

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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Maine 2003 Judicial Branch

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To the People and their Representatives:

Greetings from Chief Justice Leigh I. Saufley

2003 was an extraordinary year for Maine's Judicial Branch. Both the court's administrative structure and the scheduling model for the entire system have been redesigned to respond to the increasing responsibilities placed on the Judicial Branch through the Legislature's efforts to address the problems of Maine's citizens.

At the same time, the problem-solving courts throughout the state fine-tuned their responses to problems of substance abuse, domestic violence, and families in turmoil. The Adult Drug Treatment Courts have continued to provide a unique opportunity for people to accept responsibility for their own behavior, address their crimes, and return to health. As Judge John Romei of the Washington County Adult Drug Treatment Court has said so eloquently, "the creation of the drug treatment courts has given judges a truly meaningful opportunity to help people turn their lives around."

The drug court model, now active in six regions, has been expanded and redesigned to fit a family court model in three counties along the coast: Waldo, Knox, and Lincoln. Throughout the state, Juvenile Drug Treatment Courts offer hope to adolescents who have already found themselves involved in the criminal justice system. Domestic Violence projects in Cumberland and York counties have responded to the need for a systemic approach to the challenges of interpersonal violence.

In order to respond more thoughtfully to the continuing challenge of insufficient resources, the Supreme Judicial Court established a set of priorities to guide clerks and judges in determining which cases will receive priority when it is not possible to reach all of the cases presented to the court. Those priorities include cases involving children, whose needs must be responded to very quickly, matters of personal violence, and serious criminal prosecutions. Guided by these priorities, the Judicial Branch is responding more promptly to the pressing needs of families, children, and victims of domestic violence. One unfortunate consequence, however, has been increased delays in reaching other cases, including business proceedings. We appreciate the patience and support of the business community as we work to reduce those delays.

Perhaps the most exciting development for the Judicial Branch in 2003 was the creation of a New Model for Scheduling. This new model, which follows up on the changes created by legislation submitted by the Court Unification Task Force in 2001, was created by the Judicial Resource Team and is nothing short of a revolutionary approach to the scheduling of cases in Maine's courts. With its focus on regionalized and coordinated scheduling, accountability through increased data tracking, improved case management, and improved scheduling certainty for litigants, the new model will allow the courts to provide more predictable and prompt service to all of Maine's citizens.

The continued budget restrictions, however, have had two immediate effects on the Judicial Branch's ability to respond to the public's needs. First, despite our success in securing security equipment for every courthouse, the Judicial Branch remains unable to staff ninety-five percent of that equipment. Providing safe access to justice must remain our highest priority. Secondly, our clerks' offices, already understaffed, have suffered from additional vacancies resulting from budget cuts. Our clerks, who are the first line of contact with the public, have responded to these dire staffing shortages with an uncommon work ethic and an effort to remain positive. We will continue to work with the Governor and the Legislature to cover the vital resources necessary to provide the public with meaningful access to justice.

As we keep our eye on the future and on our goals of assuring safe, prompt access to justice, we thank all of those individuals who have supported the Judicial Branch in its efforts to meet the needs of Maine's people.

"The creation of the drug treatment courts has given judges a truly meaningful opportunity to help people turn their lives around."

Washington County Judge John Romei

Courts Strain to Maintain Operations Under Budget Cuts

During the last year, the men and women who staff Maine's state courts continued their dedicated efforts to carry out the critically important duties of the Judicial Branch. The task was made more difficult as responsibilities increased while funding decreased. The lack of money to pay for overtime hours limited the time available for courthouse activities. Vacant positions were left unfilled, resulting in circumstances where courts were closed due to lack of available staff.

More than half of the state courts have five or fewer staff in Clerk's offices and a single vacancy can seriously hamper their ability to process cases.

