STATEMENT OF
HONORABLE JULIA S. GIBBONS, CHAIR
COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET OF THE
JUDICIAL CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED STATES
BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON
FINANCIAL SERVICES AND GENERAL GOVERNMENT
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS OF THE
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

March 20, 2013

INTRODUCTION

Chairman Crenshaw, Representative Serrano, and members of the Committee, I am Judge Julia Gibbons of the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals. Our court sits in Cincinnati, Ohio, and my resident chambers are in Memphis, Tennessee. As the Chair of the Judicial Conference Committee on the Budget, I come before you to testify on the Judiciary's appropriations requirements for fiscal year 2014. In addition, I will discuss the impact of sequestration on federal court operations nationwide, the Judiciary’s fiscal year 2013 funding needs under a full-year continuing resolution, and provide an update on our cost containment program, including efforts underway to reduce the Judiciary’s space footprint. This is my ninth appearance before an appropriations subcommittee on behalf of the federal Judiciary and my seventh appearance before the Financial Services and General Government panel. Appearing with me today is Judge Thomas F. Hogan, the Director of the Administrative Office of the United States Courts.

Mr. Chairman, we had a strong working relationship with your predecessor, former Chairwoman Jo Ann Emerson, and we look forward to continuing that tradition with you and Representative Serrano, as well as with the excellent staff of the Committee.

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD

In addition to my statement and Judge Hogan’s, I ask that the entire statements of the Federal Judicial Center, the U.S. Sentencing Commission, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, and the U.S. Court of International Trade be included in the hearing record.

THE JUDICIARY’S CONSTITUTIONAL DUTIES

To begin, I would like to acknowledge the extremely difficult task this Committee has in deciding how to allocate limited resources among the 30 federal entities under its jurisdiction, each one likely making a strong case for its resource needs. As you consider Judiciary funding for fiscal years 2013 and 2014, however, we ask the Committee to take into account the nature and importance of our work. The Judiciary performs Constitutionally-mandated core government functions that are a pillar of our democratic system of government. Unlike many Executive Branch entities, we do not have programs or grants that we can cut in response to a budget shortfall. The entire scope and volume of our work are attributable to carrying out functions assigned to us by the Constitution and by statute. We cannot reduce our work if we face deep funding cuts. We must adjudicate all cases that are filed with the courts, we must
protect the community by supervising defendants awaiting trial and criminals on post-conviction release, we must provide qualified defense counsel for defendants who cannot afford representation, we must pay jurors for costs associated with performing their civic duty, and we must ensure the safety and security of court staff, litigants, and the public in federal court facilities. This is a broad mission and it is carried out by the Judiciary’s 35,000 dedicated judges, probation and pretrial services officers, clerks of court staff, federal defenders, law clerks, and other personnel. We look to Congress to recognize the uncontrollable nature of our workload and provide the resources needed to perform this essential work. If sufficient funding is not provided to the courts, we cannot provide the people of the United States the type of justice system that has been a hallmark of our liberty throughout our nation’s history.

IMPACT OF SEQUESTRATION CUTS ON THE FEDERAL COURTS

I turn now to a matter of the utmost concern to us. If left unchanged, the sequestration cuts that took effect on March 1 will have a devastating effect on federal court operations nationwide. The 5.0 percent across-the-board sequestration cut results in a nearly $350 million reduction in Judiciary funding below current levels. We believe we have done all we can to minimize the impacts of sequestration but a cut of this magnitude, particularly so late in the fiscal year, will affect every facet of court operations and impact the general public as well as individuals and businesses looking for relief in the courts. On February 7, 2013 the Executive Committee of the Judicial Conference finalized a number of emergency measures based on updated sequestration calculations for the Judiciary. We are now in the process of implementing those measures. These actions are unsustainable, difficult, and painful to implement. Indeed, the Judiciary cannot continue to operate at sequestration funding levels without seriously compromising the Constitutional mission of the federal courts.

To manage this situation, the Judiciary will phase in the cuts, but the impacts will be real, and potentially devastating to the citizens served by the courts. The courts operate under a decentralized management system so each court will decide how to implement the funding cuts but we estimate that, on a national basis, up to 2,000 employees could be laid off this fiscal year, or face furloughs for one day a pay period, resulting in a 10 percent pay cut. These staffing losses would come on top of the 1,800 court staff that have been lost over the last 18 months, representing a 9 percent decline in staff since July 2011.

