

tive Reference assists in the preparation of legislation and maintains information services essential for legislators and the public. The Department of Fiscal Services prepares financial impact statements and monitors fiscal functions for the General Assembly.

One of the single most important tasks of the General Assembly, and one that requires close coordination and consultation with the Executive Branch, is adoption of the annual budget for Maryland State government. The Constitution specifies that it is the responsibility of the Governor to present the annual budget to the General Assembly within five days of the beginning of each legislative session. The budget of Maryland must be balanced—it must not exceed anticipated revenues. This requirement prevents deficit spending and accounts in large part for the excellent bond rating enjoyed by the State. Reflecting the principle of separation of powers within State government, the Governor must incorporate into the budget unchanged requests from the legislative and judicial departments, as well as the estimated expenses required for operating the public schools. Beyond these items and other obligations for certain State debts and the salaries of officials specified in the Constitution, the Governor has considerable discretion in determining what programs and agencies to fund in the budget. The budget process thus is a major policy-shaping tool for the Governor. Supplemental budgets may be submitted by the Governor after adoption of the annual budget, but all requests for such funds must be matched by additional anticipated revenues.

JUDICIAL BRANCH

The Judicial Branch is responsible for the resolution of all matters involving civil and criminal law in the State of Maryland. Judges base their decisions on statutory law, common law, or equity. Maryland has a four-tiered court system consisting of the District Court of Maryland, Circuit Courts, the Court of Special Appeals, and the Court of Appeals.

The District Court of Maryland was created in 1971 on a statewide basis in each county and Baltimore City. As a court of limited jurisdiction, it replaced local justices of the peace and county trial magistrates. District Courts have jurisdiction in minor civil and criminal matters and in virtually all violations of the Motor Vehicle Law. District Court judges are appointed by the Governor for ten-year terms.

In each county and in Baltimore City is a Circuit Court. The Circuit Court has original jurisdiction

over more serious criminal and civil cases and also hears appeals from decisions in the District Court. Circuit Court judges are nominated by special judicial selection commissions and appointed by the Governor, or they may be elected by the voters. At the first statewide election occurring at least one year after their appointment, Circuit Court judges must successfully stand for election to continue in office for a term of fifteen years.

The Court of Special Appeals is the second highest court in Maryland. Like the State's highest court, the Court of Special Appeals is an appellate court. It was established in 1966 to ease the caseload of the Court of Appeals and to facilitate resolution of cases requiring appellate adjudication. The thirteen judges of the Court of Special Appeals are appointed by the Governor with Senate consent for ten-year terms, subject to approval of the voters at the next election after their appointment. The Court of Special Appeals has exclusive initial appellate jurisdiction over any reviewable judgment, decree, order, or other action of a circuit court, except for appeals in criminal cases in which the death penalty is imposed.

The Court of Appeals has a long history in Maryland, dating from the seventeenth century and reformed by the first State constitution of 1776. As Maryland's highest court, the Court of Appeals reviews cases of major importance where the decisions rendered are based on constitutional interpretation of the law. The seven judges of the Court of Appeals are appointed by the Governor with Senate consent. They serve ten-year terms. Like judges of the Court of Special Appeals, judges of the Court of Appeals must win approval of the electorate at the first election occurring at least one year after their appointment.

Various units, boards, and commissions exist within the judiciary to facilitate the judicial process and assist judges of the different courts. The Administrative Office of the Courts, for example, assists the Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals in carrying out administrative duties. The Judicial Nominating Commissions present names to the Governor when vacancies occur on any of the appellate or circuit courts. The State Law Library is the principal law reference library in the State. Also within the Judicial Branch are the State Board of Law Examiners, which conducts examinations for prospective members of the State Bar, and the Attorney Grievance Commission, charged with supervising and administering the discipline of attorneys.