



CAPITOL COMMENTARY

INBRIEF | APRIL 19, 2026

BGR Opposes Cuts to Orleans Parish Judgeships Without a Supreme Court Study

The Louisiana Legislature is considering bills to consolidate Orleans Parish courts and reduce the number of judges. Proponents say the legislation would address longstanding inefficiencies, saving millions of dollars a year for both the State of Louisiana and the City of New Orleans. Opponents contend the bills would make deep and disruptive cuts to the court system without sufficient study and justification.

For many years, the Bureau of Governmental Research (BGR) has [brought attention](#) to court spending and urged careful review of potential excess judgeships. The City's ongoing financial crisis adds urgency to eliminating any unnecessary judgeships. Each excess judgeship would cost the City about \$2 million over a six-year term. But the insufficient analysis of the current bills raises serious concerns about their potential impacts on the Orleans Parish justice system and public safety.

The Louisiana Supreme Court has prepared only preliminary estimates using a new caseload formula that suggests Orleans Parish may have up to 10 more judges than necessary. In providing these estimates to the Legislature in March, the Supreme Court [emphasized](#) that a final determination of the appropriate number of judges would require further qualitative analysis of court workloads, including site visits and supplemental research. The Supreme Court has not conducted this analysis.

This is an unfortunate and troubling pattern with the Supreme Court. Since hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005 reshaped the demographics of south Louisiana, the Legislature has made three separate requests for the court and its research arm, the Judicial Council, to determine the appropriate number of trial court judgeships in the state. Each time they reached no conclusions. Moreover, the Supreme Court did not replace its old caseload formula, often cited as inadequate for decision making, until just last year.

Rather than request a new study, some legislators, with the support of the governor, are moving two bills, [House Bill 911](#) and [Senate Bill 217](#). Each would eliminate nine judgeships in Orleans Parish, though they differ on the specific judgeships. The proposed reductions are in some cases not well aligned with the estimates of potentially unnecessary judgeships based on the Supreme Court's formula. More importantly, the formula itself does not fully capture the complexities of the Orleans Parish justice system. This is most apparent at Criminal District Court, which has 13 judges but may need as few as eight, according to the formula. For example:

- The court handled approximately 4,000 criminal cases last year, but a single case often has multiple defendants, multiple charges, or both. This keeps criminal cases open on a judge's docket longer than in other parishes.
- The outsized number of homicides and other violent felonies prosecuted in Orleans, compared to other parishes, increases the burden on court dockets. For example, New Orleans reported 145 homicides last year, compared to 21 in its larger neighbor, Jefferson Parish.
- Orleans criminal court judges presided over 137 jury trials last year, the most in the state. Approximately a quarter of all criminal jury trials happened in Orleans.

These factors and others should be considered in making a final determination of how many judges the court needs.

The bills' proponents want to eliminate judgeships they deem unnecessary before the November 2026 general election for Orleans Parish judges. After the election, a constitutional prohibition against shortening a judge's term would prevent a reduction in those judgeships until 2032.

Underinformed decisions based solely on the caseload formula risk cutting too many judges and delaying justice. Delays could add to case backlogs and increase the parish jail population, which already exceeds the jail’s 1,250-person maximum capacity. Higher costs of pre-trial detention would fall on both the State and the City, potentially wiping out the savings from fewer judgeships.

In this Capitol Commentary, BGR identifies additional information and analysis that legislators and the public need to evaluate the proposed reductions in judgeships.

Relative to the pending legislation, BGR recommends:

- **The Legislature should not eliminate judges at Orleans Parish courts without a comprehensive Supreme Court analysis, including court visits and supplemental research, to determine the appropriate number of judges.** The Legislature should use the results of that analysis to inform

potential amendments to House Bill 911 and Senate Bill 217, aligning any reductions in judgeships with the demonstrated needs of the courts. This is essential to help balance the potential financial benefits of right-sizing the courts with the need to ensure that any cuts do not negatively affect public access to the courts or put public safety at risk.

- **The Supreme Court should promptly complete the necessary supplemental analysis and provide its findings on how many judges the courts need to the Legislature during the current session.** If the Supreme Court does not initiate a review, House and Senate leaders should request one. If the Supreme Court cannot complete its analysis before the June 1 end of the current legislative session, the Legislature should explore options that would enable it to still take the court’s recommendations into account after the session.

**PRELIMINARY ESTIMATES OF JUDGES NEEDED AT ORLEANS PARISH COURTS
BASED ON THE LOUISIANA SUPREME COURT’S CASELOAD FORMULA**

	Current judges	Preliminary estimate of judges needed	Potential surplus judges	Judges cut under HB 911 (engrossed)	Judges cut under SB 217 (engrossed)
District Courts					
Civil District Court	14	12.7	1.3	4	2
Criminal District Court	13	8	5	3	4
Juvenile Court	4	1.2	2.8	2	1
City Courts					
Municipal and Traffic Court	7	4.2*	2.8	-	2
First City Court (civil cases)	3	5.2*	-2.2	-	-
Second City Court (civil cases)	1	0.7*	0.3	-	-
TOTAL	42	32	10	9	9



The Takeaway: The Supreme Court’s caseload formula indicates Orleans Parish might have up to 10 more judges than it needs. HB 911 and HB 217 would each eliminate nine judgeships, though they differ on the specific judges. The formula is just an indicator light for the Supreme Court, which must do a deeper analysis to determine the appropriate number of judges.