Sequestration will impact public safety because there will be fewer probation officers to supervise criminal offenders released in our communities, and funding for drug testing and mental health treatment will be cut 20 percent. There will be a 30 percent cut in funding for court security systems and equipment and court security officers will be required to work reduced hours thus creating security vulnerabilities throughout the federal court system. In our defender services program, federal defender attorney staffing levels will decline which could result in delays in appointing defense counsel for defendants, and payments to private attorneys appointed under the Criminal Justice Act could be delayed for nearly three weeks in September. Sequestration will also require deep cuts in our information technology programs on which we depend for our daily case processing and on which we have successfully relied in past years to achieve efficiencies and limit growth in our budget.
Chairman Crenshaw and Representative Serrano, I must convey to you in the strongest possible terms the dire circumstances the federal Judiciary finds itself in under sequestration. I emphasize that the Judiciary cannot continue to operate at such drastically reduced funding levels without seriously compromising the Constitutional mission of the federal courts. This is especially true if these funding levels continue into fiscal year 2014 and beyond. We are hopeful that Congress and the Administration will ultimately reach agreement on alternative deficit reduction measures that renders the current sequestration cuts unnecessary. I will now outline for the Committee the fiscal year 2013 funding needs of the Judiciary under a full-year continuing resolution.

**FISCAL YEAR 2013 FULL-YEAR CONTINUING RESOLUTION**

I appear before you today to testify on the Judiciary’s fiscal year 2014 budget request with sequestration in place and fiscal year 2013 full-year appropriations for the federal government still unresolved. For the purposes of constructing the Judiciary’s fiscal year 2014 budget request we assumed – like the Executive Branch – for fiscal year 2013 the funding level available under the current continuing resolution (Pub. L. 112-175) of a 0.6 percent increase above the fiscal year 2012 enacted appropriations level. After full-year fiscal year 2013 appropriations for the Judiciary are known, including any changes to sequestration, we will update our fiscal year 2014 request and advise the House and Senate Appropriations Committees accordingly.

On February 13, 2013, Judge Hogan and I transmitted a letter to the House and Senate Appropriations Committees requesting that two anomalies be included in the fiscal year 2013 full-year continuing resolution measure you will be considering this month. The Judiciary requires a funding level of $7,017,065,000 in the continuing resolution, which includes an anomaly of $15,000,000 above a fiscal year 2012 hard freeze level to ensure that payments to private attorneys providing defense representation mandated by the Sixth Amendment and the Criminal Justice Act continue uninterrupted. Although there are anomaly needs in other Judiciary accounts, we have limited our request to the Defender Services account, our most urgent funding need.

A full-year continuing resolution funding level of $7,017,065,000 is the minimum necessary to maintain court operations at current levels. Funding below this level would result in additional staffing losses in the courts that, due to funding constraints, have already downsized by 1,800 staff in the last 18 months. This is a nearly 9 percent reduction of staff in our clerks of court and probation and pretrial services offices. The vast majority of these losses were due to normal attrition, but we did offer voluntary separation incentive payments (buyouts) and early retirement in order to minimize forced downsizing.

At a hard freeze for fiscal year 2013, without sequestration cuts, we anticipate courts would continue to downsize, primarily through attrition, including buyouts and early retirement. However, cuts below the fiscal year 2012 level – even cuts less severe than sequestration – would adversely impact federal court operations and result in forced downsizing (reductions-in-force and furloughs) in the courts creating delays in processing cases and a reduction in the supervision of felons on post-conviction release in the community. There would also be reductions in the funds used for drug testing and treatment and for mental health treatment for
those released felons under supervision. Cuts to court security funding place at risk the safety of judges, litigants, witnesses, jurors, and court employees. Cuts to defender services would require staff furloughs in federal defender organizations and the deferral of panel attorney payments into fiscal year 2014 which may impact our ability to secure competent counsel to accept these cases. Cuts at the sequestration level only magnify these impacts across the federal court system.

