

LEGISLATIVE BUDGET BOARD
Austin, Texas

FISCAL NOTE, 89TH LEGISLATIVE REGULAR SESSION
Revision 1

March 10, 2025

TO: Honorable Joan Huffman, Chair, Senate Committee on Finance

FROM: Jerry McGinty, Director, Legislative Budget Board

IN RE: SB293 by Huffman (relating to the discipline of judges by the State Commission on Judicial Conduct, notice of certain reprimands, judicial compensation and related retirement benefits, and the reporting of certain judicial transparency information; authorizing an administrative penalty.), **Committee Report 1st House, Substituted**

Estimated Two-year Net Impact to General Revenue Related Funds for SB293, Committee Report 1st House, Substituted: a negative impact of (\$100,830,509) through the biennium ending August 31, 2027.

The bill would make no appropriation but could provide the legal basis for an appropriation of funds to implement the provisions of the bill.

General Revenue-Related Funds, Five- Year Impact:

<i>Fiscal Year</i>	<i>Probable Net Positive/(Negative) Impact to General Revenue Related Funds</i>
2026	(\$70,963,696)
2027	(\$29,866,813)
2028	(\$29,866,813)
2029	(\$29,866,813)
2030	(\$29,866,813)

All Funds, Five-Year Impact:

<i>Fiscal Year</i>	<i>Probable (Cost) from General Revenue Fund 1</i>	<i>Probable (Cost) from Judicial Fund 573</i>	<i>Probable (Cost) from Other Special State Funds 998</i>	<i>Change in Number of State Employees from FY 2025</i>
2026	(\$70,963,696)	(\$963,890)	(\$220,750)	5.0
2027	(\$29,866,813)	(\$963,890)	(\$220,750)	5.0
2028	(\$29,866,813)	(\$963,890)	(\$220,750)	5.0
2029	(\$29,866,813)	(\$963,890)	(\$220,750)	5.0
2030	(\$29,866,813)	(\$963,890)	(\$220,750)	5.0

Fiscal Analysis

The bill would amend Government Code to add persistent or willful violation of the rules for setting bail under Article 17.15 of the Code of Criminal Procedure and failure to meet deadlines set by statute or binding court order to the definition of willful or persistent misconduct for the purposes of Section 1-a, Article V, Texas Constitution.

The bill would allow the State Commission on Judicial Conduct (SCJC) to impose an administrative penalty between \$500 and \$10,000 for knowingly filing a false complaint.

The bill would eliminate private sanctions from the disciplinary actions available for SCJC to impose, contingent on voter approval of a constitutional amendment.

The bill would require SCJC to conduct a preliminary investigation and draft recommendations for commission action as soon as practicable after a complaint has been filed. The bill would shorten the timeframes for investigating and disposing of complaints. The bill would allow SCJC to grant an additional extension for disposing of complaints under certain circumstances.

The bill would add substance abuse as a cause of judicial incapacity and would revise the process for disposing of complaints alleging judicial incapacity.

The bill would direct the Office of Court Administration (OCA) to establish a judicial directory for use by the SCJC to provide notices to judges.

The bill would require the reporting of certain judicial transparency information by district judges and would require OCA to provide administrative support for the collection of this information. The bill would require OCA to prepare and submit a report compiling the information to certain offices.

The bill would amend the Government Code to increase judicial salaries by increasing the annual base salary of a district judge from \$140,000 to \$161,000. By statute, the salaries of many positions in the judiciary, including some prosecutors, are tied to the salary of district court judges. The bill would revise the salary of the chief justices of an appellate court and the salary supplement for district and business court judges who serve as administrative judges. In addition, the retirement pay of elected class officials is tied to the salary of district court judges.

The bill would amend the Government Code to specify that the retirement benefits of judges and elected class officials who have retired or will retire before September 1, 2025 would not be eligible for an increase in retirement pay, absent legislation enacted by the 90th or later Legislatures.

The bill would modify the manner in which retired judges that resume service as full-time judicial officers may rejoin the JRS 2 retirement plan.

Methodology

Creating a new SCJC administrative penalty for false complaints could result in an increase in revenue, however the number and timing of any offenses are unknown and therefore, the fiscal impact cannot be estimated.

Based on information provided by SCJC, this analysis assumes the agency would require \$3,230,933 in General Revenue Funds in fiscal year 2026 and \$656,488 in fiscal year 2027 and 5.0 FTE positions to implement the provisions of the bill. This includes \$2,500,000 for office reconfiguration or move, \$98,480 for a new case management system, \$20,000 court reporter fees, and \$1,268,941 in costs associated with the additional staff including 2.0 Attorney positions, 1.0 Administrative Assistant position, 1.0 Legal Secretary position, and 1.0 Investigator position. Salary, benefit and payroll contribution costs included in these amounts would total \$593,734 each fiscal year.

Based on information provided by OCA, this analysis assumes the agency would require \$254,006 in General Revenue Funds in fiscal year 2026 and \$88,206 in fiscal year 2027 for the development of a system to collect judicial transparency information.

Based on information provided by the Comptroller of Public Accounts and OCA, the provisions of the bill increasing the base salary of a district judge would require \$25,735,049 in General Revenue Funds each fiscal year including, \$3,076,235 for the justices and judges of the appellate courts, \$226,800 for the Business Courts judges, \$12,098,940 for District Court Judges, \$936,117 for Associate Judges, \$23,100 for the State Prosecuting Attorney, \$97,440 for District Attorneys, \$3,595,200 for Professional Prosecutors, \$80,640 for Felony Prosecutors, \$71,820 for State Prosecutors' longevity pay, \$839,160 for the Constitutional County

Court Judge Supplement, \$3,263,400 for the Statutory County Court Judge Salary Supplement, \$252,000 for the Statutory Probate Court Judge Salary Supplement, \$42,000 for the 1st and 2nd Multicounty Courts at Law, \$1,111,257 for the County Attorney Supplements, and \$20,940 for Multi-district Litigation Courts.

According to the Employees Retirement System (ERS), the provisions of the bill increasing the salaries of active judges and certain prosecutors would result in one-time costs to the Judicial Retirement System Plan Two (JRS II) and ERS retirement plans. The increase in one-time costs for JRS II is estimated at \$24,833,878 in General Revenue Funds for fiscal year 2026, and the increase in one-time costs to ERS is estimated at \$13,522,760 for fiscal year 2026.

According to ERS, the provisions of the bill increasing the salaries of active judges and certain prosecutors would also result in an annual increase of \$4,212,810 in All Funds to JRS II and an annual increase of \$358,900 in General Revenue Funds to the ERS plan.

Technology

These costs include technology impacts of \$254,006 in fiscal year 2026 and \$88,206 in fiscal year 2027 to provide a system for OCA to collect judicial transparency information and technology impacts of \$72,320 in fiscal year 2026 and \$26,160 in fiscal year 2027 for SCJC to acquire a new case management system.

Local Government Impact

No significant fiscal implication to units of local government is anticipated.

Source Agencies: 212 Office of Court Administration, Texas Judicial Council, 242 State Commission on Judicial Conduct, 302 Office of the Attorney General, 304 Comptroller of Public Accounts, 327 Employees Retirement System

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