Trial Courts Face Increasing Demands with a Plan for the Future

In September of 2002 the Maine Supreme Judicial Court created the Judicial Resource Team (JRT) to "assess the workload and judicial resources of Maine's trial courts and generate a new model for court scheduling and allocation of judicial resources." In the fall of 2003, JRT presented its new model of court operations, consisting of 49 recommendations for improvement, from creation of coordinated court regions, to establishment of trial management procedures. Four principles guided the details of the team's recommendations:

1. *Regional Structure*, requiring that "the District and Superior Courts should operate as...an integrated system of case scheduling and judicial resource allocation";
2. *Objective Measures*, meaning that "dockets should be scheduled based on established (time) measures ... and priorities set by the Supreme Judicial Court";
3. *Consolidation*, shared responsibilities between the trial courts within a region to increase efficiency; and
4. *Event Certainty*, working toward achieving the goal that every scheduled case event will occur as scheduled.

The Supreme Judicial Court approved the recommendations of the JRT and the Trial Court Chiefs are overseeing implementation.

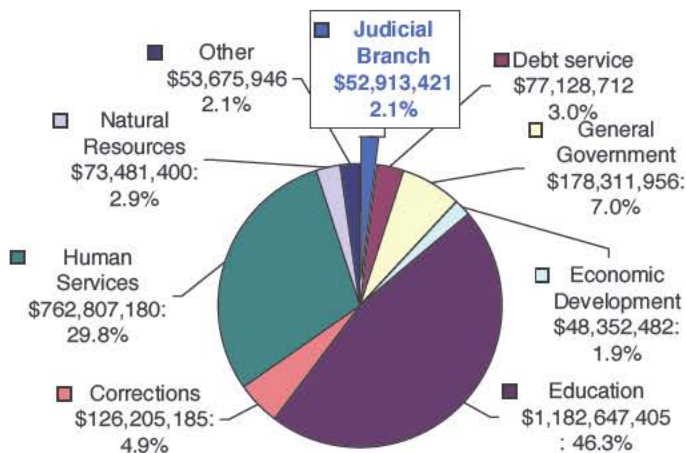
INNOVATIVE RESPONSES TO TODAY'S ISSUES:

- Pilot programs in Portland and York provide focused court attention to victims and defendants in Domestic Violence cases, bolstering safety and changing behaviors.
- Adult and Juvenile Drug Treatment Courts provide comprehensive monitoring and treatment referrals to enable recovery from addiction.
- Family Drug Treatment Courts actively address substance abuse issues in child protection cases.
- Family Division eases the process for families in transition, emphasizing mediation and case management while increasing support services in the community.

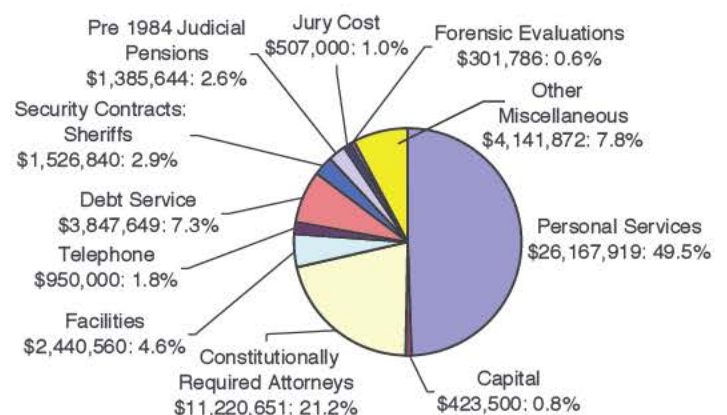
The Courts Respond to Improve Access to Justice:

- The Law Court Courtroom in Cumberland County has a new sound system designed to better serve the needs of the public, including those participants and observers who are hard-of-hearing.
- A telephone interpreting system is available in all clerks' offices to provide immediate interpretation services for non-English speaking customers.

Judicial Branch Share of the State's General Fund, Projected FY '04



FY '04 Judicial Branch General Fund Budget: \$52,913,421



These charts represent the proposed FY '04 budget -- State General Funds only; grant funds are not included.