Our second CR anomaly request is a no-cost anomaly to extend the authorizations for nine temporary district judgeships that are at risk of being lost. The authorizations for these judgeships have either already expired, in the case of the Kansas and Hawaii judgeships, or the authorizations expire later in 2013. If a judgeship vacancy occurs in a district (through death, retirement, etc.) after a temporary judgeship authorization expires, that judgeship is permanently lost. This was the case in fiscal year 2011 when the authorization for a temporary district judgeship in the Northern District of Ohio was not extended during a continuing resolution, became vacant during that period, and the judgeship was lost. When a temporary judgeship is lost, caseloads have to be shifted to other judges, increasing their workload and possibly delaying the judicial process. Similar extensions have been included in prior appropriations bills, and we ask the Committee to extend the authorizations to protect these nine temporary judgeships into 2014.

**COST CONTAINMENT**

The Judiciary continues to build on the cost-containment efforts we started in 2004. Over the last decade many of the cost-cutting initiatives have been implemented and have helped limit the growth in the Judiciary’s budget. In fact, our fiscal year 2014 budget request reflects a 2.6 percent increase above the fiscal year 2013 assumed funding level, the Judiciary’s lowest requested increase ever.

While we are proud of our accomplishments to date in containing costs, we recognize that we are in an era of budget constraint. Accordingly, we have embarked on a new round of cost-containment initiatives. Our approach to cost containment is to continuously challenge our ways of doing business and to identify, wherever possible, ways to economize even further. To be candid, this can be a painful process as we are often proposing changes to long established Judiciary customs and practices and there are differing and legitimate perspectives within the Judiciary on containing costs. But we are committed to doing everything we can to conserve resources and be good stewards of the taxpayers’ money. We continue to take these difficult steps in the belief that they are essential to positioning the Judiciary for the fiscal realities of today and the future.

I must point out, however, that while cost containment has been helpful during the last several years of flat budgets, no amount of cost containment will offset the major reductions we face from sequestration. We believe we are doing our part by containing costs and limiting our request, but we have an essential job to perform and we look to the Congress to fund that request.

One of our new cost-containment initiatives is to maximize the implementation of shared administrative services among the courts of appeals, district courts, bankruptcy courts, and probation and pretrial services offices. We believe this will reduce the duplication caused by multiple human resources, procurement, financial management, and information technology staffs in a single judicial district or circuit. This effort will take several years to implement, but it
should allow courts to partially absorb budget cuts by reducing administrative staffing and overhead costs and streamlining administrative processes, allowing them to minimize cuts to staff performing core operations.

At the request of this Committee, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) is studying the issue of consolidating district and bankruptcy clerks’ offices. We are cooperating with GAO on the study and will review their findings and recommendations.

Chairman Crenshaw, during my appearance last year, your predecessor on this Committee, Congresswoman Jo Ann Emerson, expressed specific interest in two areas: reducing the Judiciary’s space footprint and containing costs in the Defender Services program. I would like to update the Committee on progress we are making in these areas.

**REDUCING THE JUDICIARY’S SPACE FOOTPRINT**

One of the Judiciary’s biggest cost-containment success to date has been in limiting the growth in space rent costs. As a result of cost containment initiatives put in place in recent years, our fiscal year 2014 budget request for GSA rent reflects a cost avoidance of approximately $400 million below estimates made prior to implementation of our cost-containment initiatives. We have revamped our long-range space planning process to better prioritize space needs with an eye towards cost. With strong controls in place to limit the growth in space rent costs, we are now focusing on reducing the Judiciary’s overall space footprint.

By pursuing aggressive space reduction policies, the Judiciary believes a 3 percent space reduction by fiscal year 2018 is achievable subject to certain exceptions, including any new courthouse construction, renovation, or alteration projects approved by Congress, and additional square footage needed for newly authorized judgeships and additional senior judges in accordance with courtroom sharing policies. I cannot emphasize strongly enough that GSA’s cooperation is essential to our ability to reduce space. As the Judiciary’s landlord, we will need GSA to work closely with us on space reduction, including taking back excess space from us in a timely manner.

