

# THE RECORDER

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# AROUND THE STATE

Participate in TMCA Elections, Membership, Meetings, and More

*As the action arm for municipal courts from throughout the State, we need a strong voice during legislative sessions and want to continue to provide support for judges, clerks, prosecutors, and juvenile case managers in Texas. -TMCA President Teresa Evans*

TMCEC would like to acknowledge the Texas Municipal Courts Association as our founding parent organization and for providing steady institutional leadership, with many of their membership serving on our volunteer Board of Directors and volunteer faculty for more than 40 years.

We are deeply grateful for that generosity, which has resulted in TMCEC educating more than 9,000 municipal judges and court personnel every year.

TMCA is currently holding its 2026 election for open seats on its Board of Directors. Those selected will serve a two-year term from September 1, 2026 through August 31, 2028, except for the President Elect, who serves a one-year term.

Ballots were distributed on May 1 and voting continues through June 15. TMCA members are encouraged to vote by logging into the [TMCA website](#) and clicking the [Elections Ballot 2026 header](#).

Those with voting issues or questions should contact Judge Evans, ([tevens@weatherfordtx.gov](mailto:tevens@weatherfordtx.gov)) or Judge Wayne Frost, Nominations Committee Chair ([wfrost@midlandtexas.gov](mailto:wfrost@midlandtexas.gov)).

The nominees, their affiliation, and bios ([linked if available](#)) are listed on the following page. The majority of board seats are uncontested. **Please note: For the most up-to-date election information and to cast your vote, visit the [TMCA election website](#).**



# AROUND THE STATE

## 2026 TMCA Board of Director Candidates

### Contested



Office: President Elect  
[Henrie Morales bio](#)  
Presiding Judge  
Aransas Pass Municipal Court



Office: President Elect  
[Robin Ramsay bio](#)  
Judge  
Lewisville Municipal Court

### Uncontested



Office: Second Vice President  
[Ed Spillane bio](#)  
Presiding Judge  
College Station Municipal Court

Office: Region IV Director  
[Donna Mathis bio](#)  
Presiding Judge  
Log Cabin Municipal Court



Office: Treasurer  
[Landra Solansky bio](#)  
Court Administrator  
Seguin Municipal Court

Office: Region VI Director  
[Robert "Bobby" Garcia bio](#)  
Presiding Judge  
Waco Municipal Court



Office: Region II Director  
[Melanie Houston bio](#)  
Associate Judge  
Fort Worth Municipal Court

Office: Region VII Director  
[Tammy Odom bio](#)  
Alternate Judge  
Surfside Beach Municipal Ct.



Office: Region VIII Director  
Jaqueline Chapa  
Presiding Judge  
Corpus Christi Municipal Ct.



## TMCA Membership and Rebranding

Join TMCA and support municipal courts! A rebranding committee is devising new ways to enhance membership; they want to hear your ideas. Join or renew your TMCA membership (scan QR) before August 1, 2026 to enjoy TMCA membership through August 31, 2027.



## TMCA Board of Directors Meeting

Members may also attend the July TMCA Board of Directors meeting that begins at 1:30 p.m. on July 9 at the Embassy Suites Austin Arboretum, 9505 Stonelake Boulevard, Austin, Texas.

## TMCA Annual Meeting and Awards Dinner!

Judge Evans invites members to break bread with their peers at the 2026 Annual Meeting and Awards Dinner on Thursday, July 9, starting at 5:30 p.m. at the Steiner Ranch Steakhouse in Austin. Members: no fee; Guests: \$75 per person. [Register for the event here.](#)

# 2026 Municipal Traffic Safety Initiatives (MTSI) Award Winners

**Congratulations to the 2026 Municipal Traffic Safety Initiatives (MTSI) Award Winners and Honorable Mention Recipients! These municipal courts demonstrated outstanding traffic safety outreach in calendar year 2025.**

Honorees were recognized at the MTSI Conference in Conroe on April 2. For more information about the awards, and if your municipal court is interested in applying next year, visit the [MTSI Awards Page](#).

## **Trailblazer Award**

Carrollton

### **Low Volume Winners**

Alvin, Bay City, Burnet, Freer,  
Kennedale, Lakeway, Watauga

### **Medium Volume Winners**

Baytown, Cedar Hill, College  
Station, Edinburg, Georgetown,  
Harker Heights, Harlingen, La Porte,  
Mansfield, Midland, Temple, Victoria

### **High Volume Winners**

Austin, Corpus Christi, El Paso,  
Houston, San Antonio

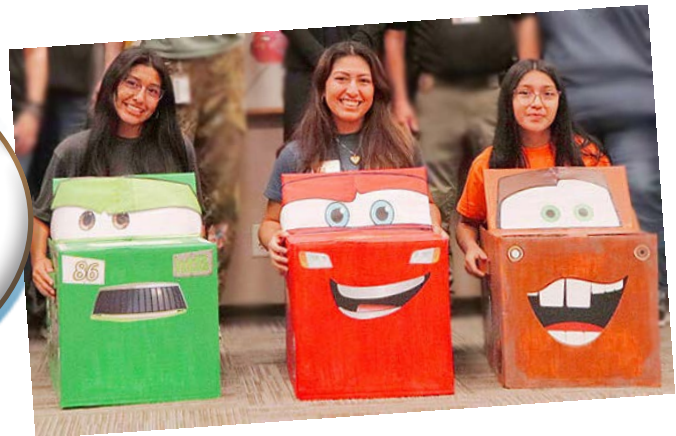
### **New Application Winners**

Canyon, Fair Oaks Ranch,  
Friendswood, Garland

### **Honorable Mention Recipients**

Amarillo, Aransas Pass, Arlington,  
Azle, Balch Springs, Dallas,  
Denton, Dickinson, Eagle Lake,  
League City, Lewisville, Lufkin,  
Mesquite, New Braunfels,  
Robinson, South Padre Island,  
Wink

Special kudos to the Carrollton Municipal Court, recipient of the 2026 Trailblazer Award for their innovative Radiator Springs activity: an interactive traffic safety experience including characters from *Cars*, an obstacle course, and a prize wheel!



# Past, Present, and Future The Texas Judicial and Court Personnel Training Fund

Hon. Ryan Kellus Turner  
TMCEC Executive Director

Imagine an educational juggernaut with no physical address that annually delivers more than 245,280 hours of instruction (the equivalent of 28 years) across a state larger than Germany. It is neither a university nor a single institution.

It is a training fund. Every year, millions of Texans' lives are directly affected by it, although few know it exists. It ensures that organizations responsible for educating those in the legal system have the resources to provide timely, practical information to the professionals who work day in and day out in Texas courts—individuals whose knowledge and judgment shape how justice is delivered.

For more than four decades, the Judicial and Court Personnel Training Fund (JCPTF) (Chapter 56, Government Code) has quietly underwritten the continuing education of judges and other justice system actors across Texas. Chapter 56 establishes the structure, allocation rules, and oversight mechanisms that govern the fund.<sup>1</sup> The JCPTF is also known as Fund 540, the official accounting code used by the Texas Comptroller to track and dedicate the specific court fees and revenue earmarked for the training fund. This dedicated fund, administered by the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals, provides grants for continuing legal education and technical assistance to organizations, including the Texas Association of Counties, Texas Center for the Judiciary, Texas Criminal Defense Lawyers Association, Texas District Court Alliance, Texas Justice Court Training Center, Texas Municipal Courts Education Center, and Center for American and International Law.

In 2025, the fund marked its 40th anniversary—a milestone that invites reflection on how it has evolved and whether it continues to operate as originally intended. Where other states have struggled to maintain consistent investment in judicial and legal education, Texas has historically excelled.<sup>2</sup> That success has not been accidental; it has depended on a steady commitment to ensuring sufficient financial resources.

In recent years, grant revenue has leveled off while operating costs have continued to rise. In July 2025, the Court of Criminal Appeals informed grantees that the fund is an “estimated” appropriation based on court fee revenue. When the Legislative Budget Board lowered its revenue projection from \$15.2 million to \$13.1 million, and because the Court distributes only about 90 percent of projected collections, grant awards were about 20 percent less than what grantees originally requested, planned for, and expected based on prior years' awards.<sup>3</sup>

These reductions had immediate and significant consequences. Grantees scaled back programming, cancelled seminars and publications, reduced staffing, and, in some cases, shifted a greater share of costs to participants.

Constraints on grant funding place increasing pressure on the ability of grantees to sustain initiatives tailored to their audiences and to keep pace with rising technology costs necessary for operations and instruction. These constraints also affect retention of experienced personnel, increasing turnover and risking loss of institutional knowledge and subject-

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matter expertise. Funding reductions affect grantees unevenly, depending on their structures and the populations they serve, resulting in differing levels of cost coverage and access to continuing education across court types.

Across the system, courts in smaller or resource-constrained jurisdictions face higher costs to meet continuing education requirements. Over time, these pressures reduce access to continuing education and make it harder to keep up with changes in law and practice. Left unaddressed, they create unintended harmful consequences.

While these effects impact both counties and cities, they are felt most strongly at the municipal level. Cities fund enforcement, operate municipal courts on behalf of the state, and collect the court costs that support state initiatives, yet receive comparatively less direct support in return under the current funding structure. Instruction from TMCEC is one of the few tangible benefits that flows back to municipalities. As funding constraints reduce the availability or accessibility of that training, municipal courts face increased local costs, reduced access to support, and greater reliance on limited internal resources. This increases strain on cities already responsible for sustaining court operations without direct state funding.

