



COUNCIL BUDGET STAFF REPORT

CITY COUNCIL of SALT LAKE CITY

TO: City Council Members

FROM: Lehua Weaver
Deputy Director

DATE: May 20, 2025

**RE: FY2026 BUDGET - JUSTICE COURT
WRITTEN BRIEFING**

Budget Book Pages:

Key Changes: pages 51 to 52
Department Summary: pgs 211 to
215
Staffing Document: 300 to 301

ISSUE AT-A-GLANCE

The Justice Court handles misdemeanor criminal citations, small claims, traffic citations, and traffic school for moving violations. The Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 budget proposes a total budget of \$6,287,214 and 44 full-time employees, one of which is funded by Funding Our Future dollars. There is an increase of \$329,104 or 5.5% as compared to the FY 2025 Adopted budget.

This budget review will be held as a “written briefing” because the proposed budget does not include any major requests, and no new programs or services. However, because of the inter-related nature of the Justice Court, the Prosecutor’s Office (in the Attorney’s Department Budget), and the Legal Defenders contract (in the Non-Departmental Budget), the topic of caseload and resource needs may come back as a follow-up discussion with the Council. More info below.

BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS

The primary increases to the budget include:

Personnel and compensation items

The following personnel cost changes are for both the 43 general fund employees and 1 outreach coordinator who is funded with Funding Our Future dollars.

- \$143,866 Salary Proposal increase
- (\$4,503) Pension/401K decrease
- (\$10,000) Health Savings Account decrease



- (\$38,419) Insurance Rate decrease to match actual usage

\$121,183 Special Projects Manager – due to a reduction to the amount received by the City from the mitigation grant, this position is being moved into the General Fund.

\$50,000 Increase for Interpreter Services – transfer from the Language Access fund in the Mayor’s Office to help with increased usage and inflation.

Community Outreach Case Manager position - continued to support efforts to assist individuals who are unhoused. This position is entirely funded from the Funding Our Future budget.

Security - During Budget Amendment No. 1, the Council approved an increase to the Justice Court budget to provide additional security resources. This is continued in the annual budget for \$200,000.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

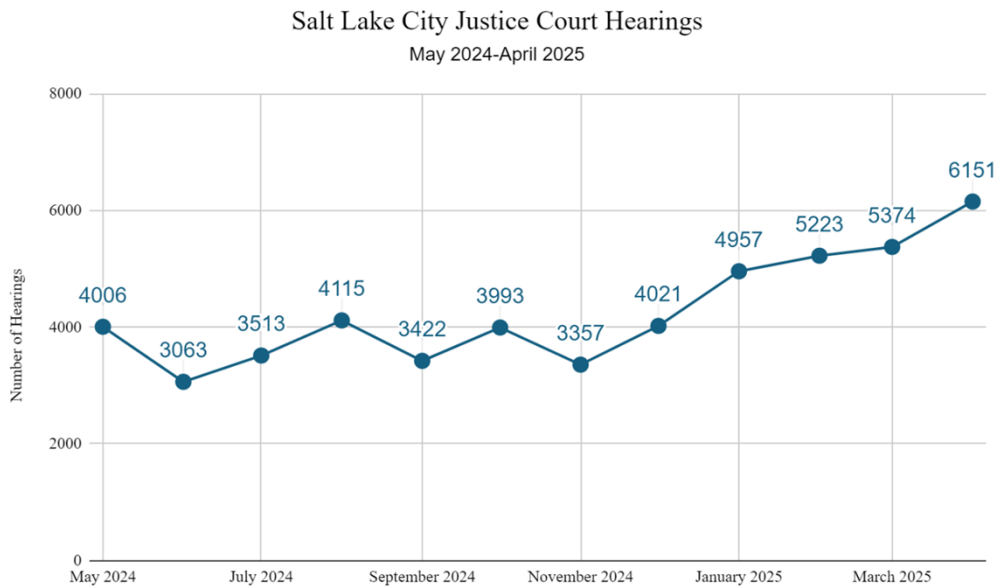
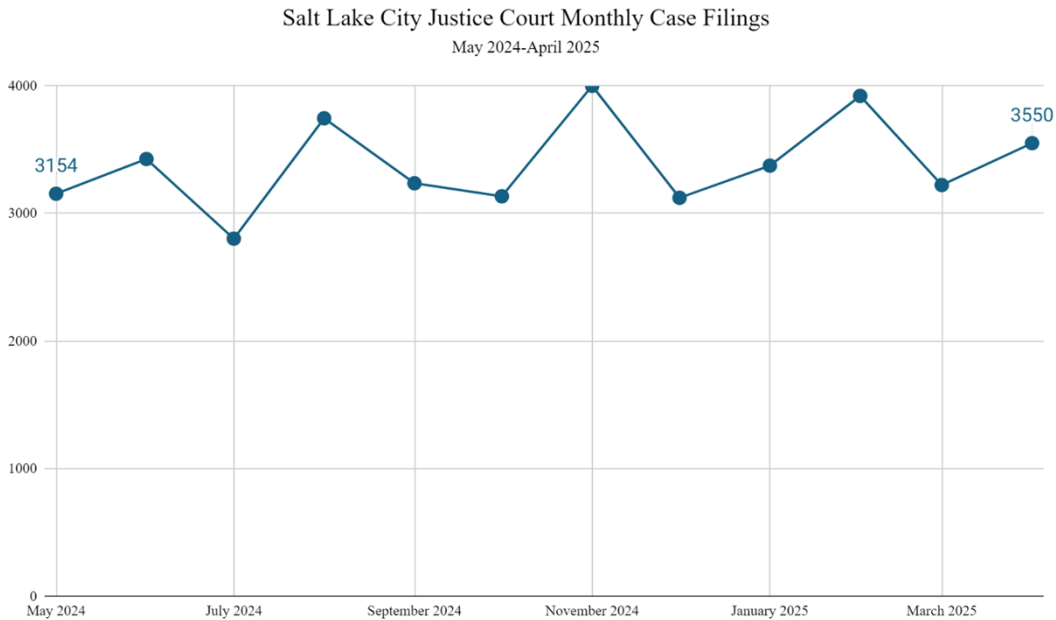
Increased Caseload in the City’s Court System