Our most ambitious space reduction effort is the Integrated Workplace Initiative (IWI) which will reduce the Judiciary's space footprint by taking advantage of the flexibility that technology makes possible with regard to where and when work is performed. The goal of this initiative is to create a smaller and more efficient workplace that reflects changing work styles, such as telework and mobile technologies for court employees. For example, probation offices generally require less space than before because of the nature of the work that most probation officers now perform (i.e., they use mobile devices while working in the field). As a result, some of these probation offices could reduce the amount of commercial space that they lease, or they could move out of commercial space and into courthouses, while using less space in the courthouses than previously needed. In addition, with the increased use of electronic case filings of court documents instead of paper filings, there will be opportunities for space reduction in clerks of court offices. There will be upfront costs associated with construction, relocation, and renovation expenses but we believe this initiative has the potential to produce significant long-term savings as long as we are able to fund those upfront costs.

Two IWI pilot projects are currently in concept and design phases – one in Chicago, IL, and one in Tucson, AZ. In Chicago, the probation office is being relocated from commercially-
leased space to a federal building while reducing space occupied by at least 50 percent. In Tucson, probation office personnel who were in leased space are being consolidated with other probation office personnel in the courthouse in less total occupied space. The leased space is being given up, which will result in additional cost savings. In Chicago, GSA is covering concept design costs but the Judiciary will have to fund the detailed design and construction costs estimated to be $3.4 million. In Tucson, the concept design was completed in January 2013. The next stage is the detailed design and construction, estimated to cost just over $3.2 million, and which the Judiciary will have to fund. It will be very difficult for us to fund these costs at a sequestration funding level.

The Judiciary will also continue to look at releasing space in underutilized non-resident facilities based on Judicial Conference approved criteria and upon the recommendation of the appropriate circuit judicial council. A non-resident facility is defined as a facility with a courtroom that does not have a full-time circuit, district, magistrate, or bankruptcy judge in residence, and since 1996 the Judiciary has identified and closed five non-resident facilities. In addition, another 13 court facilities have been vacated for a variety of reasons. The most recent space reductions approved by the Judicial Conference at its September 2012 session will eventually result in the release of 56,000 square feet of space in six additional non-resident facilities with associated annual rent savings of approximately $1.0 million.

We are pursuing other space reduction initiatives as well. The increased use of online legal research by court personnel offers an opportunity to reduce library-related costs in the areas of library staffing, space, and collections. We have also created financial incentives for courts across the country to identify and release excess space.

I will close on this topic by assuring the Committee that we take seriously your concerns regarding the Judiciary’s space inventory. We recognize that increasing space during tight budget times is not sustainable and we are committed to working with the Committee and GSA on space reduction going forward.

CONTAINING COSTS IN DEFENDER SERVICES

At last year’s hearing, former Chairwoman Emerson asked about cost growth in the Defender Services program. The Defender Services program is the Judiciary’s second largest program at approximately $1.0 billion a year. Funding in this program is used to provide defense representation under the Criminal Justice Act to defendants charged with a federal crime who cannot afford representation, as constitutionally required by the Sixth Amendment. The program is largely reactive – it has no control over the number and nature of cases it must defend against. The caseload is driven entirely by the prosecutorial policies and practices of the U.S. Department of Justice and its 93 United States Attorneys. Nevertheless, the Judiciary continues to make real progress in containing the costs of providing effective representation. The average annual growth of 8 percent per year in obligations between FY 2007 and FY 2010 declines to 2.6 percent between FY 2011 and FY 2013 (projected). I would like to highlight for the Committee four major initiatives we are pursuing:

Case Budgeting. Our case budgeting initiative focuses on the 3 percent of panel attorney representations that account, disproportionately, for 30 percent of the total cost of all panel attorney representations. To specifically target these cases, the Judiciary is promoting the use of
case budgeting for any non-capital “mega-case” – a representation in which total expenditures exceed $30,000 – and for all federal capital prosecutions and capital post-conviction proceedings. Most importantly, the Defender Services program is funding case-budgeting attorneys in three circuits to work with judges and panel attorneys in developing budgets to ensure that the representation is provided in a cost-effective manner. A 2010 Federal Judicial Center study found that the savings from the three positions more than offset their costs. We hope to expand our case budgeting initiative from three to seven positions in fiscal year 2013 in order to provide case budgeting services to an additional six circuits.