These developments raise a broader and more consequential question: whether the current statutory and funding structure of the JCPTF is sustainable in the future. This article responds to that question by providing the historical context necessary to understand the statewide training infrastructure that supports the education of judges, court personnel, and other justice system participants in Texas. It also identifies possible reforms.

## **I. History Matters**

### **A. Origins: 1974-1984**

Most are unaware that the JCPTF was born from a municipal court initiative. The Texas Municipal Courts Association (TMCA) was organized in 1974 by municipal judges and prosecutors in Harris County to form a professional association dedicated to supporting and improving municipal courts

statewide. In 1977, TMCA successfully championed legislation that created a framework specifically for the education of municipal judges. However, there was a problem. No money was provided.

In his 1983 State of the Judiciary Message to the 68th Legislature, Chief Justice Jack Pope pointed out the inequity that municipal courts generated 58 percent of the funds the Governor's Criminal Justice Planning Fund used to provide grants for the education of Texas judges, but no grant funds were awarded for the education of municipal judges and municipal court personnel.<sup>4</sup> Chief Justice Pope urged the passage of legislation sought by TMCA to fund training for municipal judges and court personnel.

The legislation was filed by former La Marque City Council Member, Representative Lloyd Criss, Jr. H.B. 1068, creating the Municipal Court Judges and Personnel Training Fund (MCJPTF), went into effect January 1, 1984. The fund was established in the state treasury and administered by the Criminal Justice Division of the Governor's Office. It provided grants to statewide professional associations of municipal court judges and municipal court personnel to conduct continuing education courses and seminars. Funding came from a 50-cent court cost assessed upon conviction of a criminal offense in a municipal court, excluding parking and pedestrian violations. In August 1984, Governor Mark White and Judge Elinor Walters, president of TMCA, announced a \$338,400 grant to TMCA from the Criminal Justice Division of the Governor's Office.<sup>5</sup> It marked the beginning of the Texas Municipal Courts Education Center.<sup>6</sup>

Even before H.B. 1068 went into effect, its fiscal implications were understood. In a fiscal note from Jim Oliver, director of the Legislative Budget Board to the House Committee on the Judiciary, it was projected that in its first year (1984), the MCJPTF would generate \$812,000, and by 1988, it would annually generate \$1,345,000. To put this amount in perspective, Chief Justice Pope's requested state budget for judicial education in 1983 was \$645,000. However, because funding for judicial education was not allocated to the judicial branch, but instead came from the Criminal Justice Division of the Governor's Office, the Chief Justice "hoped the Legislature

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[would] ensure that the courts [got] a fair share of the grant monies available.”<sup>7</sup>

## **B. Milestones**

### **1985: Statewide Expansion and Structural Realignment**

By 1985, it was clear that judicial education funding from the Governor’s Criminal Justice Division was not going to be available in the future.<sup>8</sup> The Legislature identified the MCJPTF as an alternative funding mechanism and had reason to be confident it would solve the state judicial education funding problem.<sup>9</sup> In less than two years, it not only demonstrated how a dedicated court cost could successfully fund education for municipal judges and municipal court personnel, it provided a scalable model the Legislature could amend to provide ample funds to finance continuing education for all judges and court personnel in Texas. The MCJPTF paved the road for what would become a highway of training across the Texas justice system.

In 1985, the Legislature transferred administration of judicial education funding from the Governor’s Office to the Supreme Court of Texas, incorporating the municipal model into a broader framework (H.B. 309).<sup>10</sup> The MCJPTF was repealed. All unexpended funds in the MCJPTF were deposited to the credit of the new Judicial Court Personnel Training Fund. The 50-cent fee that was only imposed in Class C misdemeanor criminal convictions in municipal courts, excluding parking and pedestrian offenses, was replaced with a \$1.00 court cost to be assessed in all criminal cases (felonies and misdemeanors) except for parking and pedestrian offenses.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, 50 percent of specified fees collected by clerks of the courts of appeals were directed to be deposited into the fund for the purpose of supporting continuing legal education for judges and court personnel. A total of \$4.2 million was appropriated for FY 1986 and FY 1987. H.B. 309 also included the first iteration of limits on the fund’s use that still exist today: no more than one third for the education of municipal judges; no more than one third for the education of justices of the peace; and no more than one third for the education of judges of appellate courts, district courts, county courts at law, and county courts performing judicial functions. The allocation limits included court personnel.

### **1987: Codification in the Government Code and Administrative Framework Established**

During the 70th Legislature, as part of the state’s ongoing statutory revision program to modernize and organize Texas laws, S.B. 895 reorganized the judicial branch by moving numerous provisions from the old Vernon’s Civil Statutes into the Government Code, including what is today Chapter 56, titled the Judicial and Court Personnel Training Fund.<sup>12</sup>

In a separate related bill, S.B. 687, pertaining to education programs, an amendment to the Court Administration Act (former Article 200a-1, Vernon’s Texas Civil Statutes) stated that the Supreme Court shall, if adequate funding is available for education programs for judges and court personnel, ensure that adequate education programs are available “on an equitable basis for all courts created under the constitution and the law of this state.”<sup>13</sup>

### **1991: Funding for Prosecutors and Indigent Defense Bar Training Appropriated from JCPTF**

For about 20 years, the criminal justice division of the Governor’s Office had funded education and technical education assistance for prosecutors in county and district courts and criminal defense attorneys who represent indigent defendants.<sup>14</sup> By 1991, the funding was no longer available. In 1991, the 72nd Legislature appropriated money from the JCPTF to provide funding.<sup>15</sup> Grants were awarded to the Texas District and County Attorneys Association and the Texas Criminal Defense Lawyers Association.<sup>16</sup>

### **1993: Administration Transferred to Court of Criminal Appeals and Eligibility Expanded**

As originally introduced, S.B. 947 amended Section 56.001 so that the Judicial Court Personnel Training Fund would be jointly administered by the Supreme Court of Texas and the Court of Criminal Appeals. However, by the time the bill made its way to Governor Ann Richard’s desk, the administration of the JCPTF was transferred from the Supreme Court to the Court of Criminal Appeals. By the end of the 73rd Legislature, references to the Supreme Court in Chapter 56 and Section 74.025 of the Government Code were replaced with references to the Court of Criminal Appeals.

S.B. 947 was significant in other ways. Section 56.004 was amended to extend eligibility beyond courts, authorizing grants for continuing legal education, technical assistance, and related programs for prosecuting attorneys, criminal defense attorneys representing indigent defendants, and justices of the peace and their personnel.<sup>17</sup>

**1995: Oversight Authority and Performance-Based Funding Introduced**

S.B. 1338 expanded the authority of the Court of Criminal Appeals under Section 56.006 to include oversight of grant-funded entities.<sup>18</sup> The Court was authorized to require compliance with legislatively mandated training and to condition funding on the quality of programs and services provided. The bill

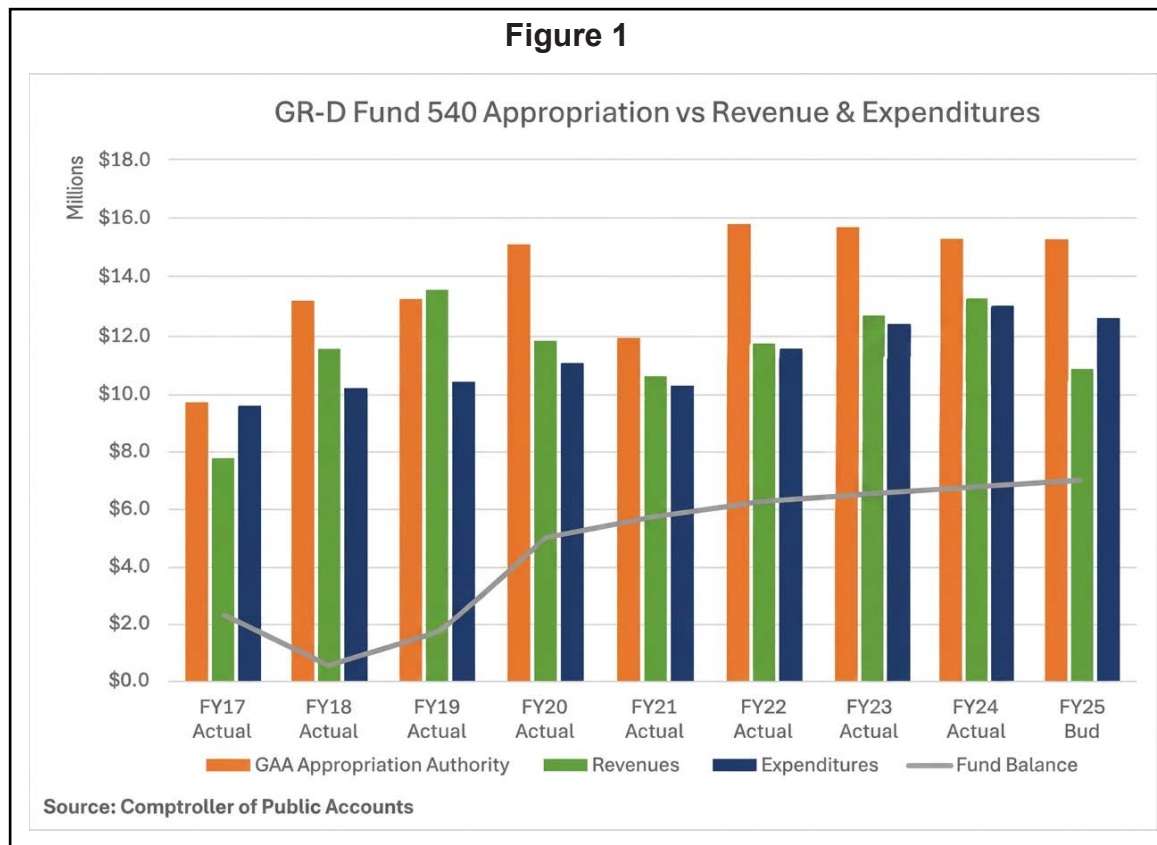
**2003: Expanding Grant Eligibility Beyond “Associations”**

H.B. 2157 amended Section 56.003(f) to expand eligibility for JCPTF grants beyond professional associations, authorizing funding for additional entities that provide education and training to judges, prosecutors, indigent defense attorneys, and court personnel, broadening the pool of potential grantees.

