, through a competitive process, based upon predetermined eligibility criteria?

JUSTIFICATION OF REQUEST

The Chief Justice believes both the circuit and family courts play an equal and vital role in the administration of justice in South Carolina. By statute, however, family court judges are paid less than circuit court judges. Specifically, family court judges are paid 92.5% of the salary of an associate Supreme Court Justice's salary, while circuit court judges are paid 95% of an associate Supreme Court Justice's salary. This disparity in salary, although not tremendous, is based on the archaic notion that family court is somehow an inferior court, or that issues involving families and children are somehow less important than civil or criminal matters. Both family and circuit court orders are of critical importance to our justice system. From both family and circuit courts, appeals are made to the court of appeals and, therefore, both courts are equal tribunals.

Further, as society has become more complex, so too have the issues involving families and youth, increasing the size and complexity of the family court docket. Over time, the family court's jurisdiction over incarcerated and troubled youth has expanded, its role in abuse and neglect proceedings has increased, as too have the number of complex divorce proceedings.

Cases involving families and children have a direct and profound impact on South Carolina beyond what happens in the courtroom. The State of South Carolina must be able recruit talented attorneys who have experience in family law who do not view a family court judgeship as a stepping stone to a circuit court judgeship, but as an equally important position. It is past time to equalize the salary of family and circuit court judges.

Please thoroughly explain the request to include the justification for funds, potential offsets, matching funds, and method of calculation. Please include any explanation of impact if funds are not received. If new positions have been requested, explain why existing vacancies are not sufficient.

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FORM B1 – RECURRING OPERATING REQUEST

AGENCY PRIORITY	2
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Provide the Agency Priority Ranking from the Executive Summary.

TITLE	Circuit Court Judges and Staff
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Provide a brief, descriptive title for this request.

AMOUNT	General: \$2,200,000 Federal: \$0 Other: \$0 Total: \$2,200,000
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What is the net change in requested appropriations for FY 2026-2027? This amount should correspond to the total for all funding sources on the Executive Summary.

NEW POSITIONS	12.00
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Please provide the total number of new positions needed for this request.

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE REQUEST	Mark “X” for all that apply:	
	☐	Change in cost of providing current services to existing program audience
	☒	Change in case load/enrollment under existing program guidelines
	☐	Non-mandated change in eligibility/enrollment for existing program
	☐	Non-mandated program change in service levels or areas
	☐	Proposed establishment of a new program or initiative
	☐	Loss of federal or other external financial support for existing program
	☐	Exhaustion of fund balances previously used to support program
	☐	IT Technology/Security related
	☒	HR/Personnel Related
	☐	Consulted DTO during development
	☐	Related to a Non-Recurring request – If so, Priority #

STATEWIDE ENTERPRISE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES	Mark “X” for primary applicable Statewide Enterprise Strategic Objective:	
	☐	Education, Training, and Human Development
	☐	Healthy and Safe Families
	☐	Maintaining Safety, Integrity, and Security
	☐	Public Infrastructure and Economic Development
	☒	Government and Citizens

ACCOUNTABILITY OF FUNDS	NA
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What specific strategy, as outlined in the most recent Strategic Planning and Performance Measurement template of agency’s accountability report, does this funding request support? How would this request advance that strategy? How would the use of these funds be evaluated?

RECIPIENTS OF	South Carolina Judicial Branch (SCJB) Employees
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What individuals or entities would receive these funds (contractors, vendors, grantees, individual beneficiaries, etc.)? How would these funds be allocated – using an existing formula, through a competitive process, based upon predetermined eligibility criteria?

“Infrastructure” is very much a focus of the Judicial Branch’s ability to provide a court system to all South Carolinians. South Carolina’s population was approximately 4 million in 2000. Recent estimates show the state population in excess of 5.5 million. Future projections anticipate even greater growth. Five counties—Horry, Berkeley, Jasper, Lancaster, and Spartanburg—are expected to see their populations increase by 49% or more over the next 15 to 20 years. Other counties are, of course, also growing. The number of judges has not kept up with the increase in population and number of cases filed. In 2000, South Carolina had 1.15 circuit judges per 100,000 citizens; today, we have 0.97 circuit judges per 100,000. In 2000, South Carolina had 1.29 family court judges per 100,000 citizens; today, we have 1.11 family court judges per 100,000.

As South Carolina continues to grow, the Branch will continue to assess and seek more judgeships as needed. In the context of this growth SCJB asks for three additional circuit court judges.