Electronic Voucher System. The Judiciary is making major progress in developing an electronic vouchering system, known as eCJA, to replace the current paper-based system for Criminal Justice Act payments to panel attorneys. These attorneys are paid on a per case, per hour basis and currently submit paper vouchers that are entered manually into a system and processed for payment. This is an inefficient process that can result in keying and payment errors. The new system will enable electronic preparation, submission, processing, and ultimately payment of vouchers; reduce voucher processing errors; and expedite voucher processing and payment. It will also provide judges with historical payment information to assist them in evaluating and approving vouchers. Implementation of the system is expected to begin in 2013.

Reducing Discovery Costs. We are collaborating with the Department of Justice (DOJ) to contain discovery costs in criminal cases (for both the DOJ and the Judiciary) by effectively managing electronically stored information (ESI). In fiscal year 2012, broad national protocols were disseminated that were jointly developed, by the DOJ and the Administrative Office, for the cost-effective and efficient management of ESI in discovery. The Judiciary is optimistic that substantial cost avoidance will result from widespread use of the protocols – to help meet the rapidly changing technological challenges in this high-cost area of discovery – for CJA federal defender and panel attorney cases – and for the DOJ.

Case Weights. I made a commitment last year that the fiscal year 2014 budget request for Defender Services would reflect the application of a “case-weights” methodology in establishing staffing requirements for federal defender organizations. I can report today that the fiscal year 2014 budget request does reflect case weighting. Case weights act as a scientific and empirically-based methodology for determining the complexity of workload in the Defender Services program and allows for a more efficient allocation of limited resources. Case weights provide a fair, objective basis for identifying staffing needs based on disparate case types in federal defender organizations around the country. I believe that case weights will improve the utilization of resources in the Defender Services program.

Again, I want to assure the Committee that we are committed to cost containment in the Defender Services program – and throughout the Judiciary – and will continue to look for additional opportunities to provide cost-effective services in this program.

FISCAL YEAR 2014 BUDGET REQUEST

For fiscal year 2014, the Judiciary is seeking $7.22 billion in appropriations, a 2.6 percent overall increase above the assumed fiscal year 2013 appropriations level, the lowest requested increase on record, as I mentioned earlier in my testimony. We believe the requested funding
level represents the minimum amount required to meet our Constitutional and statutory responsibilities. As I mentioned at the outset, we used the fiscal year 2013 six-month continuing resolution level to construct the fiscal year 2014 request. After full-year fiscal year 2013 appropriations for the Judiciary are known, we will update our fiscal year 2014 request and advise the House and Senate Appropriations Committees of any changes.

The Judiciary’s fiscal year 2014 budget request represents essentially a current services budget and includes $175.0 million for adjustments to base for standard pay and non-pay changes, including a 1.0 percent ECI adjustment for Judiciary personnel consistent with the President’s recommendation for Executive Branch personnel, and a total of $4.7 million for two small program increases in two Judiciary accounts. I will summarize the 2014 requests for our three largest accounts.

The Judiciary’s largest account, courts’ Salaries and Expenses, funds the bulk of federal court operations including the regional courts of appeals, district courts, bankruptcy courts, and probation and pretrial services offices. In recognition of the fiscal constraints we all face, the Judicial Conference made some very tough choices and elected to limit the growth of this account to 2.3 percent for fiscal year 2014 to $5.18 billion. One decision was not to request funding for this account to restore any of the 1,800 staff we have lost over the last 18 months as a result of budget constraints. The dramatic loss of staff since July 2011 reflects a reduction far below what the courts require to perform their mission. The reality is that the courts simply do not have the funding needed to support on-board staffing levels and are choosing to leave vacancies unfilled until the federal budget picture stabilizes. This trend cannot continue without serious repercussions to the federal court system in this country.

The Defender Services program, which provides criminal defense services under the Criminal Justice Act to defendants that are unable to afford counsel, is projected to have an increase in weighted caseload in fiscal year 2014 and requires a 3.0 percent increase to $1.07 billion to handle an estimated 209,000 representations. The request provides a small cost-of-living adjustment to the panel attorney non-capital rate (from $125 to $126 per hour) and capital rate (from $178 to $180 per hour), consistent with the cost-of-living adjustment requested for federal workers. The request includes no program increases.