**2011: Dedicated Account Status and Fund Retention Stabilized**

S.B. 1 amended Section 56.001 by reclassifying the JCPTF as a dedicated account within the general revenue fund and eliminating the requirement that unexpended balances be transferred to general

revenue at the end of each fiscal year.<sup>19</sup> As a result, the fund now retains 100 percent of its unexpended balance for its statutorily authorized training purposes. This change provides greater fiscal continuity by eliminating year-end sweeps and allowing grantees to maintain operations when court-fee collections fall below biennial projections.



also required grantees to meet specified financial performance standards.

These changes introduced a performance-based framework for the administration of the fund, tying grant awards to both educational effectiveness and fiscal accountability.

**II. More/Less**

History sets the stage. This graph from the Comptroller tells the story of current events for the JCPTF. See Figure 1.

Start with the orange bars. These are appropriations, the amount the Legislature authorizes for the fund each year. Think of it as a ceiling, not a guarantee. It

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reflects how much money can be distributed; *not how much will actually come in or go out*. At a glance, the bars rise over time, with a dip during the pandemic and a recovery that follows. But the increases are modest, and the bars do not show whether the fund has more resources.

Look at the green bars. These represent revenue, the money that actually comes into the fund, not what is projected. If appropriations are the ceiling, revenue is the fuel that powers the JCPTF. It rises and falls over time, with a clear disruption during the pandemic years. There is no sustained rise. The level recovers, but it does not move beyond its prior range.

The blue bars show expenditures. Here again, the level stays in the same general range as revenue and appropriations. That matters. The fund is spending within its means. This is not a picture of spending exceeding available resources.

The gray line is the fund balance, what is left over from year to year. It trends upward, but slowly. After 2020, there is no surge and no sign of large reserves building up. It is essentially flat.

Taken together, the chart shows a fund that works. Money comes in. Money goes out. The parts move together, year after year. Nothing here signals collapse or insolvency. It is stable. Careful stewardship by the Court of Criminal Appeals has helped keep the fund functioning effectively despite increasingly constrained resources.

But the overall picture can be misleading. Prices surged after the pandemic, and those increases did not disappear. A dollar today buys less than it did in 2019.

The chart tells part of the story. But it does not show what has changed, what drives the numbers, the demands placed on the fund, or whether it still works as the Legislature intended.

### A. The Assumption

In 1983, Chief Justice Pope observed that municipal courts were generating 58 percent of the revenue supporting judicial education throughout Texas.<sup>20</sup> Long before a dedicated training fund existed, judicial education in Texas depended on a high volume of Class C misdemeanor cases.

The MCJPTF, and later the JCPTF, built on that reality. The Legislature did not create a new funding source so much as it redirected and scaled an existing one. The model assumed that as Texas grew, and as new Class C misdemeanors were created by the Legislature, city councils, and county commissions, case volume would rise or remain steady. A high-volume, broadly distributed base would provide stable and scalable support for judicial education. Growth in filings would translate into more resources for training.

When the model expanded in 1985, that same assumption carried forward statewide. The fund was designed to be supported by court activity, particularly the high volume of Class C misdemeanor cases handled in municipal and justice courts. Those cases were expected to generate sufficient revenue to fund training not only for municipal courts, but for judges, court personnel, prosecutors, and defense attorneys across the state.

There were other assumptions. Collections would remain predictable. As Texas grew, the model would grow with it. The Legislature would make periodic adjustments as needed. But all of these were secondary to the core assumption that court activity would be sufficient to sustain the fund and meet the needs of the fund's grantees.

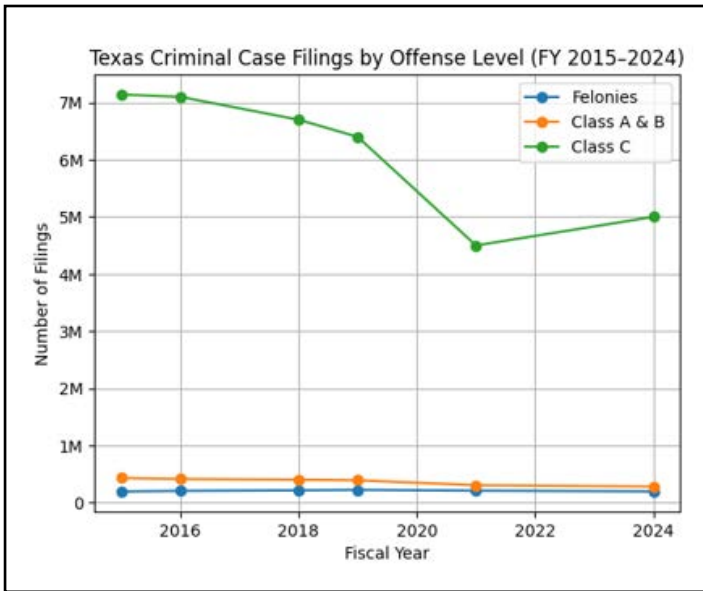
### B. What Changed? Case Volume (and More)

The primary assumption did not hold. For more than a decade, Class C misdemeanor filings have declined. The trend began before 2020 and accelerated during the pandemic, when filings dropped sharply. Recovery has been partial. Filings have not returned to prior levels, and the expectation of consistent, high-volume filings no longer reflects reality. See Figure 2.

In a previous issue of *The Recorder*, authors examined a 37 percent decline in traffic and parking cases filed statewide between 2006 and 2016, despite significant increases in population and licensed drivers.<sup>21</sup>

See Figure 3. Traffic and parking cases make up roughly 80 percent of all Class C filings in Texas.<sup>22</sup> The authors identified several clusters of theories to explain the trend, describing it as a "piecemeal explanation," with no single factor responsible.<sup>23</sup>

**Figure 2**

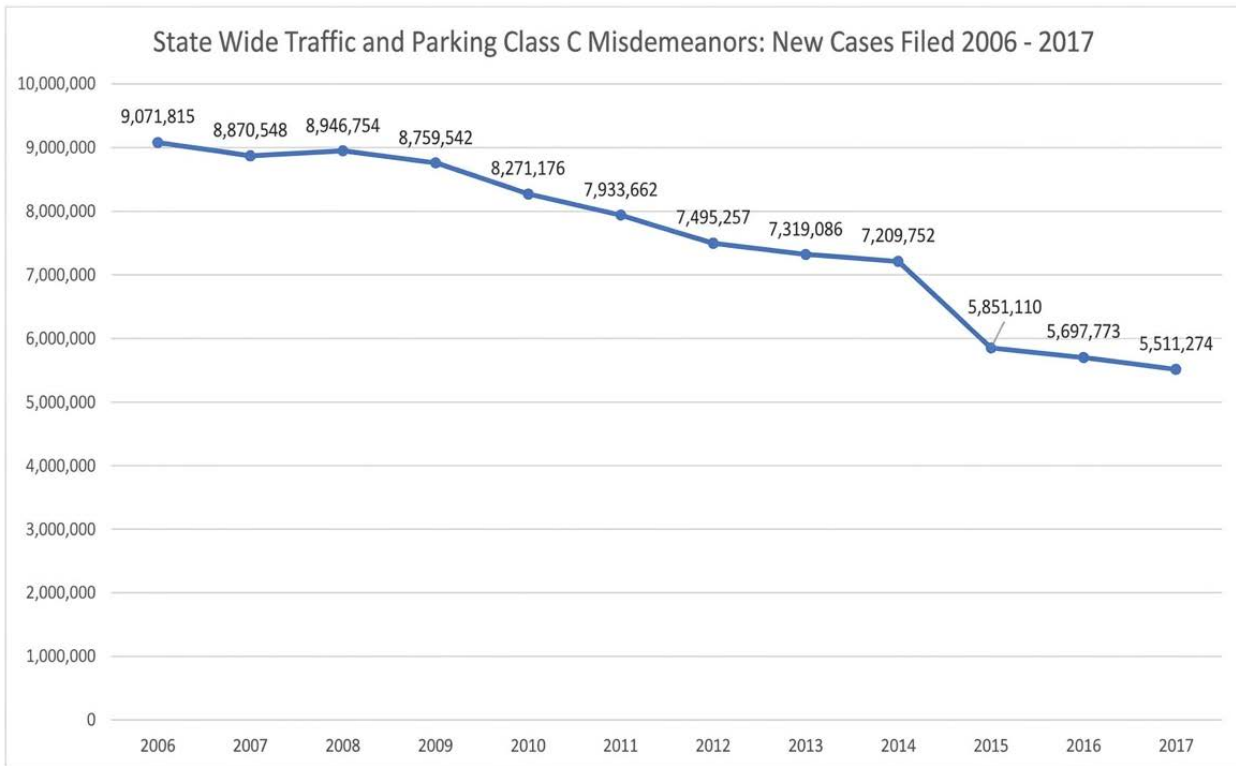


The decline in filings is sustained. It is not the result of a single policy change or isolated event. It reflects broader shifts in practices, technology, and policy.

