



2025 Government Legal Department Report

Budget, staffing, and technology challenges persist as agencies adjust to a climate of uncertainty and change



Thomson Reuters
Institute

Executive summary

The *2025 Government Legal Department Report* arrives at a pivotal time for government legal professionals. While most lawyers who work for the government (district attorneys, public defenders and county and municipal attorneys) still have confidence in the legal system and feel that their own agencies and departments are “successful,” many are still concerned about how they are going to address the myriad challenges they expect to face in the coming year, including uncertainties surrounding the current administration’s management of the judicial system in general.

Maintaining departmental and agency effectiveness is still a top priority, of course, but government legal professionals still find themselves grappling with many of the same issues year after year. Budget constraints and a chronic talent shortage top the list of perennial challenges, but there are plenty more. Acceptable solutions have been elusive as well, though progress can be seen in some areas — including a willingness to invest in technology when the need, price and budget align.

The vast majority of law departments and agencies at all levels feel that their efforts over the past year have been either successful or very successful.

Overall, the report confirms that government legal professionals and their department/agencies are still working hard (harder than ever in some cases) to fulfill their professional obligations. And despite the many obstacles in their path, they continue to take pride in the quality of their work.

Key findings

- **Challenges:** As in past years, more than half (52%) of government departments and agencies continue to cite the difficulties of attracting, recruiting and retaining quality talent as their top challenge. Other familiar challenges include budget limitations and caseload-management issues. Many attorneys also report being squeezed by an increase in the volume, variety and complexity of their caseload, coupled with lack of time and resources to research complex legal matters. Statistically speaking, however, the situation isn't much different than it was in 2024.
- **Solutions:** To address staffing issues and time constraints, some government legal department/agencies are simply asking staff attorneys to take on more work. Occasionally using outside counsel helps, but budget constraints limit the extent to which many agencies can lean on outsourcing. Many issues remain unresolved, however. Indeed, fewer than one in five department/agencies have figured out how to avoid spending so much time on administrative tasks, how to persuade staff to return to the office or how to deal with their constant budget woes. On the positive side, more than half (54%) of agencies said they have made changes to help demonstrate department value, partly to protect their agency against further cuts.
- **Technology:** Though budget constraints and bureaucracy continue to hamper efforts to improve and upgrade the technology available to government attorneys, 42% of agencies saw increases in tech investment over the past two years. Furthermore, 80% of agency representatives report being confident that they have the tools and technology they need to do their jobs effectively. Nevertheless, about two-thirds (68%) of survey respondents are frustrated that their technology is inferior to private-sector systems. Their wish list for technological upgrades is long, and it includes better matter/case management and scheduling systems. Skepticism about Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) is widespread as well, with only 18% of respondents expressing optimism about the technology's use in government. However, 34% of respondents also said they are either using GenAI already or considering it.
- **Access to Justice:** A majority (54%) of respondents to this year's survey think access to justice has been fairly stable over the past two years, but the rest are split on whether access has increased or decreased over that same period. Pessimism about future access is growing, however. Last year, only 22% of federal/state attorneys thought access to justice would decline in the future, whereas 60% think so now.

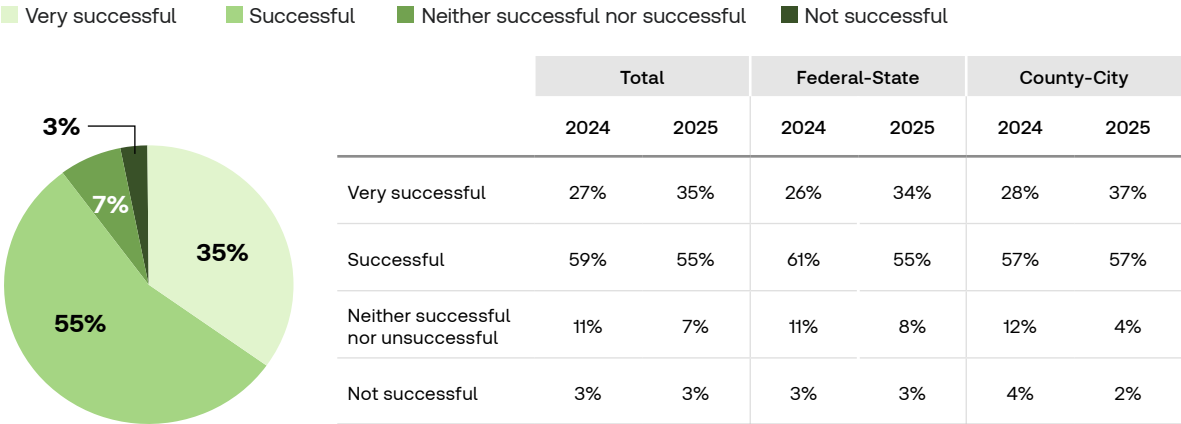
METHODOLOGY

The data in this report was taken from a quantitative survey conducted from March 7-April 3, 2025, by the Thomson Reuters Market Research and Customer Insights team. A total of 150 surveys were completed by legal professionals from various government law departments and agencies, including public defenders, prosecutors, attorneys general, district attorneys and city attorneys. All respondents had been in their position for at least one year.