Our Court Security account funds protective guard services and security systems and equipment at federal courthouses and requires a 4.2 percent increase to $524 million for fiscal year 2014. The request will provide for additional court security officers, higher Federal Protective Service costs, and other standard adjustments. The request includes a single program increase of $1.7 million to improve security at federal court facilities by increasing in-service training for court security officers from 8 to 16 hours per year, consistent with training that other security officers guarding federal facilities receive.

A summary of fiscal year 2014 adjustments to base and program increases and appropriations requirements for each Judiciary account are included at Appendix A.

CONCLUSION

Chairman Crenshaw and Representative Serrano, I hope that my testimony today provides you with some insight into the impact of sequestration on the federal courts, the fiscal year 2013 and fiscal year 2014 funding needs of the Judiciary as well as our commitment to cost
containment. Consideration this month of full-year funding for fiscal year 2013, followed in a few months by markup of the fiscal year 2014 appropriations bill, will present this Committee with difficult funding decisions. In your deliberations we ask that you take into account the Judiciary’s unique Constitutional role in our system of government and the importance to our citizenry of an open, accessible, and well-functioning federal court system. We believe, and I hope you agree, that the federal Judiciary is a vital component of what a free society affords its people, and a standard for the world to emulate. Finally, as a co-equal partner in this great democracy, we ask that Congress preserve our federal court system now and in the future by providing funding that takes into consideration sequestration and allows the Judiciary to sustain current on-board staffing levels and operations as reflected in our fiscal year 2013 full-year continuing resolution anomaly request and in our fiscal year 2014 budget request.

Thank you for your continued support of the federal Judiciary. I would be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.
SUMMARY OF THE JUDICIARY’S FISCAL YEAR 2014 REQUEST

The Judiciary’s fiscal year 2014 appropriation request totals $7,221,707,000, an increase of $179,665,000 (2.6 percent) over the fiscal year 2013 assumed appropriation level.

- A total of $175.0 million (97 percent) of the $179.7 million increase requested will provide for pay adjustments, inflation and other adjustments to base necessary to maintain current services. Of this amount,
  - An increase of $85.5 million will provide for inflationary pay and benefit rate increases, including expected January 2014 pay adjustments (e.g. 1.0% ECI adjustment for federal workers), changes in health benefit premiums, changes in benefit costs for both judges and supporting personnel, a cost-of-living adjustment for panel attorneys, and a wage rate adjustment for court security officers.
  - An increase of $33.6 million is necessary to replace non-appropriated sources of funds used to support base requirements in fiscal year 2013 with direct appropriations.
  - An increase of $25.8 million is associated with an additional 27 senior judges and 90 associated staff, and an additional 10 active Article III judges and 51 associated staff.
  - An increase of $17.4 million will provide for increases in contract rates and other standard inflationary increases.
  - A net increase of $11.3 million will provide for the increase in weighted representations associated with the projected 209,000 non-capital and capital representations in the Defender Services program in fiscal year 2014.
  - An increase of $9.0 million is for GSA rent and related costs.
  - An increase of $5.2 million is for security-related adjustments.
  - An increase of $3.4 million is for adjustments for the retirement trust funds accounts and changes in the Fees of Jurors program.
  - A decrease of $16.2 million is associated with cost-containment reductions to Judiciary programs and fiscal year 2013 non-recurring requirements.

- The remaining $4.7 million (3 percent) of the requested increase is for program enhancements, as follows:
  - An increase of $3.0 million will provide for building exterior façade restoration at the
Supreme Court.

- An increase of $1.7 million is required to increase in-service training for court security officers from 8 to 16 hours per year, consistent with training that other security officers guarding federal facilities receive.
### Judiciary Appropriations ($000)

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<th>Appropriation Account</th>
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<td>Salaries &amp; Expenses - Direct Vaccine Injury Trust Fund</td>
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\(^1\)The fiscal year 2013 funding assumption reflects amounts available under the fiscal year 2013 six-month continuing resolution (Pub. L. 112-175) that runs through March 27, 2013.