But the decline in filings is not the only thing that has changed. In the last decade, there has been a substantial shift in how court costs are collected. In 2016, the Legislative Budget Board reported that, between 2006 and 2015, the Collection Improvement Program (CIP), administered by the Office of Court Administration, resulted in an additional \$221.6 million in court costs remitted to the state.<sup>24</sup> By 2019, as part of broader legislative reforms to fines and fees, particularly for defendants with low incomes, the CIP was repealed.<sup>25</sup>

At the same time, legislative changes have affected how cases are resolved.<sup>26</sup> Since 2019,

**Figure 3**



courts that adjudicate Class C misdemeanors have placed greater emphasis on procedural fairness and individualized dispositions.<sup>27</sup> More judgments are discharged through community service. The Legislature has also authorized courts to waive fines and court costs when a defendant is indigent or does not have sufficient

## Figure 4

### Judicial Court Personnel Training Fund: Fee-Related Changes Since 1985

#### 1997: Appellate Fee Increases

Twelve years after its creation, the JCPTF received its first funding increase. Through H.B. 787, the Legislature raised certain appellate filing fees under Section 56.002, whose revenue is divided between the Judicial Fund and the JCPTF.<sup>i</sup> The fee for filing an appeal increased from \$50 to \$100; the fee for filing a motion relating to a proceeding from \$20 to \$50; the fee for granted motions from \$30 to \$75; and the fee for motions to file or extend time to file a record on appeal from \$5 to \$10.

#### 1999: Criminal Court Cost Increased

Two years after the appellate fee increases, the Legislature increased the criminal court cost supporting the JCPTF. Through S.B. 1187, amending Section 56.001(b), the cost assessed upon conviction of a criminal offense (excluding parking and pedestrian offenses) was increased from \$1 to \$2, the first increase since 1985.

#### 2003: Integration into Consolidated Court Cost Structure

In H.B. 2424, part of a broader restructuring of court costs, the uniform \$2 criminal court cost in Section 56.001(b) was repealed and incorporated into a consolidated court cost in Section 133.102 of the Local Government Code.<sup>ii</sup> This marked the first implementation of consolidated court costs in criminal cases. Under this structure, amounts allocated to the JCPTF varied by offense classification: felonies (\$6.43); Class A and B misdemeanors (\$4.01); and fine-only misdemeanors (\$1.93).

#### 2017: Introduction of Civil Filing Fee

For the first 32 years of its existence, the JCPTF was supported exclusively by court costs assessed in criminal cases and appellate filing fees. The 85th Legislature fundamentally changed that structure through the Judge Julie Kocurek Judicial and Courthouse Security Act (S.B. 42).<sup>iii</sup> The legislation added a \$5 civil filing fee dedicated in part to judicial education and training, marking the first time a fee assessed in a civil case was used to support the fund.<sup>iv</sup>

#### 2019: Criminal Court Cost Restructuring and Allocation Adjustment

Following the Court of Criminal Appeals decisions in *Peraza v. State*<sup>v</sup> and *Salinas v. State*,<sup>vi</sup> the Legislature reorganized criminal court costs. Under S.B. 346, the single consolidated court cost was replaced with two consolidated fees: a state consolidated fee and a local consolidated fee.<sup>vii</sup> Within this structure, allocations to the JCPTF were adjusted by offense classification: felonies (\$6.14); Class A and B misdemeanors (\$4.88); and Class C misdemeanors (\$2.05).

#### Endnotes

i Act of May 28, 1997, 75th Leg., R.S., ch. 1080, § 1, 1997 Tex. Gen. Laws 4169. See also, House Comm. on Judicial Affairs, Bill Analysis, Tex. H.B. 787, 75th Leg., R.S. (1997) (explaining that revenue from the affected appellate filing fees is divided between the Judicial Fund and the JCPTF).

ii Act of June 2, 2003, 78th Leg., R.S., ch. 209, § 2, 2003 Tex. Gen. Laws 996, 979.

iii Act of May 22, 2017, 85th Leg., R.S., ch. 190, § 5, 2017 Tex. Gen. Laws 357, 356.

iv Mirroring the criminal consolidation enacted in 2019, in 2021, the 87th Legislature enacted S.B. 41 which consolidated numerous civil filing assessments into a unified State Consolidated Civil Fee (Section 133.15, Local Government Code). This reform absorbed the standalone \$5.00 JCPTF fee created by the Kocurek Act into the consolidated structure. The JCPTF receives \$5.00 from both the \$137 district court filing fee and the \$21 justice court filing fee. This allocation applies to qualifying civil, probate, guardianship, and mental health filings, as well as subsequent actions.

v *Peraza v. State*, 467 S.W.3d 508 (Tex. Crim. App. 2015) (holding that a court cost need not arise out of the defendant's particular prosecution in order to be legitimate). Furthermore, as long as the statutory assessment is reasonably related to the costs of administering the criminal justice system, it is not a tax in violation of separation of powers. Rejecting the requirement in *Ex parte Carson*, 159 S.W.2d 126 (1942), which stated that "to pass constitutional muster, the statutorily prescribed court cost must be 'necessary' or 'incidental' to the 'trial of a criminal case.'" *Peraza*, 467 S.W.3d at 517 (emphasis added). The court stated that court costs should be related to the recoupment of costs of judicial resources, but it found the terms "necessary or incidental" too limiting.

vi *Salinas v. State*, 523 S.W.3d 103 (Tex. Crim. App. 2017) (holding court costs collected for "abused children's counseling" and "comprehensive rehabilitation" under Section 133.102 of the Local Government Code (Consolidated Fees on Convictions) are facially unconstitutional under the Separation of Powers Clause of the Texas Constitution (Article II, Section 1). Citing *Peraza*, each cost was deemed unrelated to a criminal justice purpose.

vii Act of May 24, 2019, 86th Leg., R.S., ch. 1352, § 1.02, 2019 Tex. Gen. Laws 3981.

resources or income to pay, and paying or performing community service would impose an undue hardship.<sup>28</sup> In addition, the Court of Criminal Appeals has recognized that fines are punitive, while court costs are non-punitive recoupments.<sup>29</sup> As a result, more court costs are waived today than in the past.

The funding model for the JCPTF assumed stable, if not increasing, case volume. Nevertheless, Class C filings moved in a different direction. So have the law and the conditions under which cases are resolved.

### C. Backfill and Shortfall

There have been five fee-related changes since the Judicial Court Personnel Training Fund was established in 1985 (See Figure 4). Each reflected an effort to support or expand the fund. But the decline in Class C misdemeanor filings has outpaced those efforts. New sources of revenue were intended to offset that loss. They have not kept pace either. In practical terms, recent changes have operated as backfill, replacing declining revenue rather than expanding it, and have produced a persistent shortfall.

Legislative Budget Board materials over the past decade reflect awareness of this shift. Increases in JCPTF appropriation have been tied to anticipated growth in civil filing fee revenue, even as criminal court cost revenue was expected to decline.<sup>30</sup> In 2018, the Legislative Budget Board estimated that the new five-dollar civil filing fee authorized by S.B. 42 would generate \$10 million for the JCPTF, while also noting a \$4 million decrease in court cost revenue from biennial levels.<sup>31</sup> By 2020, that \$10 million estimate was reduced to \$3.1 million.<sup>32</sup>

Legislative adjustments on the criminal side follow the same pattern. Changes to consolidated court costs in 2019 increased the amounts allocated to the JCPTF. But like the addition of civil filing fees, they were not sufficient to offset the decline in Class C misdemeanor filings (See Figure 2). At the time, these changes may have been perceived as additions. In retrospect, they functioned as substitution rather than expansion and did not offset erosion in the JCPTF's funding base.

### D. Increasing and Expanding

While the funding structure of the JCPTF has changed incrementally, the scope of what it is expected to accomplish has expanded as Texas has grown.

In 1983, there were more than 700 municipalities in Texas. Today, there are more than 1,200. The population of the state has doubled to approximately 32 million.<sup>33</sup> The number of judges has increased, and the number of court personnel supporting judicial operations has grown alongside it.

**Figure 5**

## **Participant Expansion (1993-2019)**

- 1993:** Prosecutors and Criminal Defense Attorneys Representing Indigent Defendants (S.B. 947)
- 1997:** District Clerks, County Clerks, and Other Court Personnel (H.B. 622)
- 1999:** Full-Time Associate Judges, Masters, Magistrates, Referees (S.B. 1187)
- 2003:** Title IV-D Child Support Judicial Officers (H.B. 2157)
- 2007:** Law Enforcement Personnel and Law Students via Innocence Training Programs (S.B. 496)
- 2013:** Indigent Defense Support Personnel (H.B. 1245)
- 2017:** Court Security Training, Including Individuals Responsible for Courthouse Safety (H.B. 42)
- 2019:** Part-Time Masters, Magistrates, Referees, Associate Judges (S.B. 346)

Participation in training has followed the same trajectory. In 2015, the JCPTF supported training for 21,563 individuals.<sup>34</sup> By 2025, that number had risen to 39,744.<sup>35</sup>

What began as a training fund for judicial education now supports a broader cross section of the justice system, including clerks, juvenile case managers, and other individuals working in the administration of justice.