*The Supreme Court has not updated the caseload formula for city courts. The court calculated these figures by applying the district court case weights to the city courts’ filing data. As such, the figures are not intended to reflect the optimal number of judges for these courts.

Sources: Letter from John L. Weimer, Chief Justice, Louisiana Supreme Court, to the Honorable Jack G. MacFarland, Chairman, House Committee on Appropriations, March 6, 2026; La. H.B. Bill 911 (Engrossed) and S.B. 217 (Engrossed), Reg. Sess. of 2026.

RISK ANALYSIS

The case for a closer look at Orleans Parish courts

The Legislature has an opportunity to save millions and right-size a court system that may have more judges than it needs. But cutting the wrong number carries consequences that go beyond the bottom line.

BGR RECOMMENDS

Wait for the full study. The Supreme Court must complete a comprehensive analysis, including court visits and supplemental research, before any judgeships are eliminated.

THE POTENTIAL RISKS

Cutting too many Criminal District Court judgeships without Supreme Court analysis



Trials may slow down; case backlogs could grow

Orleans handled 137 jury trials in 2025, nearly 25% of all criminal jury trials statewide. Fewer judges could mean longer waits for court dates.



Pretrial detainees may wait longer for resolution

The accused, victims and families could wait longer for resolution. Delayed justice has real costs for everyone involved.



Pressure on the Orleans Parish Jail could increase

The jail currently holds 1,349 detainees, nearly 8% over its 1,250-person maximum capacity. Additional pretrial detainees would strain an already crowded facility.



The jail's consent decree compliance could become harder to achieve

Supervision was deemed insufficient by a 2026 audit following the May 2025 jailbreak. A larger detainee population could make compliance more difficult.



Risks at the jail for detainees and staff may grow

The sheriff has struggled to fill vacancies. More detainees could require more deputies and conditions for both staff and detainees could deteriorate.



Costs across the justice system could rise

Extended trial timelines and a larger detainee population could drive up operating costs for the District Attorney, public defender and other justice system entities.



The City could face higher jail operating costs

The City is required to provide most of the jail's funding. Higher costs would fall on an already strained City budget, leaving less for other services residents need.

The projected savings could be at risk.

Higher detention costs, extended consent decree monitoring, and rising system-wide expenses could offset projected savings, particularly if cuts go beyond what the evidence supports.

BGR REVIEW COMMITTEE

Anne P. Baños, *Chair*

Carlin Conner

Ben A. Dupuy

John Landrum

Nathalie Simon

Vanessa B. Claiborne

Louis M. Freeman, Jr.

Ronald P. McClain

Lamar Villere

BGR PROJECT STAFF

Rebecca Mowbray, *President & CEO*

Stephen Stuart, *Senior Vice President & Research Director*

Paul Rioux, *Senior Research Analyst*

This report is available on BGR's website, www.bgr.org.

BGR ETHICS POLICY

We safeguard the independence of our work at the staff and board levels. This includes a board-adopted [BGR Ethics Policy Statement](#) that requires recusal from discussions of reports and recommendations where an actual or perceived conflict of interest exists. BGR followed its policy for this report and obtained all appropriate recusals from staff and board members.

BECOME A MEMBER

To preserve its independence, BGR relies on financial support from a diverse membership of individuals, corporations and foundations. To find out how you can support our work, go to www.bgr.org/membership or call us at 504-525-4152.

BGR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

OFFICERS

Anne P. Baños, *Chair*

Nathalie Simon, *Vice Chair*

Louis M. Freeman, Jr., *Secretary*

Carlin Conner, *Treasurer*

John Landrum, *Assistant Secretary*

Vanessa B. Claiborne, *Assistant Treasurer*

PAST CHAIR

Steven W. Usdin

BOARD MEMBERS

Ryan Adkerson

Ben Billings

Kheri Billy

Elizabeth Boh

Bob Brickman

Melanie Bronfin

Mollye M. Demosthenidy

R. Foster Duncan

Ben A. Dupuy

Perry Eastman IV

Elizabeth Hefler

Patrick Hernandez

Mike Katz

Merritt Lane

Lauren Mastio

Ronald P. McClain

Patty Riddlebarger

David C. Rieveschl

Kenneth St. Charles

Merrick Sloss

Syrita Steib

Douglas M. Stokes

Vera Triplett

Lamar Villere

HONORARY BOARD

Harry J. Blumenthal, Jr.

J. Kelly Duncan

Ludovico Feoli

Hardy B. Fowler

Louis M. Freeman

Richard W. Freeman, Jr.

Ronald J. French

Norma Grace

David Guidry

Hans B. Jonassen

Diana M. Lewis

Mark A. Mayer

Anne M. Milling

R. King Milling

Lynes R. Sloss

Sterling Scott Willis



The Bureau of Governmental Research is a private, nonprofit, independent research organization dedicated to informed public policy making and the effective use of public resources for the improvement of government in the New Orleans metropolitan area.

BUREAU OF GOVERNMENTAL RESEARCH

1055 St. Charles Ave., Suite 200

New Orleans, LA 70130

Phone 504-525-4152

www.bgr.org

[@bgrmola](https://www.instagram.com/bgrmola)

Photography by Sophia Germer