The Fifteenth Judicial Circuit is comprised of Horry and Georgetown counties. From 2023-2024, the Myrtle Beach metro area was ranked third in the US in terms of population growth. Although Georgetown is steadily growing, Horry is the fastest growing county in South Carolina. The Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office shows that from 2020 to 2030, Horry is expected to have the highest population growth of all South Carolina counties. By 2030, it will be the second most populous county (Greenville being the first). For the last five years, Horry has had the most common pleas filings and the third most general sessions filings in the state. Because of this rapid growth, the Fifteenth Judicial Circuit needs another judicial seat to adjudicate civil and criminal cases. The Fifteenth Circuit is in need of an additional resident circuit judge.

The Sixth Judicial Circuit is comprised of Fairfield, Chester, and Lancaster counties. Every circuit in South Carolina has at least two resident circuit judges—except the Sixth Circuit, which has only one resident circuit judge. Every circuit needs at least two resident circuit judges. Multiple judges are needed for assisting with search warrants, handling routine orders that must be regularly reviewed, signed and filed. Having only one resident judge in a circuit is ill-advised. Moreover, the Sixth Circuit is growing, largely fueled by its proximity to Charlotte and growth in Lancaster. The Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office shows that the Charlotte metro area (which includes Lancaster, Chester, and York) was ranked ninth in the US in terms of growth from 2020-21. Further, from 2020 to 2030, Lancaster is predicted to be the ninth largest county in the state in terms of population growth. Currently, the Sixth Judicial Circuit only has one judicial seat. Because of the growth in this region, as well as the need for at least two resident circuit judges in every circuit, a second resident circuit judge is needed in the Sixth Circuit.

Lastly, the SCJB seeks another judgeship for the Fifth Judicial Circuit, with the specific seat to be allocated to Kershaw County. Since 2000, both Richland and Kershaw counties have seen a marked increase in population. Since 2000, Richland has seen its population increase by over 100,000. During that same period, Kershaw has seen its population increase from approximately 52,000 to almost 75,000 (an increase of about 33%). Kershaw is ranked as the sixth fastest growing county in the State. The resources committed to the Fifth Judicial Circuit by the legal system have been primarily assigned to Richland County. All the Fifth Circuit judges reside in Richland County—none reside in Kershaw County. The lack of a resident judge in Kershaw County has negatively impacted the justice system in Kershaw County, especially as it relates to the criminal court backlog. Meanwhile, as Kershaw has grown, resource allocation has not kept pace. In particular, as noted, the general sessions docket has grown and with it, the backlog. Because of the troubling criminal court backlog in Kershaw County, the Chief Justice required the chief administrative judge for general sessions of the Fifth Circuit (who would be typically assigned to Richland County) to focus on the criminal case backlog in Kershaw County. With a judge regularly addressing the Kershaw backlog, substantial progress has been made. In fact, in 2024, Kershaw disposed of more general sessions cases than were filed. However, more resources are needed, including having a judge allocated to Kershaw to

JUSTIFICATION OF REQUEST

prioritize the needs of its citizens. In years past, Kershaw disposed of significantly fewer general sessions cases than were filed resulting in a backlog that will take time, resources, and commitment to overcome. Stunningly, over 20% of general session cases in Kershaw have been pending for three to five years. A judge specifically dedicated to Kershaw is needed to oversee the management of the docket, reduce the backlog, and to ensure the timely disposition of cases. The SCJB is requesting an additional resident circuit judge in the Fifth Circuit, specifically assigned to Kershaw County.

Please thoroughly explain the request to include the justification for funds, potential offsets, matching funds, and method of calculation. Please include any explanation of impact if funds are not received. If new positions have been requested, explain why existing vacancies are not sufficient.

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FORM B1 – RECURRING OPERATING REQUEST

AGENCY PRIORITY	5
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Provide the Agency Priority Ranking from the Executive Summary.

TITLE	Court Staff Interpreters and Bar Exam Interim Positions
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Provide a brief, descriptive title for this request.

AMOUNT	General: \$0 Federal: \$0 Other: \$0 Total: \$0
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What is the net change in requested appropriations for FY 2026-2027? This amount should correspond to the total for all funding sources on the Executive Summary.

NEW POSITIONS	6.00
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Please provide the total number of new positions needed for this request.