Since its expansion in 1993 to include prosecutors and criminal defense attorneys representing indigent defendants, the scope of eligibility for training funds has been expanded seven times by statute. Additional categories of court personnel and specialized judicial officers have been incorporated. The result is a system that reaches more participants across more disciplines (See Figure 5).

Expansion has not been limited to who is eligible for training funds. It also extends to what must be taught.

**Natural Expansion of Fundamental Judicial Education:** Members of the Texas judiciary have an official duty to complete the instruction required by the Texas Rules of Judicial Education (TRJE).<sup>36</sup> While the TRJE imposes different requirements on different judges, five core areas run through judicial education in Texas: ethics, procedural law, substantive law, the law of evidence, and court administration.<sup>37</sup> Even within those core areas, the volume and complexity of instruction have increased over time as statutes change, case law develops, and new issues emerge. Keeping that instruction current and useful is itself a substantial and continuing demand on judicial education providers and the JCPTF.

**Legislatively Mandated Judicial Education:** In addition to core instruction under the TRJE, the Legislature has expanded mandatory judicial education requirements five times. These mandates vary by jurisdiction and assignment. They include training related to juvenile diversion, family violence, mental health, guardianship, and other subject areas tied to judicial duties.<sup>38</sup>

**Mandated Training Beyond Judges:** The Legislature has imposed mandatory training on non-judicial personnel, including prosecuting attorneys and court staff. These mandates address subject areas such as disclosure obligations, family violence, and guardianship.<sup>39</sup> Board-certified family law attorneys and criminal, county, and district attorneys

are required to receive training on sex-offender characteristics.<sup>40</sup>

**Magistrate Duties and Bail Training:** Every judge in Texas is a magistrate.<sup>41</sup> Not every magistrate in Texas is a judge.<sup>42</sup> A 2021 legislative mandate imposes training requirements on magistrates, including instruction related to bail determinations and the use of statewide systems to obtain criminal history information.<sup>43</sup>

### **E. The Invisible Cut: Erosion of Purchasing Power and Lingering Effects of Inflation**

For most of its history, the JCPTF operated in a relatively low-inflation environment. That changed during the pandemic. Prices rose sharply in the years that followed, and those increases have not reversed. A dollar today buys less than it did just a few years ago. Just as individuals feel this in their everyday lives, so do the grantees funded by the JCPTF.

What does not appear on any chart or spreadsheet is the invisible cut to the JCPTF. Funding levels may appear stable, but purchasing power has declined. The result is a reduction in what the fund can support, a reduction that does not appear in appropriations or revenue figures but is felt in the delivery of training.

At the same time, revenue is essentially flat. Costs have risen. Revenue has not kept pace. Because the JCPTF is primarily supported by fixed court costs that do not adjust for inflation, those dollars lose value even if collections remain stable.

In real terms, current funding in FY 26 carries the purchasing power of approximately \$11 to \$12 million in 2017 dollars.<sup>44</sup> The system continues to function, but travel, facilities, technology, and labor are more expensive than they were only a few years ago. More is being asked of the fund. More participants. More training. More costs. At the same time, the real value of its dollars has declined.

## **III. Multiple Choice**

Several approaches are available to address the problems facing the Judicial Court Personnel Training Fund. Here are four that address different aspects of the problem.

### **A. Increase Court Costs**

An obvious option is to increase the amount of court costs dedicated to the JCPTF. Since its creation, the fund has been supported through periodic

adjustments to court costs, each reflecting an attempt to maintain or expand its capacity.

Those adjustments have not occurred on a regular or uniform basis. Appellate filing fees have not been increased since 1997. Felony allocations have not been increased since 2003 and were reduced in 2019. Misdemeanor allocations were last adjusted in 2019. The civil filing fee contribution has remained at \$5.00 since 2017.

The result is a funding structure built on layers of adjustments made at different points in time, without a consistent mechanism to account for inflation or changes in case volume. Over time, the real value of these components has declined. Even where increases have occurred, they have often functioned as partial offsets to declining case volume rather than true expansions of funding capacity.

If inflation is the problem, adjusting for it is the most direct response.

Using the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U) as a rough measure, a simple inflation reset would place the JCPTF-supporting amounts at approximately the following levels. For each item below, the first year and amount reflect the last substantive increase to that fee or allocation, adjusted into current dollars.

- Appellate filing fee: \$100 in 1997 to about \$200 today
- Appellate motion fee: \$50 in 1997 to about \$100 today
- Motion to extend time fee: \$10 in 1997 to about \$20 today
- Felony allocation: \$6.43 in 2003 to about \$11.25 today
- Civil filing fee allocation: \$5.00 in 2017 to about \$6.57 today
- Class A and B misdemeanor allocation: \$4.88 in 2019 to about \$6.15 today
- Class C misdemeanor allocation: \$2.00 in 1999 to approximately \$3.75 today<sup>45</sup>

Using this approach closes the current gap between available funding and recent grant requests and materially restores the fund's lost purchasing power.

**Class C Misdemeanors:** It has been more than a quarter of a century since the JCPTF court cost on

Class C misdemeanors was meaningfully adjusted. In 1999, it increased from \$1.00 to \$2.00. That change represented a doubling of the amount, not simply an adjustment for inflation. At the time, the House Research Organization noted that increases in court costs should be tied to necessary administrative costs, and some questioned whether a 100 percent increase was justified based on the information available.<sup>46</sup> Applying the same rationale today, a 100 percent increase from \$2.00 to \$4.00 can be tied to necessary administrative costs and justified based on the information now available.

**Civil Filing Fees:** A related consideration involves the role of civil filings in supporting the fund. The JCPTF has long supported courts of civil jurisdiction, but civil cases did not begin contributing to the fund until 2017. The \$5.00 civil filing fee has not been increased since its inception and has not met revenue expectations. The current amount should be reexamined. Rather than focusing solely on inflation, any adjustment should reflect filing volume and the nature of civil cases as user-initiated proceedings and ensure that civil filings make a meaningful contribution to the fund. Based on the information available, increasing the fee to \$10.00 corrects the shortfall created by the current \$5.00 fee and produces adequate revenue.

**Consolidated Court Costs:** A related consideration involves how changes can be made within the current court cost structure. Prior to 2003, when the state began consolidating criminal court costs, and more recently in 2021, when civil court costs were consolidated, adjusting a cost dedicated to a specific purpose was relatively straightforward. The Legislature could simply amend the dollar amount of that cost.

Under the consolidated court cost model, the process is more complex. A consolidated court cost combines multiple separate funds into a single fee, with the collected revenue then divided among various state programs according to statutory percentage allocations. To increase funding for the JCPTF under the consolidated court cost model, the Legislature would need to consider both the total amount of the court cost and the percentage allocated to the fund.

For example, increasing the consolidated court cost would increase the amount distributed per conviction to all programs funded through the fee, including the JCPTF. By contrast, increasing only the JCPTF's percentage allocation would increase funding for

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the JCPTF by reallocating existing revenue from other programs funded by the consolidated fee. A third approach would combine an increase in the overall court cost with corresponding adjustments to the percentage allocations. Under that approach, the JCPTF could receive increased funding while the dollar amounts distributed to other programs could remain substantially similar because the total amount collected through the consolidated court cost would also increase.

Adjustments to percentage allocations are not unprecedented.<sup>47</sup> They are driven by need. In prior legislative sessions, percentage shares have been modified to advance particular priorities, including indigent defense. These changes show that the consolidated court cost model is not fixed. It can be adjusted when needs change.

**Ability to Pay:** Court costs are paid by defendants and litigants. Any adjustment raises questions about affordability and fairness. At the same time, the legal framework governing fines and costs has changed significantly. Courts now operate under a different set of statutory requirements and available tools when addressing nonpayment and inability to pay. Over the past decade, the Legislature has substantially reshaped the legal framework governing fines and costs in criminal cases in response to those concerns. Courts are now required to assess a defendant's ability to pay, provide alternatives such as community service, and, when appropriate, waive fines and costs.<sup>48</sup> Accordingly, increasing court costs today occurs within a fundamentally different legal framework than in the past. Defendants now have the benefit of a range of procedural safeguards that did not exist when earlier increases were considered.

## **B. Reduce Reliance on Court Costs**

General Revenue provides the most stable hedge against inflation and fluctuations in case filings. Using General Revenue to provide additional funding for the JCPTF could turn the corner and put the fund on a long-term positive trajectory.

The solvency of the JCPTF hinges on whether enough people break the law, are formally accused of doing so, and go to court. When those numbers decline, funding declines with them, even though the need for the services funded by the JCPTF does not.

One way to address this problem is to reduce reliance on court costs and provide greater support from General Revenue. Texas has already recognized this

issue in other parts of the judicial system. The Fair Defense Account, like the JCPTF, is funded in part by consolidated court costs. In recent budget materials, the Legislative Budget Board noted a projected decline in revenue to the Fair Defense Account (Fund 5073), which supports indigent defense, and recommended increased General Revenue support to stabilize funding and avoid reductions in core services.<sup>49</sup>

Chapter 56 of the Government Code contemplates that funding may come from sources beyond court costs, including legislative appropriations.<sup>50</sup> For the 2026–2027 biennium, the Court of Criminal Appeals requested and received \$400,000 in General Revenue for the JCPTF to offset increased costs associated with hosting judicial education seminars, including lodging and travel.<sup>51</sup> That type of appropriation addresses specific cost pressures, not the broader instability created by solely relying on court costs.

