

- Relocation to Ohio Courts Building scheduled for Spring 2004
- Tight budget precipitates reductions in staff, activities, and programs

## Judicial Conference of Ohio

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### ROLE

The Judicial Conference of Ohio is a statutory entity within the judicial branch of state government created to continually study and recommend changes in the procedures and practices of Ohio's court system in an effort to promote a fair and effective administration of justice. The mission is accomplished primarily through research projects, program activities, and published materials that allow information, experiences, and ideas to be shared with and among judges.

The Conference consists of all 712 of the active judges in Ohio, including the Supreme Court of Ohio, the courts of appeals, the courts of common pleas, the municipal courts, and the county courts. In addition, the Courts of Appeals Judges Association, the Ohio Common Pleas Judges Association, the Ohio Association of Probate Judges, the Ohio Association of Juvenile Court Judges, the Ohio Association of Domestic Relations Judges, and the Association of Municipal-County Judges of Ohio are members of the Conference. Members are required to pay annual dues, and although they receive no compensation for services rendered to the Conference, may receive reimbursement for reasonable and necessary expenses.

The general charge and supervision of the administration of the Conference's affairs rests with judges who serve on the executive committee, which includes its officers and its chair. The executive committee is comprised of approximately 40 judges, including representatives of all six judicial associations. The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Ohio serves as the honorary chairman of the Conference. Member judges sit on more than 20 *ad hoc* and permanent committees, which work to produce products and share information that will enhance the administration of justice. Currently, the Conference has 11 full-time staff, including the executive director who is appointed by the officers of the executive committee.

Agency In Brief					
Number of Employees*	Total Appropriations-All Funds		GRF Appropriations		Appropriation Bill(s)
	2004	2005	2004	2005	
11	\$1.2 million	\$1.2 million	\$962,000	\$957,000	Am. Sub. H.B. 95

\*Employee head count obtained from the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) payroll reports as of June 28, 2003.

### OVERVIEW

Costs of the Conference's day-to-day business is covered by a single GRF line item (018-321, Operating Expenses), while the expenses associated with supporting the work of its *ad hoc* and permanent committees and conducting various conferences, workshops, and special projects are covered by its lone non-GRF line item (018-601, Ohio Jury Instructions).

In the fall of 2003, the Conference requested what it termed a “no-growth” GRF budget consisting of \$1.1 million in each of FYs 2004 and 2005. The Conference anticipated those levels of annual GRF funding would enable it to maintain FY 2003 service levels and cover the payroll costs associated with 11 existing full-time staff positions. The FY 2004-2005 biennial budget as enacted provided GRF appropriations totaling \$962,000 in FY 2004 and \$957,000 in FY 2005, short of the requested annual GRF amounts by \$162,000, or 14.4%, in FY 2004 and by \$167,000, or 14.9%, in FY 2005. Also of note is that, relative to the Conference’s actual total FY 2003 expenditures of \$1.1 million, the FY 2004-2005 biennial budget as enacted provided total annual GRF appropriations that were lower by \$153,905, or 13.8%, in FY 2004 and by \$158,905, or 14.2%, in FY 2005.

Historically, the Conference has relied on the GRF to finance around 85% of its total annual operating expenses. From the Conference’s perspective, recent reductions in its level of annual GRF funding have created a variety of problems, a number of which are discussed below.

## **BUDGET ISSUES**

### ***RELOCATION TO OHIO COURTS BUILDING***

It appears that, when constructing its FY 2004-2005 biennial budget request, the Conference assumed its planned office relocation to the Ohio Courts Building would occur in January of 2004. The Ohio Courts Building, formerly known as the Ohio Departments Building and located on Front Street in downtown Columbus, is in the process of undergoing a \$85-plus million restoration. Currently, the Conference rents private office space at 10 West Broad Street. The Supreme Court of Ohio will be managing all building operations and it appears that the Court does not intend to charge the Conference for any building operating expenses.

As of this writing, the Conference believes that its office relocation will be delayed until March or April of 2004. Such a delay means that the Conference would incur at least three to four additional months of office space rental payments that were not budgeted for FY 2004.

### ***NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF COMMISSIONERS ON UNIFORM STATE LAWS***

The Conference is obligated to pay the expenses associated with the State Council of Uniform State Laws. The Council, which consists of four commissioners appointed by the Governor, collects and digests data concerning the prevailing law in the United States and other countries, upon such subjects where uniformity is important. It is also charged with ascertaining the best means to effect uniformity upon such subjects in the laws of the various states of the United States.

