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September 15, 2025

Hon. Wanda F. Willingham
Deputy Chairwoman
Chair, Audit and Finance Committee
Albany County Legislature
Harold L. Joyce Albany County Office Building
112 State Street, Room 710
Albany, New York 12207

Re: 2026 Budget

The Assigned Counsel Program is in receipt of your October 1, 2025, letter requesting information relative to the Albany County 2026 Budget. The Assigned Counsel Program's Budget is largely reimbursed through State funding. Our core function is to review claims that are submitted by attorneys assigned to represent clients in the Criminal and Family Courts in Albany County. Once reviewed, our office forwards the claims to the Comptroller's Office for payment. In addition to approving State mandated funding for indigent defense/representation, the Assigned Counsel Program also provides resources to assigned attorneys so that they can adequately and professionally represent the clients that they are assigned to represent. At the Assigned Counsel Program, we endeavor to continue to look for cost neutral ways to improve the services offered by the County, to become a model for other Assigned Counsel Programs throughout the State and to find ways to share the benefits bestowed upon us by the State with other departments, where permissible. Enclosed, please find answers to each of the questions that were posed in your letter.

1. Identify the department representative appearing before the Audit & Finance Committee for your agency budget presentation.
 - a. Shane Hug – Administrator of the Assigned Counsel Program.

2. Identify by line item all vacant positions in your department.
 - a. Supervising Attorney – This position is anticipated to be filled by the middle of November, 2025.
 - b. Confidential Secretary –
3. Identify by line item any new position(s), how the position(s) will be funded and the reimbursement rate(s), if applicable.
 - a. Investigator – This position will initially be funded by Albany County, however, the County will receive reimbursement for this position on a quarterly basis from the State. These reimbursements will include the fringe benefits for this position.
 - b. IT Discovery Technician – This position will initially be funded by Albany County, however, the County will receive reimbursement for this position on a quarterly basis from the State. These reimbursements will include the fringe benefits for this position.
 - c. Paralegal & Data Specialist - This position will initially be funded by Albany County, however, the County will receive reimbursement for this position on a quarterly basis from the State. These reimbursements will include the fringe benefits for this position.
4. Identify by line item any proposed salary increase(s) beyond union contract commitments. Include justifications for the raise(s).
 - a. The following positions have salary increases that are beyond union contract commitments:
 - i. Data Analyst – This position receives funding reimbursement from New York State to this amount
 - ii. Confidential Secretary – This position receives funding reimbursement from New York State to this amount.
5. Identify by line item any position proposed to be eliminated or salary decreased.
 - a. No salaries have been decreased.
 - b. The following lines have been eliminated:
 - i. Legal Secretary
 - ii. Office Assistant
6. Identify by line item all positions that are funded by grant money, the percentage of funding provided by the grant, and indicate whether there is a commitment that the grant has been reviewed for 2026.
 - a. Every position in the Assigned Counsel Program are funded entirely by State grant money, with the exception of the Senior Attorney position, which is funded entirely by the County.
 - b. The following positions are 100% funded by New York State Grants, which they are committed to paying in 2026:
 - i. Administrator
 - ii. Supervising Attorney
 - iii. IT Discovery Technician
 - iv. Investigator
 - v. Paralegal and Data Specialist
 - vi. Data Analyst
 - vii. Confidential Secretary