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE REQUEST	Mark “X” for all that apply:	
	☐	Change in cost of providing current services to existing program audience
	☒	Change in case load/enrollment under existing program guidelines
	☐	Non-mandated change in eligibility/enrollment for existing program
	☐	Non-mandated program change in service levels or areas
	☐	Proposed establishment of a new program or initiative
	☐	Loss of federal or other external financial support for existing program
	☐	Exhaustion of fund balances previously used to support program
	☐	IT Technology/Security related
	☒	HR/Personnel Related
	☐	Consulted DTO during development
☐	Related to a Non-Recurring request – If so, Priority #	

STATEWIDE ENTERPRISE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES	Mark “X” for primary applicable Statewide Enterprise Strategic Objective:	
	☐	Education, Training, and Human Development
	☐	Healthy and Safe Families
	☐	Maintaining Safety, Integrity, and Security
	☐	Public Infrastructure and Economic Development
☒	Government and Citizens	

ACCOUNTABILITY OF FUNDS	NA
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What specific strategy, as outlined in the most recent Strategic Planning and Performance Measurement template of agency’s accountability report, does this funding request support? How would this request advance that strategy? How would the use of these funds be evaluated?

RECIPIENTS OF	South Carolina Judicial Branch (SCJB) Employees
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FUNDS

What individuals or entities would receive these funds (contractors, vendors, grantees, individual beneficiaries, etc.)? How would these funds be allocated – using an existing formula, through a competitive process, based upon predetermined eligibility criteria?

**JUSTIFICATION OF
REQUEST**

The Judicial Branch is requesting that five (5) interim State FTE positions for staff court interpreters and one (1) interim other funded FTE for a Bar Admissions Coordinator be made permanent. In FY2025, the Branch requested five (5) FTE positions and general appropriations to support the interpreter program. General appropriations were awarded but not the coinciding FTEs. The Judicial Branch is also requesting a permanent other funded FTE be created for a Bar Admissions Coordinator. This position will be funded with earmarked revenue received from Bar Admissions.

No additional appropriation or authorization is requested.

Please thoroughly explain the request to include the justification for funds, potential offsets, matching funds, and method of calculation. Please include any explanation of impact if funds are not received. If new positions have been requested, explain why existing vacancies are not sufficient.

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FORM B2 – NON-RECURRING OPERATING REQUEST

AGENCY PRIORITY	3
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Provide the Agency Priority Ranking from the Executive Summary.

TITLE	Case Management System Modernization
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Provide a brief, descriptive title for this request.

AMOUNT	\$20,000,000
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What is the net change in requested appropriations for FY 2026-2027? This amount should correspond to the total for all funding sources on the Executive Summary.

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE REQUEST	Mark “X” for all that apply:	
	☐	Change in cost of providing current services to existing program audience
	☐	Change in case load/enrollment under existing program guidelines
	☐	Non-mandated change in eligibility/enrollment for existing program
	☐	Non-mandated program change in service levels or areas
	☐	Proposed establishment of a new program or initiative
	☐	Loss of federal or other external financial support for existing program
	☐	Exhaustion of fund balances previously used to support program
	☒	IT Technology/Security related
	☐	Consulted DTO during development
	☐	HR/Personnel Related
	☒	Request for Non-Recurring Appropriations
	☐	Request for Federal/Other Authorization to spend existing funding
	☐	Related to a Recurring request – If so, Priority #

STATEWIDE ENTERPRISE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES	Mark “X” for primary applicable Statewide Enterprise Strategic Objective:	
	☐	Education, Training, and Human Development
	☐	Healthy and Safe Families
	☐	Maintaining Safety, Integrity, and Security
	☐	Public Infrastructure and Economic Development
	☒	Government and Citizens

ACCOUNTABILITY OF FUNDS	NA
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What specific strategy, as outlined in the most recent Strategic Planning and Performance Measurement template of agency’s accountability report, does this funding request support? How would this request advance that strategy? How would the use of these funds be evaluated?

RECIPIENTS OF FUNDS	Vendors and Contractors
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What individuals or entities would receive these funds (contractors, vendors, grantees, individual beneficiaries, etc.)? How would these funds be allocated – using an existing formula, through a competitive process, based upon

**JUSTIFICATION
OF REQUEST**

As the population of South Carolina expands, the trial courts must increasingly rely on automation to process and resolve cases in a timely fashion. A part of that automation is procuring and developing modern, efficient and effective case management systems.

