

Judge

Twenty years of law first, then you decide. There are only about 27,000 of these jobs in the whole country.

TYPICAL PAY

\$153,990

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$47k to \$222k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

15 to 25 years

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

Courtrooms, chambers, state trial courts, federal courthouses, heari...

How you get there

- 1

High school

English, government, history and debate. Judges read and argue for a living.

Grades 11 and 12
- 2

Bachelor's degree

Any major. Take the LSAT (Law School Admission Test), which is the test every accredited law school accepts.

4 years
- 3

Law school

Three years for a Juris Doctor (JD) degree. Grades, legal writing and law review matter more here than anywhere else.

3 years
- 4

Pass the bar exam

Each state admits its own lawyers. You must be a member in good standing before any bench will consider you.

A few months after law school
- 5

Practice law

Prosecutor, public defender, litigator or government attorney. Most judges have 10 to 20 years behind them.

10 to 20 years
- 6

Elected or appointed

Depending on your state, you either run for the seat or are nominated by a governor, a commission or the president.

Varies

Pros and cons

- +

Among the most respected jobs in the country
- +

Set hours and no billable targets, unlike private practice
- +

You decide the question instead of arguing one side of it
- Fifteen to twenty-five years of law before you are even considered
- Usually a pay cut from private practice
- In many states you campaign and raise money to keep the seat

Good to know

Almost all of it happens in state courts
About 98% of all cases in the country are handled by state courts, and roughly 70 million cases were filed in them in 2024. Federal courts get the attention, but state judges do nearly all of the work.

A federal judge's pay cannot be cut
The Constitution says the salary of an Article III judge may not be reduced while they hold office. It exists so that no president or Congress can punish a judge financially for a ruling they dislike.

Optional boosts

Prosecutor. Public defender. Magistrate or commissioner. City or county attorney.

Where these numbers come from
My Next Move: Judges, Magistrate Judges, and Magistrates (23-1023.00)
United States Courts: types of federal judges
United States Courts: judicial compensation
National Center for State Courts

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/judge>



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