Of the 150 surveys completed, 26 were from federal staffers, 73 state, 36 county, and 15 municipal (city). In the report, results were separated into two general categories: federal/state and county/city.

The year in review: continued success

FIGURE 1:
Perceptions of agency success over the past year

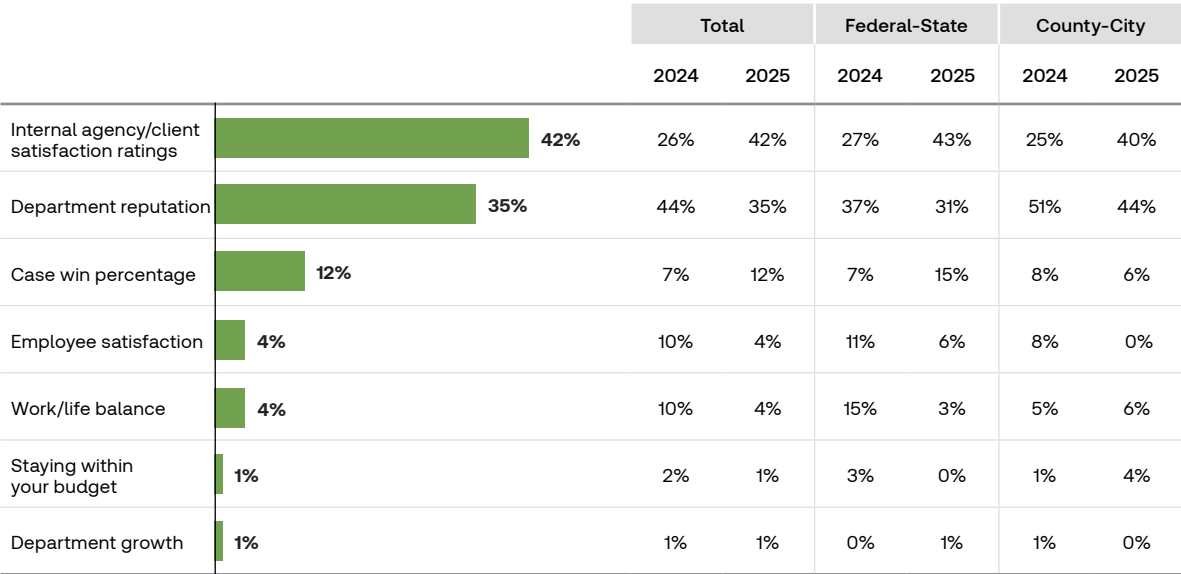


Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

Despite the many challenges facing government legal professionals, the vast majority of law departments and agencies at all levels feel that their efforts over the past year have been either successful (55%) or very successful (35%), similar to last year. Only a tiny percentage (3%) said their agency or department was unsuccessful—a rather clear indication of how much pride and confidence government legal professionals have in the quality of their work.

Measures of success:

FIGURE 2:
Most important agency success metric



Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

Success can be defined and measured in a multitude of ways, however. When asked how *they* define success, most survey respondents said the best measure of success for their agency was “department reputation,” followed by employee satisfaction, client satisfaction ratings and work/life balance.

Interestingly, the overall percentage of respondents who cited the use of internal agency/client satisfaction ratings as a top measure of success jumped from 62% in 2024 to 81% in 2025 at the federal/state level, and rose from 62% to 84% at the county/city level.

Indeed, when asked what their *most important* success metric was, 42% said “internal agency/client satisfaction ratings,” up from 26% in 2024. Meanwhile, “department reputation” dropped in importance an average of nine percentage points (44% down to 35%) from 2024 to 2025.

Respondents seem to believe that while the opinions of stakeholders outside their team are important in defining their success, they appear to be prioritizing objective measures of stakeholder satisfaction over subjective assessments of departmental reputation.