The current trial court case management system used by the Circuit Courts, the Magistrate courts, and many of the Municipal Courts, which was built by the Judicial Branch in the early 2000's, must be replaced with a modern, web-based system. The Branch has developed a three-phase structured plan for the modernization of the current case management system. Phase one is the development of a strategic plan and roadmap for the modernization effort, phase two is the hiring of a dedicated third-party project manager to manage the various contractors, cost, and scope of the project, and phase three is the hiring of highly specialized vendors to implement the modernization plan. This three-phased approach will ensure that the Branch has a clearly defined project scope, maintains a rigorous schedule and budget oversight, and that the final outcomes fully meet the needs of the South Carolina Judicial System. (The SCJB would welcome the opportunity to share a detailed presentation of the three-plan to the Governor and/or any Legislator.)

The Branch has hired the firm Berry, Dunn, McNeil & Parker, LLC (BerryDunn) – a national consulting firm with deep court-system expertise - to lead the strategic-planning effort. In collaboration with BerryDunn, we have confirmed that our estimated overall need of \$100 million, used to determine last year's budget request of \$45 million to modernize the trial court case management system, was accurate.

Last year, while \$45 million non-recurring was requested, \$25 million was awarded. The Branch now seeks the remaining \$20 million needed to fulfill our request from last year, as we move forward on our case management system modernization project.

Please thoroughly explain the request to include the justification for funds, potential offsets, matching funds, and method of calculation. Please include any explanation of impact if funds are not received. If new positions have been requested, explain why existing vacancies are not sufficient.

Agency Name:	Judicial Department		
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FORM B2 – NON-RECURRING OPERATING REQUEST

AGENCY PRIORITY	4
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Provide the Agency Priority Ranking from the Executive Summary.

TITLE	Renovation or Replacement of Bamberg County Courthouse
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Provide a brief, descriptive title for this request.

AMOUNT	\$17,650,000
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What is the net change in requested appropriations for FY 2026-2027? This amount should correspond to the total for all funding sources on the Executive Summary.

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE REQUEST	Mark “X” for all that apply:	
	☐	Change in cost of providing current services to existing program audience
	☐	Change in case load/enrollment under existing program guidelines
	☐	Non-mandated change in eligibility/enrollment for existing program
	☐	Non-mandated program change in service levels or areas
	☐	Proposed establishment of a new program or initiative
	☐	Loss of federal or other external financial support for existing program
	☐	Exhaustion of fund balances previously used to support program
	☐	IT Technology/Security related
	☐	Consulted DTO during development
	☐	HR/Personnel Related
	☒	Request for Non-Recurring Appropriations
	☐	Request for Federal/Other Authorization to spend existing funding
	☐	Related to a Recurring request – If so, Priority #

STATEWIDE ENTERPRISE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES	Mark “X” for primary applicable Statewide Enterprise Strategic Objective:	
	☐	Education, Training, and Human Development
	☐	Healthy and Safe Families
	☒	Maintaining Safety, Integrity, and Security
	☐	Public Infrastructure and Economic Development
	☐	Government and Citizens

ACCOUNTABILITY OF FUNDS	NA
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What specific strategy, as outlined in the most recent Strategic Planning and Performance Measurement template of agency’s accountability report, does this funding request support? How would this request advance that strategy? How would the use of these funds be evaluated?

RECIPIENTS OF FUNDS	Bamberg County
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What individuals or entities would receive these funds (contractors, vendors, grantees, individual beneficiaries, etc.)? How would these funds be allocated – using an existing formula, through a competitive process, based upon

JUSTIFICATION
OF REQUEST

The South Carolina constitution as well as state law ensures public access to courts, providing a fair and efficient forum for the just resolution of civil, family, and criminal matters. To fulfil this constitutional mandate, each county in South Carolina has its own public courthouse where judges preside over civil, criminal, and family court cases. A safe, functional courthouse to conduct judicial proceedings is a core function of state government.

Bamberg County is the only county in the state that does not have an operational courthouse. The current courthouse has been non-operational since 2022. Currently, court is held in a narrow classroom in a multipurpose building that previously served as an armory. The building poses a security risk for judges, lawyers, litigants, and lacks adequate ventilation.

SCJB requests non-recurring funds to ensure that Bamberg County has an operational, functional, and safe courthouse for access to the courts by the public.

Please thoroughly explain the request to include the justification for funds, potential offsets, matching funds, and method of calculation. Please include any explanation of impact if funds are not received. If new positions have been requested, explain why existing vacancies are not sufficient.