

Judiciary
FY24 Midyear Status Report

Item No.	Appropriation / Allocation	Description	Amount / Fund Source	LFD Questions
1	Alaska Court System / Trial Courts	Standing Master/Magistrate Judge to Handle Cases in Palmer	\$294.3 Gen Fund (UGF) 2 PFT Positions	Has the Magistrate Judge and support staff been hired, and if so when? Please describe the current backlog of probate cases this new judge will address.
<p>Agency Response: A magistrate judge was hired into this position from 11/13/2023 and served until 12/4/2023. The current, full-time magistrate judge was hired on 12/22/2023 and the support staff position was hired on 12/18/2023. These positions were requested based on the dramatically increased number of probate cases and specifically due to the number of mental commitment proceedings and estate cases. Commitment proceedings must be handled within a 72-hour window of time by statute, so there isn't a "backlog" to address, but the sheer volume of cases were impacting other superior court caseloads. A magistrate judge was requested and approved so that superior court judges could continue to work on other case backlogs including criminal cases. By comparison, the FY19 number of commitment proceedings cases filed totaled 36 and in FY23, these case filings totaled 434; in FY19, estate case filings totaled 154 and in FY23, these case filings totaled 257. Estate cases do not have specific timelines or benchmarks for case closure, but with the annual number of cases on the rise, the addition of a magistrate judge and a support position was needed to manage this growing caseload.</p>				
2	Alaska Court System / Trial Courts	Court Appointed Attorneys Hourly Rate Increase	\$271.0 Gen Fund (UGF)	Has this increment resulted in new contract attorneys for FY24 and what rate are they being paid? Have prior existing contracts been renegotiated at a current higher rate?
<p>Agency Response: The rate of pay for court-appointed attorneys is established by Alaska Administrative Rule 12 and once the approved rate was increased from \$75 to \$130, the rule was amended to pay all court-appointed attorneys \$130/hour effective 7/1/2023. This increase applied to all attorney appointments that were in effect for FY24. In terms of attracting new attorneys, because many attorneys are not required to bill more than quarterly, we don't have a large amount of appointment or cost information to report so far in FY24. The \$130 rate is well below market rates for private attorneys, and we don't expect a huge increase in the number of attorneys willing to accept these appointments, but we are hopeful that our existing pool of attorneys will be able to increase the number of appointments they will accept.</p>				