Court Administration Changes to Increase Efficiency and Effectiveness

In June of 2003, Chief Justice Saufley announced a change in the court system's administrative structure, which resulted in a shift from Administrators with comprehensive regional responsibilities to Administrators with specific statewide responsibilities. This was done to fully utilize the expertise that has developed, to increase efficiency, and to strengthen communication links. The four Regional Court Administrator positions have been replaced by:

The Director of Court Facilities, who is responsible for the maintenance and improvement of all courthouses throughout the state.

The Director of Court Services and Programs, who is responsible for the development of the Strategic Plan, overseeing court services, including those involving access to the courts, and a wide-range of court programs.

The Director of the Office of Clerks of Court, who supervises all of the Clerks and their staff, including those at the Violations Bureau

The Director of Court Operations, who is developing and implementing case flow management procedures and policies, supervising Court Reporters and Judicial Secretaries

The incumbent directors and their support staff did an outstanding job in working through the transition period. It is expected that the administration of the court, as restructured, will better ensure that the courts are successful in achieving their mission.

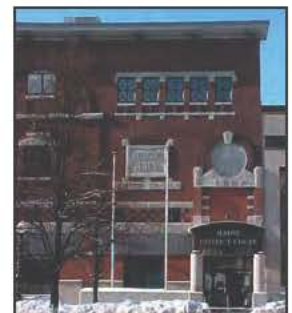
SECURITY: Equipment Arrives; Officers Still Needed



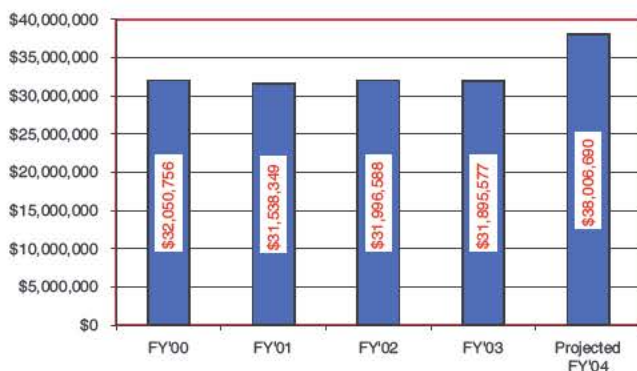
During 2003, with funding obtained through a voter approved Homeland Security Bond Bill, the Judicial Branch purchased needed security equipment. Metal detectors, X-ray scanners, video surveillance cameras, communication devices and safety glass for clerks' offices were distributed to court locations throughout the state. However, there remains unmet need for additional security officers to operate the equipment and attend to security needs at each courthouse.

Lewiston District Court Opens New Facility

In January 2003, Lewiston District Court opened in its new location at the former Frye Block Music Hall on Lisbon Street. Originally constructed as a Music Hall in 1877, the building was used for various businesses including a hardware store in later years. The Judicial Branch, with the support of the local community and funding from the state, completely rebuilt the interior of the building while maintaining and refurbishing the historic facade along with a number of interior brick walls. The new building is a model for modern courthouse design, with courtrooms, a clerk's office and public areas that are functional, efficient and secure. The Maine Preservation Society recognized the remarkable achievement by presenting the Judicial Branch with the Statewide Historic Preservation Honor Award.