General Revenue can do more than just steady the fund. It can sustain the JCPTF and move it away from overreliance on court costs. The shortfall announced by the Court of Criminal Appeals in July 2025 shows the scale of the problem.<sup>52</sup> Based on revised revenue projections from the Legislative Budget Board, it would have taken roughly \$6 million more over the biennium to fund grant requests as submitted. That gap shows what happens when funding is tied to case volume and how General Revenue can offset future downward revenue projections.

## **C. Create Local Judicial and Court Personnel Training Funds**

Another way to strengthen the JCPTF is to support local governments in paying for training.

Right now, the state fund helps pay for training, but it does not cover every cost. Cities and counties must cover the rest. When local budgets get tight, training is often cut or delayed.

The Legislature has already shown how this kind of problem can be addressed. In 2019 and 2021, the Legislature reorganized many criminal and civil court costs into standardized state and local components (that is, the state consolidated fee and the local consolidated fee). These fees now support both statewide funds and local funds.

More recently, in 2023, the Legislature helped defray the costs of implementing the Texas Early

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Intervention and Youth Diversion Act in cities and counties by supplementing the State Youth Diversion Fund with the newly created Local Youth Diversion Fund in each municipality and county.<sup>53</sup> This allowed state and local resources to work together to support a shared goal.

A similar approach can be used for judicial education.

The blueprint already exists. In 2021, the Legislature created the Judicial Education and Support Fund.<sup>54</sup> It is a local fund that helps pay for the continuing education of judges and staff of courts with probate jurisdiction, including payments for travel, related expenses, and attendance at continuing judicial education activities.<sup>55</sup>

The creation of a Local Judicial Court and Personnel Training Fund in each city and county would provide an additional way to supplement local funds used to pay registration fees, travel, and related expenses.<sup>56</sup> This approach would not replace the JCPTF. It would supplement it and give local governments another way to manage rising costs and help ensure that continuing judicial education remains available even when budgets are tight.

#### **D. Including All Parking and Pedestrian Violations**

Let's end where we began. History matters. As explained at the beginning of this article, the JCPTF was built on the bones of the Municipal Court Judicial Personnel Training Fund (MCJPTF). It was not created from scratch.

At the time the MCJPTF was created, it was believed that sufficient funding would be generated for the judicial education of municipal judges and their court personnel by applying a 50-cent court cost to Class C misdemeanor convictions. Parking and pedestrian violations were simply not needed to generate the necessary funding.

In 1985, the Legislature adapted that model into a scalable system that could address judicial education funding statewide.

The JCPTF carried forward this same belief, excluding parking and pedestrian violations from funding. However, this belief is no longer true.

As detailed in Section II above, circumstances have changed. Parking and pedestrian cases are an untapped source of revenue that the Legislature can use to fund the proposed Local Judicial Court and

Personnel Training Fund (see Section C above) and to provide additional revenue not only to the JCPTF but also to the other thirteen important initiatives funded through the state consolidated court cost.

The local consolidated fee, currently \$14, is assessed in criminal cases in municipal courts. The Legislature could fund a Local Judicial Court and Personnel Training Fund in every city and county by increasing that fee to \$19 and designating \$5 for deposit into the local fund to support local training costs.

Additionally, under Chapter 682 of the Transportation Code, municipalities with a population over 30,000 have the authority to decriminalize parking and establish a civil adjudication system. Larger Texas cities have exercised that authority, and these cases generate no revenue for judicial education. Similar to the Legislature's decision in 2017 to apply a \$5 civil filing fee to support judicial education, a \$5 court cost on civil parking cases could support the Local Judicial Court and Personnel Training Fund in the state's largest metropolitan areas, which have the greatest number of judges and court personnel.

Faced with a multiple-choice problem, sometimes the answer is "all of the above." Combined, the four approaches identified above expand the base of support for judicial education at both the state and local levels. More importantly, they bring court cost funding into line with how courts actually operate, ensuring that a broader share of court activity supports the training of the judges and personnel who make the system work.

#### **Conclusion**

For more than 40 years, the Judicial Court Personnel Training Fund has helped make Texas a national leader in judicial and legal education. Its success reflects a sustained commitment to ensuring that those responsible for administering justice have the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and resources they need.

The people of Texas, whether aware of it or not, depend on the JCPTF. Grantees count on the JCPTF for the financial support that makes their work possible: training judges, educating court personnel, supporting prosecutors and defense attorneys, and creating the conversations that shape how justice is administered across the Lone Star State.

In recent years, however, the system that supports that success has come under increasing strain.

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Revenue has remained essentially flat while costs have continued to rise, and it has not kept pace with the demands placed on the fund.

More than 40 years after its creation, the question is no longer whether the fund has served its purpose. It has. The question is whether its current structure can continue to support the system it was designed to serve. It cannot, unless its funding base is expanded.

This article examines the history of the fund, the conditions that define its present, and the options available to strengthen it going forward. By updating how the fund is financed, the Legislature can ensure that the system it built continues to meet the demands of the next 40 years.

The administration of justice depends on it.

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1 Chapter 56 sets out the statutory framework in seven sections.

**Section 56.001** establishes the Judicial and Court Personnel Training Fund (JCPTF) as a dedicated account within the state's general revenue fund and limits appropriations from the account to the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals (CCA) for purposes authorized under Section 56.003. It also defines the mechanism by which funds are accessed. Upon requisition by the CCA, the comptroller is authorized to issue warrants against the fund, but any such warrant is expressly limited to the amount appropriated for the applicable fiscal year. The statute does not contemplate what occurs if funds available in the account are less than the amount appropriated—an issue that lies at the heart of this article.

**Section 56.002** identifies one of the dedicated revenue streams supporting the JCPTF. It directs that fifty percent of specified fees collected by clerks of the courts of appeals be deposited into the fund for the purpose of supporting continuing legal education for judges and court personnel. Notably, this is the only provision in Chapter 56 that addresses fees, even though, as shall be explained, the fund's financing depends on a broader statutory framework outside the chapter.

**Section 56.003** governs the permissible use of training fund monies and—importantly—expressly contemplates the possibility that the Legislature may appropriate or otherwise provide additional funding beyond the amounts otherwise available to the fund. Albeit it does so in language limiting how appropriated funds may be used by the CCA. Absent a specific legislative appropriation for administration, no more than three percent of the funds appropriated in a fiscal year may be expended by the CCA to hire staff and administer the chapter.

Section 56.003 further divides appropriated funds into three equal allocation categories based on court type. In any fiscal year, no more than one-third of the appropriated funds may be used for the continuing legal education of judges and court personnel associated with appellate, district, and county-level courts and certain associate judges and judicial officers; no more than one-third for judges of justice courts and their court personnel; and no more than one-third for judges of municipal

courts and their court personnel. These one-third allocations establish maximums, not minimums, and do not guarantee that any category will receive a full one-third allocation or that sufficient funds will be available to meet training needs.

The CCA is also directed to distribute funds through grants to statewide professional associations and other qualifying entities that provide continuing legal education for judges and court personnel, with priority given to meeting mandatory minimum education requirements before funding education beyond those requirements. In addition, Section 56.003 authorizes grants to statewide professional associations and other entities that provide continuing legal education, technical assistance, and related support for prosecuting attorneys, criminal defense attorneys who regularly represent indigent defendants, and justices of the peace, as well as grants for innocence-related training and training for individuals responsible for court security.

**Section 56.004** addresses the allocation of training fund monies by directing the Legislature to appropriate funds from the account to the CCA for specified training purposes. Subsection (a) provides for appropriations to support the continuing legal education of judges and court personnel statewide. Subsection (b) further authorizes appropriations for continuing legal education, technical assistance, and related support programs for prosecuting attorneys, indigent-defense attorneys and their personnel, and justices of the peace and their court personnel, as well as for innocence-related training programs and court-security training.

Subsection (c) clarifies that funding for continuing legal education, technical assistance, and support programs for personnel of indigent-defense attorneys must be provided through grants made by the CCA under Section 56.003(f), reinforcing the grant-based structure through which these allocations are delivered. Taken together, the section allocates funding authority by category and purpose but leaves questions of prioritization and sufficiency to the broader statutory and appropriations framework.

**Section 56.005** addresses the role of judicial education committees in connection with the JCPTF. The section provides for the establishment of committees to recommend educational requirements, course content, credit, and standards for judges and court personnel, and contemplates coordination between the CCA and grant-funded entities involved in delivering judicial education. It further assigns these committees a consultative role in reviewing educational programs and advising the CCA on minimum education requirements and related standards.

**Section 56.006** addresses the rulemaking and oversight authority of the CCA with respect to education and training programs supported by the JCPTF. The section authorizes the Court to adopt rules governing both the substance and administration of training programs for a broad range of participants, including judges, court personnel, attorneys, and others involved in the justice system, as provided elsewhere in Chapter 56. This rulemaking authority expressly includes the ability to require grant recipients to provide legislatively mandated training and to consider qualitative program information and financial performance standards when awarding grant funds.

The section further assigns the Court an ongoing oversight role, requiring it to monitor both the financial and programmatic

performance of entities receiving grant funds under the chapter. In this way, Section 56.006 reinforces the grant-based structure established in earlier sections by pairing funding authority with continuing supervisory responsibility over how funded programs are delivered and managed.

**Section 56.007** restricts the use of grant funds awarded under Chapter 56 by prohibiting grant recipients from using those funds to pay expenses unrelated to approved grant activities. It reinforces the requirement that training fund monies be used solely for authorized education, training, and support purposes tied to the specific grant awarded.