Challenges, pressures and working conditions

FIGURE 3:
Major challenges facing government agencies/departments

		Total			Federal-State			County-City		
		2022	2024	2025	2022	2024	2025	2022	2024	2025
Attracting and retaining top talent	<div><div></div></div> 52%	—	59%	52%	—	62%	53%	—	55%	51%
Too few resources or budget	<div><div></div></div> 50%	59%	45%	50%	56%	50%	53%	61%	41%	45%
Recruiting new talent	<div><div></div></div> 49%	64%	52%	49%	62%	53%	55%	67%	51%	37%
The loss of knowledge due to retiring staff	<div><div></div></div> 46%	60%	55%	46%	68%	58%	51%	49%	53%	37%
Too much time on admin, not enough time practicing law	<div><div></div></div> 39%	—	47%	39%	—	54%	35%	—	41%	45%
Employee satisfaction	<div><div></div></div> 36%	—	39%	36%	—	43%	38%	—	36%	31%
Managing mental health issues (stress, burn out, etc.)	<div><div></div></div> 33%	—	31%	33%	—	28%	36%	—	34%	25%
Lack of internal efficiency	<div><div></div></div> 31%	—	33%	31%	—	32%	28%	—	33%	37%
Adoption and implementation of tech	<div><div></div></div> 31%	52%	35%	31%	54%	38%	29%	49%	33%	33%
Keeping up with new, emerging legal issues	<div><div></div></div> 26%	48%	37%	26%	54%	36%	23%	40%	38%	31%
Increasing complexity of technology	<div><div></div></div> 24%	—	27%	24%	—	34%	23%	—	21%	25%
Increasing pace of legal and regulatory change	<div><div></div></div> 21%	—	17%	21%	—	19%	19%	—	16%	25%
Adoption of AI and AI technologies	<div><div></div></div> 19%	—	—	19%	—	—	18%	—	—	22%
Demonstrating department value	<div><div></div></div> 17%	19%	17%	17%	17%	12%	15%	21%	21%	22%
Cost control and expense growth	<div><div></div></div> 17%	—	14%	17%	—	9%	10%	—	18%	29%
Persuading staff to return to working in the office	<div><div></div></div> 9%	—	8%	9%	—	11%	12%	—	5%	4%
Reducing outside legal costs (outside counsel/vendor)	<div><div></div></div> 8%	14%	12%	8%	9%	8%	4%	21%	16%	16%
Other	<div><div></div></div> 4%	6%	1%	4%	8%	3%	5%	4%	0%	2%

Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

The list of challenges facing government legal departments is long, but once again the most pressing concerns are talent and staffing issues. When asked to name the biggest challenges facing their department, three out of the top four responses this year were talent-related: attracting and retaining top talent (52%), recruiting new talent (49%) and loss of institutional knowledge due to retiring staff (46%). Another perennial challenge—lack of resources and budget—was also included in the top four.

Rounding out the top 10 challenges were:

- spending too much time on administrative tasks
- employee satisfaction
- managing mental health issues (stress, burnout, etc.)
- lack of internal efficiency
- adoption and implementation of new technology

Compared to 2024, however, federal/state agencies are somewhat less burdened by time spent on administrative tasks (35% vs. 54% in 2024). And at the county/city level, loss of institutional knowledge is less of an issue (37% vs. 53% in 2024), due perhaps to retirements that have already occurred. Overall, agencies also report having less trouble keeping up with emerging legal issues than they did last year.

