

Key Takeaways

- Recent legislation codified a longstanding goal to collect case-level data from state trial courts, contemplating significant data reporting both for individual courts and OCA itself.
- Improving our state's court data infrastructure will improve the efficiency of our judiciary, secure sensitive information, and better inform policymakers and the public about judicial performance.
- Funding OCA's Exceptional Items #1, #8, and #9 (total \$17,787,170) to improve trial court data reporting, establish a specialty court case management system, and replace appellate courts' legacy IT system are necessary to effectively implement new laws and represent smart investments in the human capital and IT resources for our state judiciary.

Background:

There are about 2,300 entities that report to OCA, relying on at least two dozen different IT systems. Legislation like HB 841 (88-R) and HB 1182 (88-R) require OCA to improve the detail and actionability of court data, moving from aggregate, county-level data towards case-level and court-level data. This law intends to address significant gaps in how policymakers and the public understand the state judiciary.

Similar gaps surround the population and case-type-specific dockets known as specialty courts, which can specialize in drug or mental health cases or in helping veteran defendants. There are 202 specialty court programs in Texas, 75 of which receive funding from the Office of the Governor. These programs use a variety of different systems – from custom software to spreadsheets – to track their work for reporting purposes.

Appellate court data management has been an ongoing challenge. The appellate courts' IT systems are currently operated on locally installed and managed servers, making them inefficient and vulnerable. A cyberattack in May 2020 targeting the legacy Texas Appellate Management and eFiling System (TAMES) disrupted the system higher courts rely on for weeks. Additionally, the data available from appellate courts are even more limited, where we only receive reporting for two case types – “civil” and “criminal” – disconnected from trial-level events and data.

Proposed Action:

Texas 2036 supports the adoption of Exceptional Items #1, #8, and #9, which would hire regional data coordinators, develop a specialty court case management system, and a new IT system for appellate courts.

Budget Estimate:

- Exceptional Item #1 - Improving Trial Court Data Reporting: **\$1,901,485** over FY26-27 and 11 FTEs
- Exceptional Item #8 - Specialty Court Case Management System: **\$3,943,685** over FY26-27 and 1 FTE
- Exceptional Item #9 - Replacing Appellate Courts' Legacy IT System: **\$11,942,000** over FY26-27

Public Policy Impact:

Funding for regional data coordinators (EI#1) will support local jurisdictions in navigating these new requirements and ultimately improve data quality and accuracy. A specialty court case management system (EI#8) can improve the delivery of services, more accurately measure their effectiveness, and compare performance across jurisdictions. Funding for a new appellate case management system (EI#9) will replace the local servers with a cloud-based system and update the external interfaces to systems that serve appellate attorneys, trial court clerks, and the public at large.