Council Members and staff have heard that there are significant increases to case filings and hearings in the Court system. This impacts the Justice Court, the Prosecutor’s Office (in the Attorney’s Department Budget), and the Legal Defenders (LDA) contract (in the Non-Departmental Budget). Adjustments to address the increased workload are needed holistically, and additions to one office would require additions to the other two parts of the system. It is staff’s understanding that this will be reviewed more closely with the stakeholders over the coming year for consideration in the FY27 budget, or potentially mid-year if the need is determined to be more urgent in nature.

Key considerations when evaluating the impact to the Court system:

- From the Justice Court’s perspective, case filings and the number of hearings have sharply increased. Each case filing will require a varying number of staff hours based on the unique characteristics of the case, number of hearings before a judge, and decision.
- Changes in ‘outside factors’ directly affect the Court System, for example citations issued by the Police Department, zoning enforcement cases, prosecutorial discretion, and human behavior.
- The Court also reports seeing lingering effects from the pandemic, notably in closure rates. In response to a staff question, Kate Fairchild, the Court Administrator provided the following information:
 - *Time to Disposition - 95% of criminal case dispositions should meet established guidelines for Time to Disposition (6 months).*
 - *The Justice Court’s time to disposition for 2024 was 76%. The time to disposition rate was affected by the pandemic and has been steadily increasing since, with a rate of 58% in 2022.*
 - *Criminal Case Clearance Rate - A Clearance Rate of 100% means the court has disposed of as many cases as were filed, i.e., the court is keeping up with its incoming caseload.*
 - *The Justice Court has historically always met its goal of 100% case clearance rate. However, in 2024 the clearance rate sat at 77%.*
- As each part of the system is overwhelmed, hearings in the Justice Court require more time to administer effective justice. For example, if the prosecutor’s office and/or LDA are over-burdened, then a case may not be ready to be heard by a judge and will be rescheduled.

- The Court continues to offer outreach events to expand the ability of the Court to meet the needs of the public. However, it should be noted that outreach events are typically conducted in addition to the normal hearing calendars and reduces staff availability at the Court building
- As the Administration evaluates this information in preparation for fiscal year 2027, the Court will be obtaining national comparative data for staffing standards, caseload tracking from the Utah State Administrative Office of the Courts, and other metrics.



Comparing January thru April annually:

Remote Hearings vs. In-Person Hearings

Based on information provided by the Justice Court, approximately 70% of hearings are conducted remotely.

Justice Court Background

The Salt Lake City Justice Court is the largest municipal Court in the State of Utah with a very high volume of misdemeanor cases. The Court is a limited jurisdiction Court under the umbrella of the Utah State Court system.

The Justice Court is responsible for and processes Class B and C misdemeanor, infractions and small claims cases, jury trials, appeals and expungements, video hearings, prisoner transports, and daily interaction with jails throughout the State of Utah. The Court monitors and tracks probation, warrants, community service, and restitution, collections of monetary penalties, appeals, expungements, and plea in-abeyance cases. The Court also provides traffic school, coordination of interpreter services, and any ADA needs that arise.

The Justice Court judiciary, employees, and security team describe their environment as “dedicated to open and transparent access to the Court, bringing justice for all, and providing a safe and civil environment for dispute resolution”.