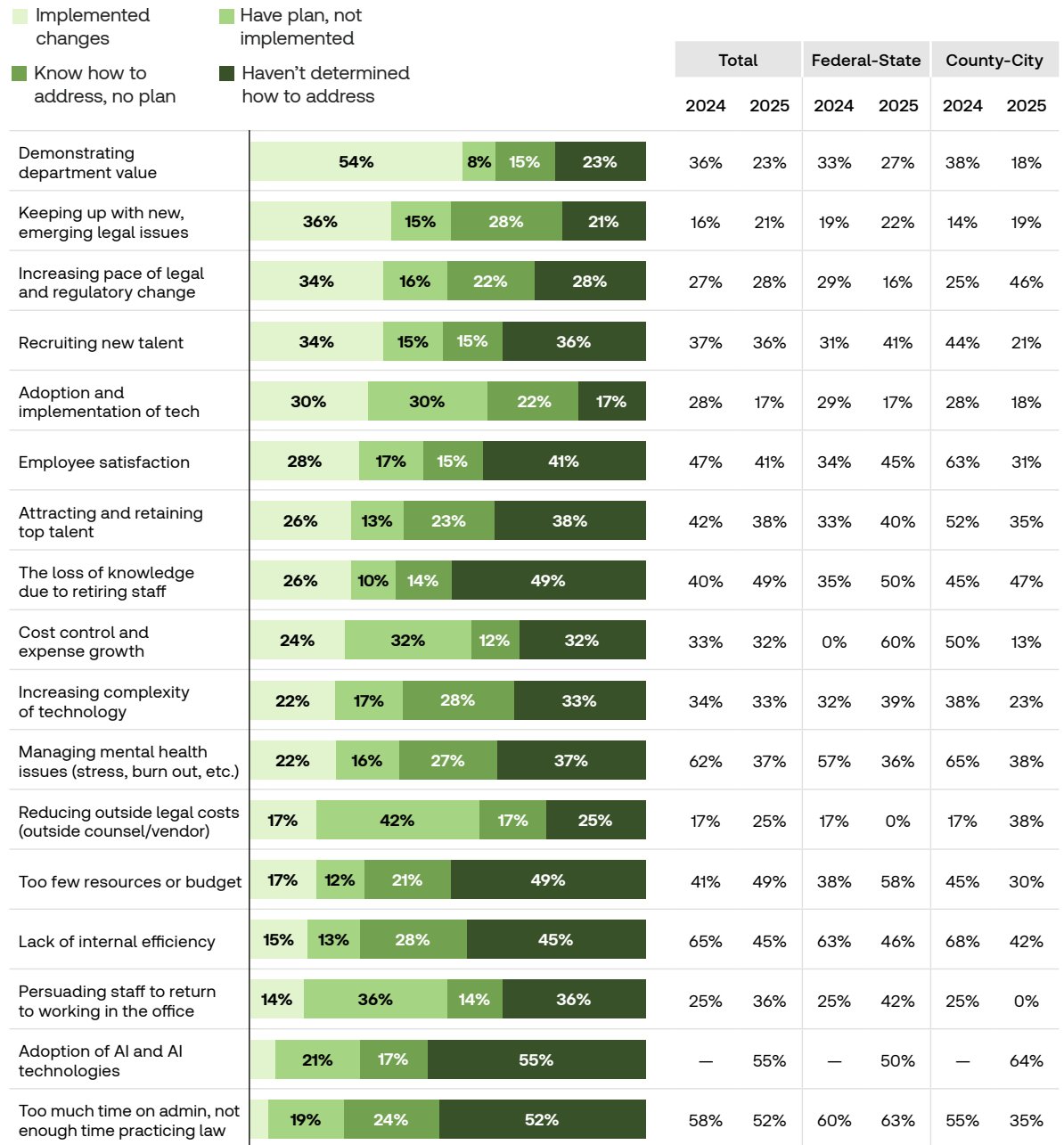
Addressing challenges: How (and whether) an agency responds to challenges is yet another measure of its success, albeit one that involves several moving targets. Some agencies have implemented changes to address many of the challenges noted above, for example, but others are caught in the quicksand of perpetual stasis. Either they have a plan but haven't implemented it, they know how to address the issue but have no plan to fix it or they simply don't yet know what to do.

"I think our biggest challenge will be the new administration's requirement that we reduce our staff and that we are not able to hire individuals to backfill those positions. Our agency is already understaffed and under-resourced."

Survey respondent

FIGURE 4:

How well dept/agencies addressing challenges?



Percent "Haven't determined how to address"

Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

For example, more than half (54%) of agencies said they have made changes to help demonstrate department value. However, few (5%) have figured out how to avoid spending so much time on administrative tasks, how to persuade staff to return to the office (14%) or how to deal with budget woes (17%). In many cases, one-third or more of the survey's respondents said their department/agency had not determined how to address the challenges they face, while others were still formulating plans.

Some issues, such as cost control, are more intransigent at the federal/state level, where 60% of respondents said their agency had not determined how to address the issue (compared to 13% at the county/city level). Likewise, federal/state agencies are more likely to say they have not found a solution for spending too much time on administrative tasks (63% vs. 35%).

On the positive side, compared to 2024, federal/state agencies are now more likely to have determined how to address their lack of resources and budget (58% vs. 38% in 2024). And at the county/city level, strides have been made to address employee satisfaction and lack of internal efficiency.

Major issues:

FIGURE 5:

Major issues over the next year

			Total			Federal-State			County-City		
			2022	2024	2025	2022	2024	2025	2022	2024	2025
Budget cuts	<div><div></div></div> 23%	14%	16%	23%	10%	16%	19%	19%	16%	29%	
Attorney/staff turnover/ retention/ hiring/Adequate staffing	<div><div></div></div> 21%	50%	40%	21%	49%	36%	23%	51%	43%	16%	
Case load management/volume of work/ burnout/job dissatisfaction/low morale	<div><div></div></div> 16%	15%	21%	16%	17%	22%	12%	12%	20%	24%	
Pace of regulatory changes/ changes in laws/more novel issues	<div><div></div></div> 14%	21%	21%	14%	23%	24%	15%	19%	17%	12%	
Lack of funding/resources	<div><div></div></div> 13%	5%	17%	13%	5%	15%	11%	5%	18%	16%	
Unstable political climate/government/ parties/acting outside their authority	<div><div></div></div> 12%	7%	3%	12%	9%	3%	14%	5%	3%	8%	
Leadership/administration creating challenges/ changes/shifts in priorities	<div><div></div></div> 9%	—	9%	9%	—	7%	11%	—	12%	6%	
Retirement of attorneys/senior staff/ succession planning/loss of knowledge	<div><div></div></div> 7%	9%	9%	7%	10%	9%	7%	7%	9%	6%	
Technology challenges/ implementing new systems	<div><div></div></div> 6%	13%	9%	6%	12%	12%	5%	14%	7%	8%	
Uncompetitive salaries negatively impacting recruitment and retention	<div><div></div></div> 5%	7%	7%	5%	6%	7%	6%	7%	7%	4%	
AI implementation concerns	<div><div></div></div> 4%	—	7%	4%	—	7%	3%	—	7%	6%	
Election issues/litigation	<div><div></div></div> 3%	—	5%	3%	—	0%	4%	—	9%	0%	
Criticism of our work/hostility from elected officials/courts	<div><div></div></div> 1%	—	4%	1%	—	7%	1%	—	1%	2%	
Remote work/telework challenges	<div><div></div></div> 1%	6%	1%	1%	8%	1%	2%	4%	1%	0%	
Need more efficiency/ streamlined processes	<div><div></div></div> 1%	—	7%	1%	—	8%	1%	—	7%	0%	
Training/onboarding new employees	<div><div></div></div> 1%	3%	2%	1%	1%	1%	0%	5%	3%	2%	

Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

While several major issues are exerting pressure on agencies, making it more difficult to operate, no single issue stood out this year. Budget cuts topped the list, followed by staffing issues, caseload/workload management, the pace of regulatory change and lack of resources. The current political climate and changing leadership priorities also topped the list of concerns.

Interestingly, several perennial challenges barely registered as issues that department/agencies felt were going to affect their work in the coming year. Loss of institutional knowledge due to retiring staff only got mentioned as a major issue by 7% of respondents. Likewise, technology challenges (6%), compensation issues (5%), AI concerns (4%) and election issues (3%) were not considered major issues either.

Workloads:

FIGURE 6:
Individual legal matters worked on per week

		Total			Federal-State			County-City		
		2022	2024	2025	2022	2024	2025	2022	2024	2025
1-10	<div><div></div></div> 43%	39%	32%	43%	46%	45%	55%	28%	20%	22%
11-20	<div><div></div></div> 22%	26%	30%	22%	22%	24%	18%	32%	36%	29%
21-50	<div><div></div></div> 27%	28%	30%	27%	26%	22%	21%	32%	38%	37%
51-100	<div><div></div></div> 6%	4%	5%	6%	4%	4%	6%	5%	7%	6%
More than 100	<div><div></div></div> 2%	3%	3%	2%	3%	5%	0%	4%	0%	6%
Average		35.7	28.5	24.2	24.9	32.2	19.5	50.5	24.9	33.4
Median		20.0	17.5	15.0	13.5	15.0	10.0	20.0	20.0	20.0

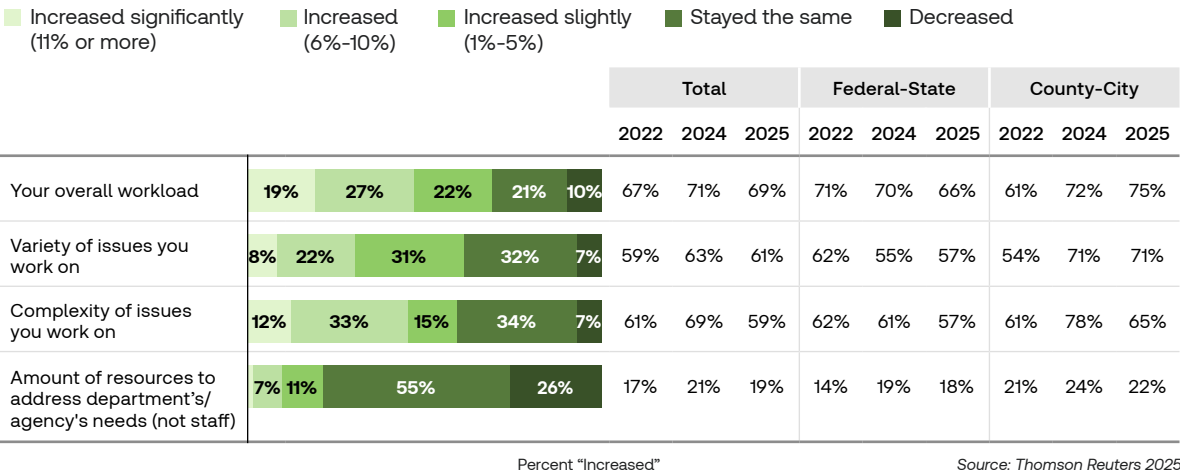
Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

Increasing caseloads and overall workloads are among the top issues survey respondents said are affecting their department/agency, and it’s not hard to see why. Forty-three percent of respondents report working on 1-10 legal matters per week, but 22% work on 11-20 legal matters per week. At the higher end, 27% said they handle 21-50 matters per week, and some (6%) manage up to 100 matters per week, or 20 matters per day. There are also a rare few (2%) who somehow manage more than 100 legal matters every week, a level that inspires equal amounts of admiration and pity.