2 The House Research Organization reported that in 1992, the state's budget for judicial training was the largest in the nation. House Research Org., Bill Analysis, Tex. S.B. 947, 73rd Leg., R.S. (1993) at 4.

3 Email from the Court of Criminal Appeals to grantees (July 31, 2025) (on file with author).

4 Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Texas, *The State of the Judiciary Message to the Sixty Eighth Legislature*, 20 (1983), <https://www.sll.texas.gov/assets/pdf/judiciary/state-of-the-judiciary-1983.pdf>.

5 Municipal court group gets grant, *The Monitor* (McAllen, Texas), Aug. 14, 1984, at 31.

6 TMCEC was originally named the Texas Municipal Courts Training Center from 1984 to 1994.

7 Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Texas, *supra* note 4.

8 Capital Improvements: Legislature Invests in Judicial Education, *In Chambers: Official Publication of the Texas Center for the Judiciary, Inc.*, June 1985, at 7.

9 *Id.*

10 In 1985, Senator Ray Farabee introduced S.B. 1168. The problem the bill addressed: "The lack of a permanent source for judicial education imperils continuation of a decade legislative expansion of required judicial education." The solution: "the bill merges responsibility for continuing legal education of all judges under the Supreme Court and requires participation by all judges as an official duty of office. It also sets up a fee of 1.00 on all criminal cases to fund the programs." Senate Comm. on State Affairs, Bill Analysis, Tex. S.B. 1168, 69th Leg., R.S. (1985). When the bill nearly died in the final hours of session, its contents were added to H.B. 309 by Representative Criss and would be codified as Article 5966c, Vernon's Texas Civil Statutes.

11 A Class C misdemeanor is an offense punishable by fine only. *See* Tex. Penal Code Ann. §§ 12.23, 12.41.

12 Act of April 30, 1987, 70th Leg., R.S., ch. 148, § 2.78, 1978 Tex. Gen. Laws 574, 534 (current version at Chapter 56 of the Government Code). Originally Chapter 56 only consisted of three sections. Section 56.001 (Judicial and Court Personnel Training Fund) contained the creation, administration, and court cost. Section 56.002 (Fees Collected by Clerks of the Court of Appeals) specified that 50 percent of fees collected were to be deposited into the fund. Section 56.003 (Use of Funds) limited the Supreme Court to no more than 3 percent of appropriations to the administration of the Chapter. Not all of the provisions pertaining to the JCPTF moved from Vernon's Civil Statutes to the Government Code in 1987. Two sections were concurrently being amended by a separate bill, H.B. 1251 (Act of April 15, 1987, 70th Leg., R.S., ch. 536, § 1, 1987 Tex. Gen. Laws 2158).

In 1989, S.B. 221 (71st Legislature) repealed the remaining JCPTF provisions in Article 5966c and added them to Chapter 56 of the Government Code. Section 56.004 (Allocation of Funds) provided for legislative appropriation of JCPTF funds to the Supreme Court for continuing legal education of judges and court personnel. Section 56.005 (Judicial Education Committees) established a committee structure to recommend educational requirements, course content, credit, and standards. Subsection (a) created the Supreme Court Education Committee, composed of judges from appellate, district, statutory county, and constitutional county courts, along with additional members appointed by the Court. Subsections (b) and (c) required grant-funded entities serving justices of the peace and municipal courts to designate similar advisory committees. (Later amendments transferred these responsibilities to the Court of Criminal Appeals.)

13 Act of June 1, 1987, 70th Leg., R.S., ch. 674, § 1.02, 1987 Tex. Gen. Laws 2508, 2507 (current version at Tex. Gov't Code § 74.025).

14 House Research Org., Bill Analysis, Tex. S.B. 947, 73rd Leg., R.S. (1993).

15 *Id.* The Legislature authorized the Supreme Court of Texas to contract with a statewide professional association of prosecuting attorneys in an amount not to exceed \$700,000 per fiscal year. It similarly authorized the Supreme Court to contract with a statewide association of criminal defense attorneys in an amount not to exceed \$200,000 per fiscal year.

16 The Supreme Court questioned whether it was the appropriate body to oversee continuing legal education for prosecutors and criminal defense attorneys, suggesting that the Court of Criminal Appeals was better suited for that role. *Supra*, note 15. After the legislative signal that JCPTF funds could be used for prosecutor training, TMCEC began offering continuing legal education to municipal prosecutors in 1992. *See* Prosecutors, <https://www.tmcec.com/programs/prosecutors/> (last visited May 26, 2026).

17 Act of May 28, 1993, 73rd Leg., R.S., ch. 896, § 3, 1993 Tex. Gen. Laws 3540, 3539 (current version at Tex. Gov't Code § 56.004(b)(1)). S.B. 947 also added Section 56.006, authorizing the Court of Criminal Appeals to adopt rules governing the education of attorneys, judges, court personnel, and justices of the peace under Section 56.003 (Use of Funds). Section 56.007 was added to prohibit the use of grant funds for expenses unrelated to approved education, technical assistance, and support programs.

18 Act of May 24, 1995, 74th Leg. R.S., ch. 718, § 2, 1995 Tex. Gen. Laws 3807, 3806.

19 Act of June 28, 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., ch. 4, § 9.02, 2011 Tex. Gen. Laws 5259, 5254.

20 *See supra* note 4.

21 Robert Avila, Mark Denman & Ryan Kellus Turner, "One Decade Down: Possible Explanations for the Decrease of Traffic Citations in Texas," *The Recorder* (May 2018) at 1.

22 *Id.*

23 *Id.* The "piecemeal explanation" consists of three thematic clusters. Cluster I: *Changes in Law Enforcement* includes automated cameras, prioritizing warnings, and reallocating personnel to border or violent crime. Cluster II: *The Ferguson Effect* explores officer reluctance under scrutiny, though the

decline predates this era. Cluster III: *Changes in Driving Behaviors* notes fewer teen drivers, higher speed limits, and safety awareness. Collectively, no single factor is responsible, and enforcement was not leveraged for revenue despite Great Recession fiscal pressures.

24 Legis. Budget Board, *Financing the Judiciary in Texas* (September 2016) at 43.

25 Act of May 27, 2019, 86th Leg., R.S., ch. 606, § 16.01, 2019 Tex. Gen. Laws 1809, 1775. “Without comment anywhere else in the bill, S.B. 891 repeals Article 103.003 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, otherwise known as the Collection Improvement Program (CIP). The CIP had been under fire in recent years for practices that some judges argued effectively removed judicial discretion and did not provide for the indigent.” “2019 Legislative Update: 86th Texas Legislature Adjourns,” *The Recorder* (August 2019) at 17.

26 *See generally* “Fines, Fees, Costs, and Indigence Revisited,” *The Recorder Special Edition* (March 2025).

27 *Id.* at 5-7.

28 *See* Tex. Crim. Proc. Code Ann. §§ 43.091; 45A.257.

29 *Weir v State*, 278 S.W.3d 364 (Tex. Crim. App. 2009) (holding that the statutory assessment of court costs against a convicted defendant is not an additional penalty for the crime committed, but a non-punitive recoupment of the costs of judicial resources expended in connection with the trial of the case).

30 Legis. Budget Board, *Fiscal Size-up 2022–23 Biennium* (March 2022) at 303.

31 Legis. Budget Board, *Fiscal Size-up 2018–19 Biennium* (September 2018) at 317.

32 Legis. Budget Board, *Fiscal Size-up 2020–21 Biennium* (May 2020) at 312.

33 *U.S. States – Ranking by Population 2026*, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/states> (last visited May 6, 2026). The population of Texas in 1984 was approximately 16 million. United States and Texas Populations 1850-2017, <https://www.tsl.texas.gov/ref/abouttx/census.html> (last visited May 6, 2026).

34 Legis. Budget Board, *Financing the Judiciary in Texas* (September 2016) at 43.

35 Email from the Court of Criminal Appeals Grant Administration to Ryan Kellus Turner, Executive Director, TMCEC (March 11, 2026) (on file with author).

36 Tex. R. Jud. Educ. 2–5.

37 *Id.* *See also* Tex. R. Jud. Educ. 12b. All judicial-education entities are required to provide ethics training to all personnel they serve, covering race, fairness, ethnic sensitivity, and cultural awareness.

38 Tex. R. Jud. Educ. 12(a); *see also* Tex. Gov’t Code Ann. §§ 22.110, 22.1105, 22.1106, 22.012, 22.013.

39 Tex. R. Jud. Educ. 12(a); *see also* Tex. Gov’t Code Ann. §§ 22.111, 41.110, 41.111, 22.0133.

40 Tex. R. Jud. Educ. 13.

41 Tex. Crim. Proc. Code Ann. § 2.09.

42 *See generally* Tex. Gov’t Code Ann. chs. 54, 54A.

43 Tex. Crim. Proc. Code Ann. § 17.024.

44 Adjusted for inflation using the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U), U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

(BLS), comparing 2017 and FY 26 price levels.

45 In some categories, particularly Class C misdemeanors, later statutory changes redistributed existing court costs without materially increasing the amount supporting the fund. The year and amount listed for Class C misdemeanors reflects the last meaningful increase in the amount rather than subsequent reallocations.

46 House Research Org., Bill Analysis, Tex. H.B. 2705, 76th Leg., R.S. (1999) (stating that court costs should be based on necessary administrative costs and questioning whether a 100 percent increase was justified).