7. Identify by line item all job titles proposed to be changed or moved to another line item **(e.g., reclassifications)**.
 - a. There have been no job titles that have been changed or moved to another line item.
8. Provide an itemized breakdown for specific expenditures regarding fees for service lines and miscellaneous contractual expense lines, and indicate 2025 budgeted expenditures compared to 2026 proposed expenditures **(include a column for each expenditure year)**.
 - a. Fee for Services Line 2026 Budget = \$4,000.00
 - b. Fee For Service Line Expenditure 2025 = \$0
9. Identify any new initiatives and/or eliminated programs, and reimbursements associated with those programs.
 - a. The Assigned Counsel Program has several new initiatives on the horizon for 2026, including, but not limited to:
 - i. Taking responsibility for attorney/case assignments from the Courts and assigning those cases internally;
 1. This initiative will require the creation of a system to assign attorneys and staff to make assignments.
 2. The Assigned Counsel Program intends to assign attorneys who are both: (1) qualified to handle their case assignments; and (2) fiscally responsible.
 3. It is anticipated that by directly assigning cases in this manner, that the Assigned Counsel Program can save the County money.
 - ii. Creating an in-house mentoring program for Panel Attorneys;
 1. This will be cost neutral for the County and will be the responsibility of the attorneys employed by the Assigned Counsel Program.
 - iii. Getting accredited to provide Continuing Legal Education courses for Panel Attorneys.
 1. This will be cost neutral for the County and will be the responsibility of the attorneys employed by the Assigned Counsel Program.
10. Identify all County vehicles used by your department. Include the title of any employee(s) assigned to each vehicle and the reason for the assignment of a County vehicle to that employee.
 - a. The Assigned Counsel Program does not use any County vehicles.
11. Provide a specific breakdown of the use for the proposed funding for all Conferences/Training/Tuition line items in your department budget.
 - a. The Assigned Counsel Plan has a budget of \$10,000 for Conferences/Training/Tuition. These monies, like the salaries for the Assigned Counsel Program are State monies.
 - b. The Assigned Counsel Program intends to use this funding to obtain a certification to provide Continuing Legal Education and begin developing a Continuing Legal Education program for Panel Attorneys.
12. Provide a specific breakdown of overtime line items in your department budget, including the actual overtime expenditures for the previous two years.

- a. There are no overtime line items for the Assigned Counsel Program.
- 13. Identify by line item any positions that were established/changed during the **2025** fiscal year.
 - a. Upon information and belief, no positions were established and/or changed during the 2025 fiscal year.
- 14. Please describe the biggest risk your department faces and the actions you have taken (or will take in 2026) to better understand that risk and mitigate it.
 - a. The Assigned Counsel Program's biggest risk is a lack of vision for growth. Since May of 2025, efforts have been undertaken to determine cost neutral ways to grow the program to both attract new Panel Attorneys and to retain the ones currently on the Panel. These efforts include reallocating funds in order to hire an in-house Investigator, who can provide investigative services for the Panel Attorneys on their cases, as well as hiring an IT Discovery Technician, who can assist the Panel Attorneys with all computer related issues, including creating exhibits for trials and hearings.
 - b. In addition, to adding these new positions to the office, we are currently seeking to purchase a new case tracking and billing system, which will streamline the claiming and reporting that the Assigned Counsel Program is required to undertake and we are also seeking ways to use State funding to purchase discovery/storage software for the cases that they are assigned.
 - c. Finally, the Assigned Counsel Program is seeking to develop a plan to use unspent State funds to create places for attorneys to meet with their clients, a multimedia room and a moot courtroom that could be used by the program for training purposes. We envision permitting other County Departments, including, but not limited to, the Public Defender's Office and the Alternate Public Defender's Office to utilize these spaces.
- 15. Please list performance indicators and metrics used by your department and current statistics for those metrics.
 - a. The Assigned Counsel Program does not have performance indicators, per se.
- 16. Note specifically all potential new unfunded mandates, regulations, risks to grant revenues, risks to reimbursement revenues, from any source.
 - a. The Assigned Counsel Program is unaware of any new or potential unfunded mandates, regulations or risks that would impact that will impact the Assigned Counsel Program's revenues. As indicated above, the Assigned Counsel Program is largely funded through State grants which have already been fully funded for 2026.

Thank you for your continued dedication to the Assigned Counsel Program. Please contact me to discuss any questions or concerns.

Respectfully,

Shane Hug

Shane Hug
Administrator
Assigned Counsel Program