Federal/state agency representatives are more likely than county/city attorneys to work on 10 or fewer matters per week (55% vs. 22%), whereas county/city attorneys are more likely to work on more than 100 (6% vs. 0%).

Scarce resources:

FIGURE 7:
Workload changes over the past two years

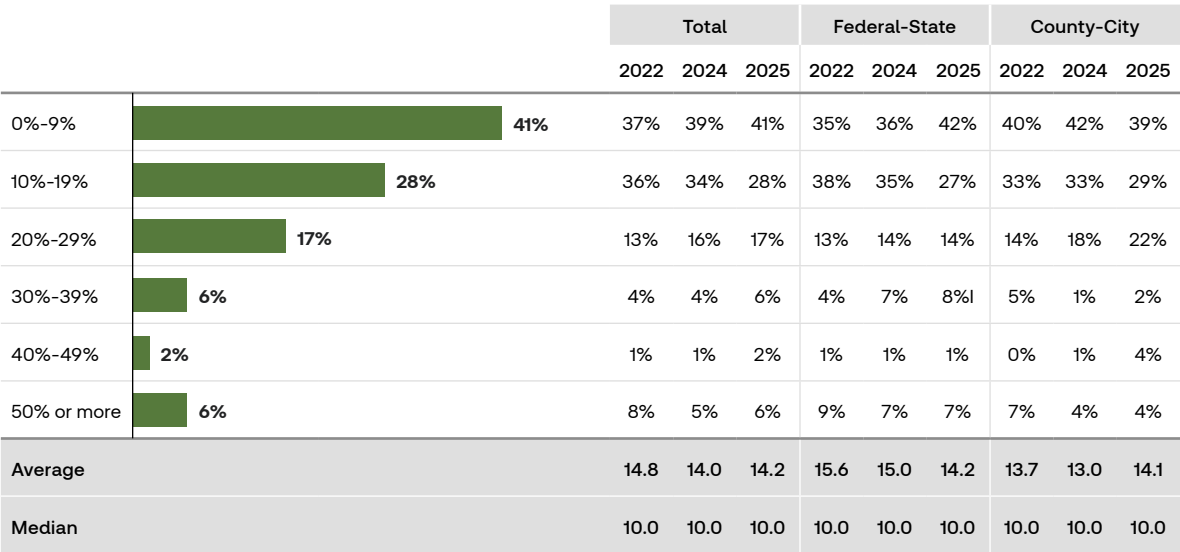


Not only have workloads increased in terms of volume, but the complexity and variety of issues have increased as well. Unfortunately, these increases in the volume, complexity and variety of legal matters have not been accompanied by corresponding increases in available non-staff resources.

While 46% of respondents report that their overall workload has either increased or increased significantly, only 19% said they had received an increase in non-staff resources over the past two years. Most (55%) saw no change in non-staff resources and 26% experienced a decrease.

Case complexity/variety:

FIGURE 8:
Percentage of novel issues dealt with per week



An increase in the variety of legal matters can also be complicated by the fact that some of those matters may involve complex or novel areas of the law that require attorneys to do additional research.

In general, novel legal issues account for fewer than 20% of cases. However, 31% of survey respondents reported that more than 20% of their caseload involves novel issues, and a small cohort—about one in 20 (6%)—deals with novel legal matters more than half the time.

FIGURE 9:
What percentage of legal research issues are complex?

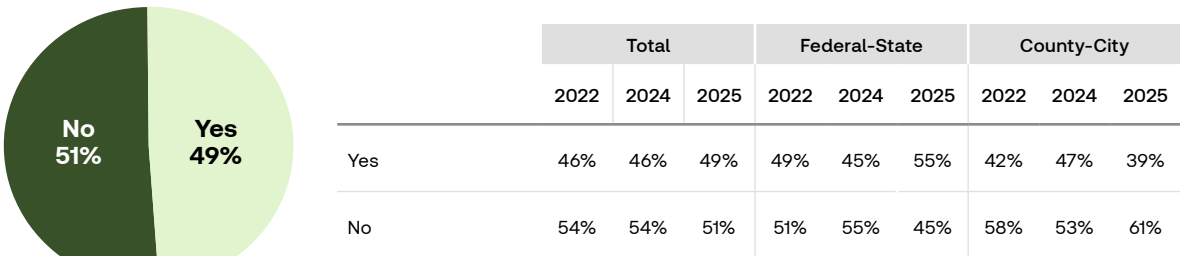
		Total			Federal-State			County-City		
		2022	2024	2025	2022	2024	2025	2022	2024	2025
0%-9%	11%	16%	21%	11%	17%	22%	10%	14%	21%	12%
10%-19%	21%	19%	14%	21%	17%	14%	21%	21%	14%	22%
20%-29%	20%	15%	13%	20%	13%	15%	20%	18%	11%	20%
30%-39%	7%	6%	7%	7%	6%	5%	4%	5%	8%	14%
40%-49%	4%	4%	3%	4%	4%	3%	5%	4%	3%	2%
50% or more	37%	41%	43%	37%	44%	42%	39%	39%	43%	31%
Average		37.2	37.8	36.7	38.3	39.0	38.6	35.7	36.6	33.1
Median		30.0	30.0	25.0	31.5	27.5	25.0	25.0	34.0	25.0

Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

The complexity of an attorney’s caseload also affects how they spend their time and how much background research they need to do. More than a third (37%) of respondents said 50% or more of their caseload qualifies as complex, whereas more than half (52%) said less than 30% of their caseload is complex.

Research time:

FIGURE 10:
Do attorneys have enough time to thoroughly research new/complex issues?

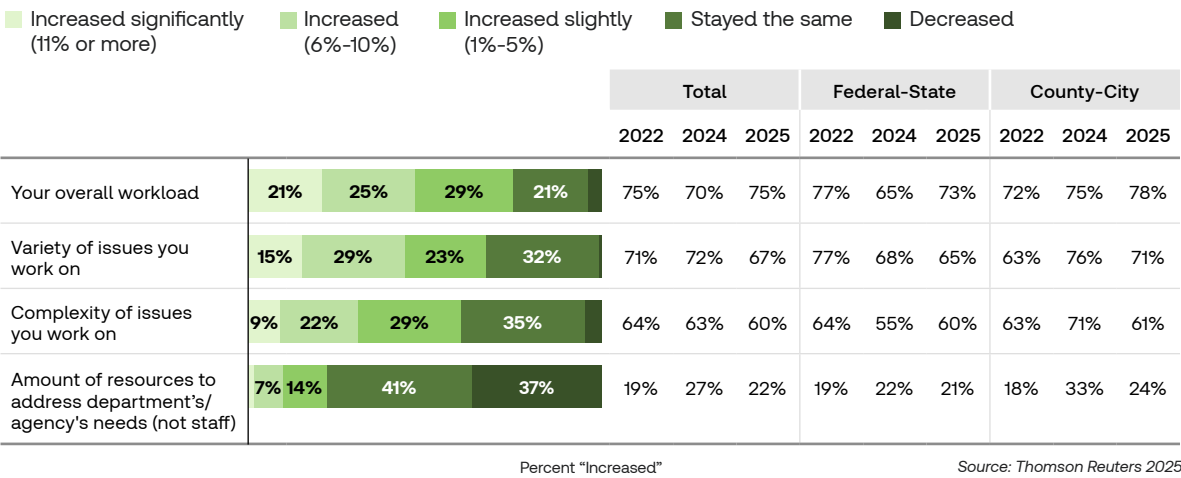


Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

Regardless of the novelty or complexity of the cases involved, attorneys are evenly split on whether they have enough time to conduct the research necessary to handle these cases. Forty-nine percent said they *do* have the time and 51% said they *don't*. However, federal/state attorneys are more likely to say they have the time they need, and county/city attorneys are more likely to say they don't.

More of the same:

FIGURE 11:
Expected workload changes over the next two years



For those with fewer resources and less time, the situation is unlikely to improve anytime soon. The volume, complexity and variety of legal work are all expected to increase somewhat in the next two years, and only one in five (22%) respondents expects to see an increase in non-staff resources.

Meanwhile, 75% of respondents expect their overall workload to increase over the next two years. Two-thirds (67%) expect the complexity of their work to increase over the same period, and 60% expect the variety of issues they work on to increase. These results are not much different from the results of our 2024 survey, which just confirms that these patterns are systemically entrenched and that expectations for change are relatively low.

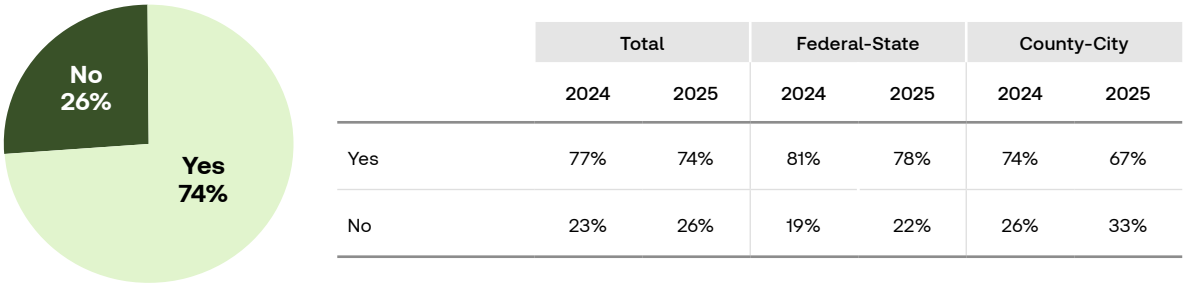
“We want to continue to heavily recruit young, talented law students through our internship program and get them interested and involved in our work, so hopefully they will want to continue along the path in public service and prosecution.”