The Council submits its funding request to the Conference and the amounts are appropriated and earmarked accordingly. Contained in the FY 2004-2005 biennial budget is temporary law earmarking GRF funds of up to \$63,000 in FY 2004 and up to \$66,000 in FY 2005 for this purpose. The Conference appears to have no discretion in determining the amount that the Council requests. In addition, the Conference has little, if any, interaction with the commissioners. The Conference essentially acts as a pass-through funding conduit for the State Council of Uniform State Laws.

## ***PLANNED INITIATIVES***

Under the direction of Executive Director Kenneth A. Rohrs, who was just appointed to the post in January 2003, the Conference has already undertaken or planned to undertake several initiatives over the course of the FY 2004-2005 biennium. However, given its reduced level of annual GRF funding, the Conference may have trouble sustaining initiatives already undertaken, and will in all likelihood be unable to implement other planned initiatives. The status of some of those initiatives as of this writing is noted below.

- ***Judicial committees.*** One initiative, already underway, is designed to increase the number of member judges who sit on the Conference's *ad hoc* and permanent committees. With this increased involvement though, the Conference has also already started to experience increased costs associated with supporting committee activities, including business meeting expenses and telecommunications charges.
- ***Judicial associations.*** Another initiative, already underway as well, is designed to improve the Conference's relationships with other judicial associations. The Conference does not anticipate that its reduced level of annual GRF funding will adversely affect those relationships.
- ***Judicial intervention and wellness.*** The Conference planned to develop and implement judicial wellness and intervention programs to help judges address issues that may affect their ability to do their work effectively and efficiently. The Conference will not be able to develop and implement those programs as planned, but intends to explore other options.

## ***SERVICE LEVELS***

The Conference has noted that, in light of reduced GRF funding, its ability to maintain service levels has become problematic. Some of the apparent effects are noted below.

- ***Staffing.*** The Conference closed FY 2002 with a staffing level of 12 full-time equivalents (FTEs). In an effort to cut its ongoing annual operating expenses in FY 2003, the Conference: (1) eliminated one FTE staff position, (2) downgraded two FTE staff positions, and (3) reduced staff training.
- ***Ohio Judges Resources Manual.*** The Conference is currently in the process of updating its Ohio Judges Resource Manual, which is regarded as an important document given the increase in the number of new judges resulting from the retirement of judges and the creation of new judgeships. The Conference is not sure that it has sufficient funding to complete that task.
- ***Outreach/public confidence activities.*** The Conference has also cut back on its program dedicated to promoting public confidence in the judiciary, which has affected a voter education campaign, a planned update of an outreach manual for judges, and research on public opinion of judges and the judicial system.
- ***Inter-branch programs and activities.*** Wherever possible, the Conference has reduced its involvement in inter-branch programs and activities, including co-sponsoring conferences and projects and assisting task forces and workgroups.
- ***Electronic communications.*** The Conference has slowed web development activities and other electronic efforts to communicate with judges, legislators, and the general public.
- ***Equipment.*** The Conference intends to delay equipment maintenance and replacement. 

**FY 2004 - 2005 Final Appropriation Amounts**

**All Fund Group**

**Line Item Detail by Agency**

*FY 2001:*      *FY 2002:*      *FY 2003:*      **FY 2004**      *% Change*      **FY 2005**      *% Change*  
*Appropriations:*      *Appropriations:*      *Appropriations:*      *2003 to 2004:*      *Appropriations:*      *2004 to 2005:*

**Report For: Main Operating Appropriations Bill**

**Version: Enacted**

**JCO Judicial Conference of Ohio**

GRF	018-321	Operating Expenses	\$ 1,063,940	\$ 1,067,688	\$1,115,905	\$ 962,000	-13.79%	\$ 957,000	-0.52%
GRF	018-502	Court Security Subsidy	----	\$ 38,017	\$0	\$ 0	N/A	\$ 0	N/A
<b>General Revenue Fund Total</b>			<b>\$ 1,063,940</b>	<b>\$ 1,105,705</b>	<b>\$ 1,115,905</b>	<b>\$ 962,000</b>	<b>-13.79%</b>	<b>\$ 957,000</b>	<b>-0.52%</b>
403	018-601	Ohio Jury Instructions	\$ 187,621	\$ 156,202	\$198,944	\$ 200,000	0.53%	\$ 200,000	0.00%
<b>General Services Fund Group Total</b>			<b>\$ 187,621</b>	<b>\$ 156,202</b>	<b>\$ 198,944</b>	<b>\$ 200,000</b>	<b>0.53%</b>	<b>\$ 200,000</b>	<b>0.00%</b>
<b>Judicial Conference of Ohio Total</b>			<b>\$ 1,251,561</b>	<b>\$ 1,261,907</b>	<b>\$ 1,314,849</b>	<b>\$ 1,162,000</b>	<b>-11.62%</b>	<b>\$ 1,157,000</b>	<b>-0.43%</b>