Revenue Collected by the Judicial Branch



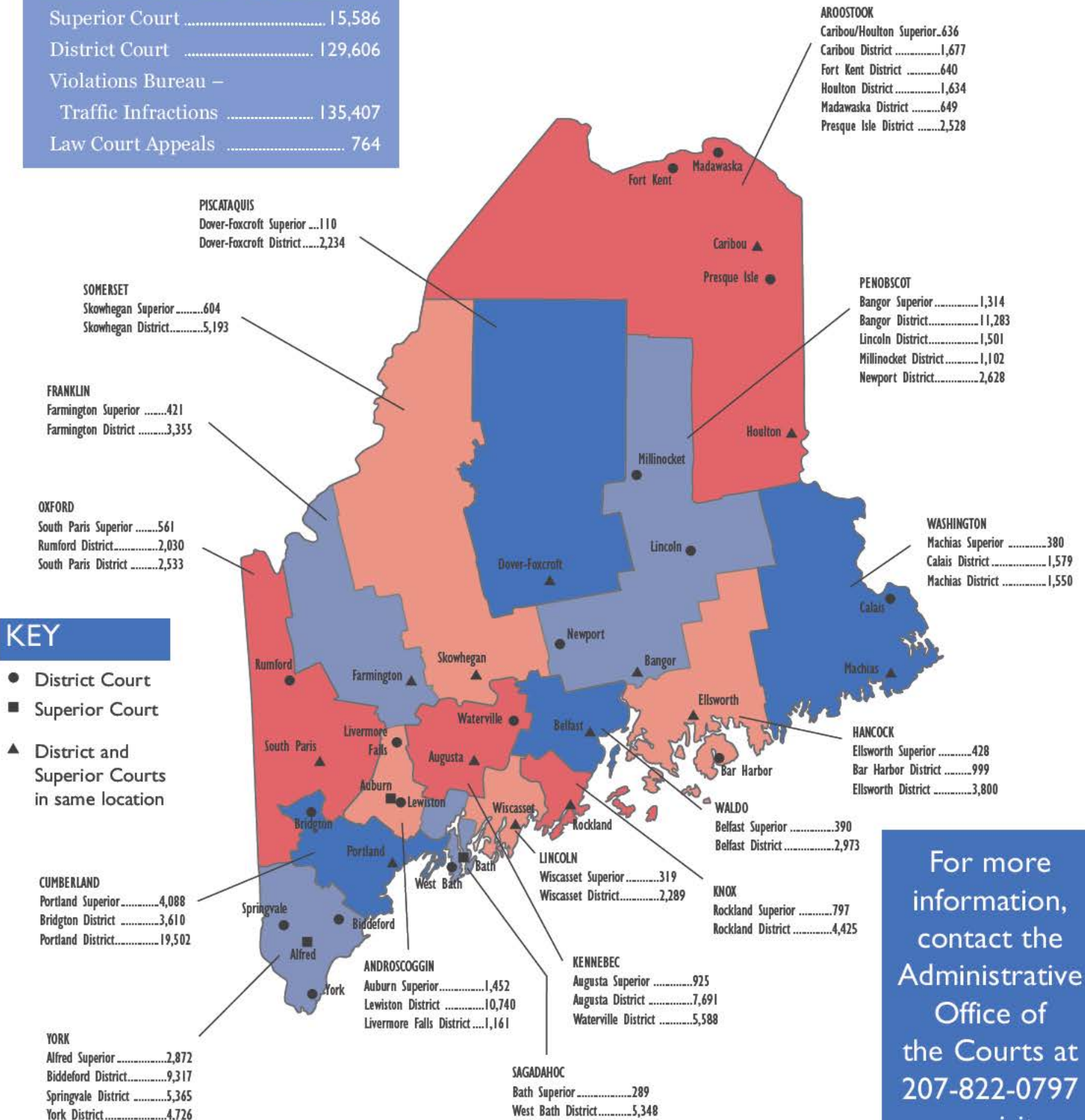
In FY '03, \$24,407,012 (77%) was deposited into the General Fund. The rest was distributed to various agencies, municipalities and counties, according to statutory dedications.

2003

Maine Courts: Filings by County

Statewide Totals

Superior Court	15,586
District Court	129,606
Violations Bureau –	
Traffic Infractions	135,407
Law Court Appeals	764



For more information, contact the Administrative Office of the Courts at 207-822-0797 or visit www.courts.state.me.us

Because of limited resources, only this summary annual report is being printed. After February 1, 2004 an expanded report may be found at the Judicial Branch website: www.courts.state.me.us.