


Memorandum

To: The Honorable Chair Grijalva and Members of the Board of Supervisors

From: Charlene Pesquiera, Presiding Judge Pima County Justice Courts 

Date: May 6th, 2024

Subject: Proposed budget cuts to Ajo Justice Court and Green Valley Justice Court

The Board of Supervisors, with a recommendation from Administrator Jan Leshner, is seeking to cut department base budgets by 2%, a \$41 million reduction county-wide. This is a responsible approach to avoid raising the property tax rate, but these cuts will affect the "shoestring budget" departments more than the ones with some fat to trim.

I am specifically advocating for the Ajo Justice Court and the Green Valley Justice Court, two rural courts that have seen caseload increases as other courts have seen a decrease in their numbers. These courts are also responsible for special innovations that serve their rural communities, which often do not have the same access to programs as those who reside within the reach of the city.

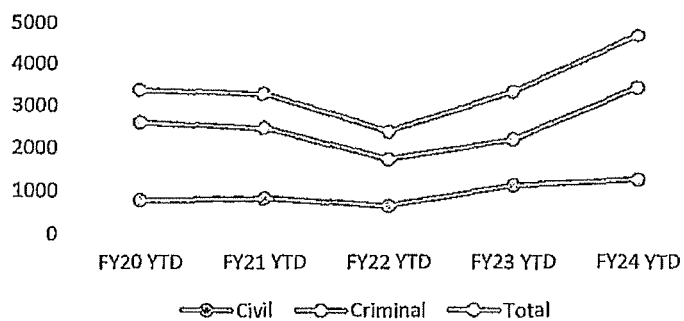
A 2% cut to these courts could devastate this vital work and interrupt state-mandated services. When the Board considers cuts, I ask you as a former lawmaker, financial auditor, and the current Presiding Judge of the Pima County Justice Courts, to assess with a fiscally responsible approach. Please allow the Ajo Justice Court and the Green Valley Justice Court to be exempt from these cuts.

GREEN VALLEY JUSTICE COURT


In January 2023, Justice Precinct 5 was eliminated and a substantial portion of Vail and I-10 was incorporated into Justice Precinct 7. While the population increased by 31%, the caseload increased by 96% from 2022 to 2024.


Green Valley Justice Court submitted a request to the Board of Supervisors for a permanent budget increase for FY23 to accommodate the caseload increase, which was granted. Currently, not counting personnel costs or other operating expenses that are not fungible such as janitorial services, equipment leases, and AOC mandates, the court only has a budget of \$47,513 per year to cover office supplies, printing, training, and all other expenditures.

Green Valley Justice Court Caseloads



A 2% budget decrease would require a cut of approximately \$17,904, nearly wiping out half of the court's available operating budget. With a staff of only 9 PCNs, the savings cannot come from job terminations. All staff at the Green Valley Justice Court are cross-trained in several areas and I have always been impressed with the depth and breadth of their knowledge and ability to understand the process from A

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COPY TO SUPERVISORS
COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR
CC: Anthony Batchelder
Kevin Frakes
DATE 5/10/24 

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to Z. I have a copy of the court's organization chart and responsibilities for each staff member available upon request.

The Green Valley court is an innovative and inspiring court with a proven track record of problem solving and success. To go backwards now and cut \$17,904 would diminish all the work, community collaborations and much needed services for rural defendant. The court has created the state's first pre-adjudicated DUI treatment court program, developed a civil mediation program, a volunteer community mediation program, started a traveling court to reach constituents in far areas of the precinct, is building a domestic violence treatment protocol, and was recently invited to present at the Arizona Association of Drug Court Professionals' conference.

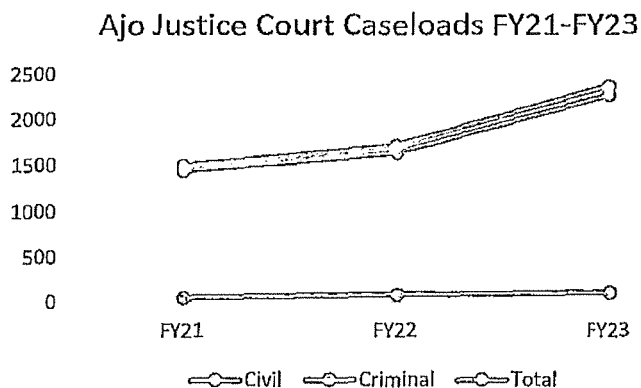
AJO JUSTICE COURT

The Ajo Justice Court struggles with unpredictable costs that can make budgeting a challenge. For instance, the court pays for defense attorneys out of its own budget rather than billing the Office of Court Appointed Council, as in other courts. As FY23 and FY24 saw an increase in caseloads, the court has already been placed on a budget stop for their attorney allocation for the second year in a row. This is a legally mandated expense, so other budgets must be reduced to cover the cost.

The Ajo court has had other challenges, including increased electricity and trash pickup costs that couldn't be budgeted for and several facilities issues including leaking pipes, a flooded basement, and an HVAC system that has required several visits to address. In FY24 there were also significant IT needs that required mandatory investments.

With a staff of only 7 PCNs, the savings also cannot come from job terminations. An overwhelming majority Court staff have been with the Court for several years and have repeatedly demonstrated to me their deep and intricate knowledge about their court and their community. While everyone has been cross-trained over the years, it has been difficult to hire qualified staff in Ajo.

The increasing caseloads in Ajo mean an expanded budget needs to be explored rather than considering a 2% cut. Several object codes have already exceeded the budget authority for FY24, with two months left leaving the court with only \$11,697 to address all operational needs.



In closing, I appreciate your thoughtfulness and consideration to this request. For many years the rural courts have operated with a conservative budget. Let us continue to encourage hard work, the cross training of staff and innovative specialty courts. I understand some departments have exceeded budgets for

whatever reasons but placing two rural courts on the chopping block who have operated efficiently would not be in the public's best interests.