47 *See supra* note 26; Tex. Gov’t Code § 133.102; Fiscal Note, Tex. S.B. 346, 86th Leg., R.S. (2019).

48 “Fines, Fees, Costs, and Indigence Revisited,” *The Recorder Special Edition* (March 2025) at 5-12, 24. 52-53 (discussing procedural safeguards for defendants, alternatives to payment, waiver of fines and costs, and indigence under Chapter 45A of the Code of Criminal Procedure).

49 Legis. Budget Board, Summary of Senate Committee on Finance Recommendations for the 2026–2027 Biennium, Texas Indigent Defense Commission (2025) (noting projected decline in revenue to the Fair Defense Account and recommending increased General Revenue support to maintain grant funding levels).

50 Section 56.003 governs the permissible use of Judicial Court Personnel Training Fund monies and expressly contemplates that the Legislature may appropriate or otherwise provide additional funding beyond the amounts otherwise available to the fund.

51 Tex. Gov’t Code Ann. § 56.003; Legis. Budget Board, Summary of Senate Committee on Finance Recommendations for the 2026–2027 Biennium, Court of Criminal Appeals (2025) (reflecting \$400,000 in General Revenue provided to the JCPTF as an inflationary adjustment).

52 *See supra* note 3.

53 H.B. 3186, *The Recorder* (August 2023) at 33.

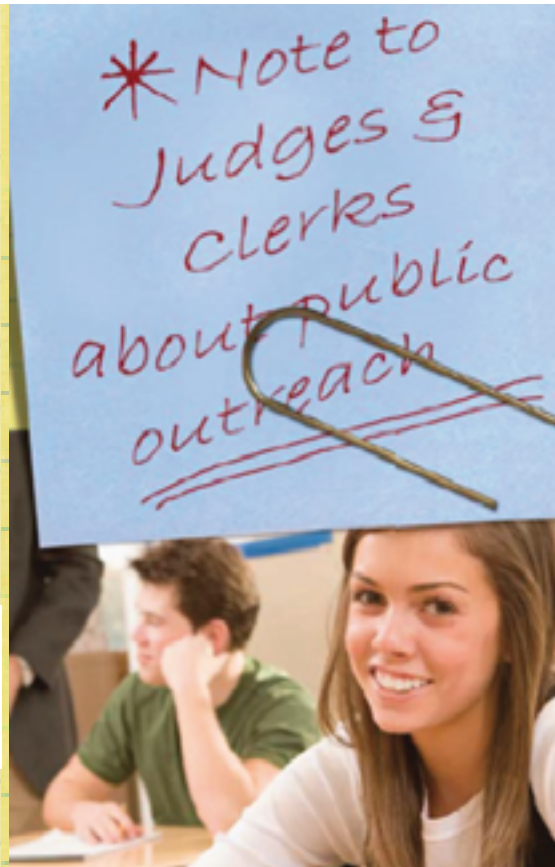
54 Act of May 31, 2021, 87th Leg., R.S., ch. 472, § 1.03, 2021 Tex. Gen. Laws 940, 934 (current version at Tex. Loc. Gov’t Code Ann. § 135.159).

55 *Id.*

56 Existing local funding mechanisms for municipal courts include portions of revenue from the time payment reimbursement fee (Tex. Crim. Proc. Code Ann. § 102.030), municipal court building security fund (Tex. Crim. Proc. Code Ann. § 102.017), municipal court technology fund (Tex. Crim. Proc. Code Ann. § 102.0172), and the consolidated municipal court building security and technology fund (Tex. Crim. Proc. Code Ann. § 102.0175).







# Community Outreach

MTSI and TMCEC encourage judges and clerks to participate as subject matter experts in K–12 classrooms across Texas. As part of our TxDOT grant, TMCEC is training teachers to educate students about traffic safety and municipal courts in social studies classes. Through this effort, TMCEC also encourages municipal court personnel to serve as resource persons in their local school districts. If your court would like assistance reaching out to local schools, please contact Elizabeth De La Garza at [elizabeth@tmcec.com](mailto:elizabeth@tmcec.com) or 512-320-8274. We would be happy to assist courts in educating their communities about traffic safety.



**Save a Life**<sup>™</sup>

Texas Department of Transportation

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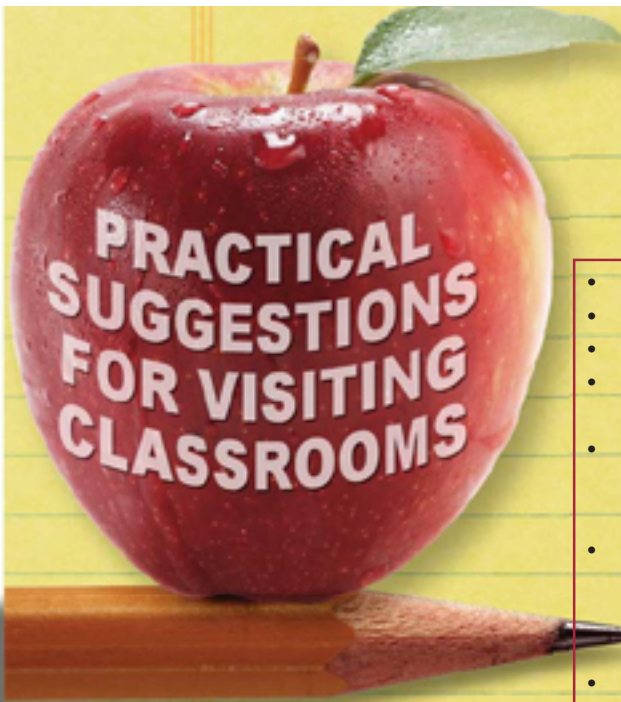
## Traffic Safety School OUTREACH GUIDE

Whether the school visits your court or you take the court to the classroom, there are some tips that MTSI would like to share with our courts about traffic safety presentations to students. If you are unsure how to initiate outreach to your local schools, contact MTSI for assistance. We would love to help!

### Before Your School Visit:

Talk with the teacher about the students' ages, experience, and class size. If possible, ask the teacher to provide name tags or name tents with students' first names. Discuss whether any background materials would help the students.

To align your presentation with the students' regular curriculum, ask questions such as whether they are studying the legal system or any topics related to traffic safety. If your presentation is during a Career Day, be prepared to speak about employment within the judicial system. Confirm whether a computer and projector will be available. You can find sample lessons and presentations on the MTSI website (<https://www.tmcec.com/MTSI/>). You may also contact Elizabeth De La Garza at 512-320-8274 or [elizabeth@tmcec.com](mailto:elizabeth@tmcec.com) with any questions.



## While at School and in the Classroom

### Don't:

- Lecture students.
- Try to cover a broad range of topics in one class period.
- Talk down to students.
- Read a prepared speech, or read the PowerPoint word for word.
- Let one or two students dominate the discussion. Instead, call on other students or limit the number of questions per person.
- Feel you must defend everything about the operation of the legal system. An unrealistic portrait of the system can increase student cynicism; a thoughtful, balanced presentation can enhance understanding.
- Give advice on individual problems.

### Avoid:

- Telling too many "war stories."
- Combining too many classes together, although you may not have a choice in this.
- Visiting schools before important state testing.

### Do:

1. Check in at the office first. You will probably need to bring your driver's license.
2. Use plain language.
3. Send material to the teacher for students to read before your presentation (a handbook or pamphlet, chart, case study, or newspaper articles).
4. Have a planned outline of how you would like your presentation to proceed, but be prepared to be flexible.
5. Begin your presentation at the students' level and relate to their world through hypothetical or real examples involving young people and the law.
6. Briefly tell the students about your work and explain the goals of your visit.
7. Move around the room. Use the whiteboard to illustrate ideas or, if available, a PowerPoint presentation to reinforce your points visually.
8. Introduce only one or two main topics and explain them fully.
9. Localize examples for students' interest and understanding.
10. Encourage questions. Repeat questions so all students can hear what was asked.
11. Use humor and a personal approach.
12. Express your appreciation to the teacher for incorporating the study of law into lesson plans. Reinforce this with a letter to the principal or superintendent.

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**TMCEC** **MISSION STATEMENT**

To provide high quality judicial education, technical assistance, and the necessary resource materials to assist municipal court judges, court support personnel, and prosecutors in obtaining and maintaining professional competence.

## Judicial Education Deadline Approaching (August 31, 2026)

Municipal judges must complete 16 annual judicial education hours, including 8 live hours through TMCEC-approved seminars or clinics. Updated [Rules of Judicial Education](#) now allow greater flexibility through TMCEC's "Power of 4" pathway.

### Remaining Live Opportunities

#### 4-Hour Virtual Clinics:

**Magistrate Duties** — June 17

**C3: Councils, Courts, & Cities** — August 12

**Mental Health Clinic** — June 22 (4 live hours)

**West Texas Regional Judges Seminar** — June 23–24 (up to 12 live hours) W

**New Judges Seminar** — July 13–17

Required for new non-attorney judges within one year of appointment

**Impaired Driving Symposium** — August 12–13 (up to 8 live hours)

**Magistrate Training Reminder:** Article 17.024, C.C.P., requires magistrates to complete an approved [8-hour magistrate duties course](#) before setting bail in confinement cases. TMCEC offers an approved on-demand course through the TMCEC Online Learning Center. Credit applies toward annual Judicial Education requirements.

To register, go to [register.tmcec.com](https://register.tmcec.com). Questions? Call or email us: [info@tmcec.com](mailto:info@tmcec.com) or 800.252.3718.