Survey respondent

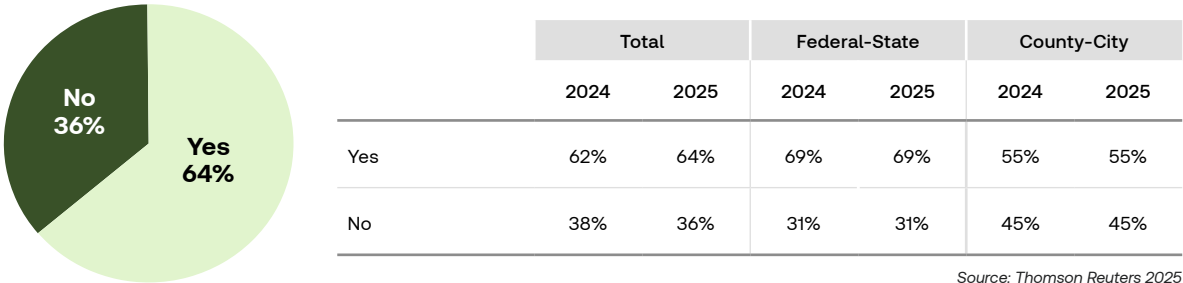
Tackling the No. 1 challenge: talent and staffing

Consistent with past years, the top challenge government legal leaders say they are facing is the difficulty of attracting and retaining top talent. These obstacles too are systemic: Government legal departments simply don’t pay as much as law firms in the private sector, and the steady drumbeat of budget cuts and increasing workloads is a deterrent that is difficult to overcome. Loss of institutional knowledge due to retirements is also a factor.

FIGURE 12:
Have you experienced staffing shortages in the past two years?



Do you anticipate staffing shortages in the next 12 months?



Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

Not much has changed in the past year, either, which is to say that three-quarters (74%) of survey respondents report experiencing ongoing staff shortages, and almost two-thirds (64%) expect this trend to continue.

Staffing levels:

FIGURE 13:
Changes in attorney staff over the past two years

		Total		Federal-State		County-City	
		2024	2025	2024	2025	2024	2025
Increased significantly (11% or more)	<div><div></div></div> 8%	8%	8%	8%	7%	8%	10%
Increased (6-10%)	<div><div></div></div> 8%	11%	8%	9%	6%	12%	12%
Increased slightly (1-5%)	<div><div></div></div> 19%	21%	19%	26%	21%	16%	14%
Stayed the Same	<div><div></div></div> 45%	32%	45%	23%	40%	41%	53%
Decreased slightly (1-5%)	<div><div></div></div> 10%	14%	10%	18%	14%	11%	2%
Decreased (6-10%)	<div><div></div></div> 6%	5%	6%	5%	6%	5%	6%
Decreased significantly (11% or more)	<div><div></div></div> 5%	9%	5%	11%	5%	8%	4%
Increase (net)	<div><div></div></div> 35%	39%	35%	43%	34%	36%	35%
Decrease (net)	<div><div></div></div> 21%	29%	21%	34%	25%	24%	12%

Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

Current and future staffing shortages extend a trend that has been relatively consistent over the past couple of years. Just under half (45%) of agencies say their staffing levels have not changed much over the past two years, and 21% saw a decline in staffing over the same period. Federal/state agencies were more likely than county/city agencies to have seen either no change in staffing or a decrease.

On the positive side, 35% of agencies say they *increased* attorney staff over the past two years, a sign that at least some priorities are receiving additional resources.

FIGURE 14:
Expected changes in attorney staff over the next 12 months

		Total		Federal-State		County-City	
		2024	2025	2024	2025	2024	2025
Increased significantly (11% or more)	<div><div></div></div> 2%	1%	2%	3%	2%	0%	2%
Increased (6-10%)	<div><div></div></div> 4%	8%	4%	8%	3%	8%	6%
Increased slightly (1-5%)	<div><div></div></div> 13%	25%	13%	28%	11%	21%	16%
Stayed the Same	<div><div></div></div> 57%	51%	57%	46%	54%	55%	63%
Decreased slightly (1-5%)	<div><div></div></div> 15%	9%	15%	8%	17%	9%	10%
Decreased (6-10%)	<div><div></div></div> 3%	5%	3%	5%	4%	4%	2%
Decreased significantly (11% or more)	<div><div></div></div> 7%	2%	7%	1%	9%	3%	2%
Increase (net)	<div><div></div></div> 19%	34%	19%	39%	16%	29%	24%
Decrease (net)	<div><div></div></div> 25%	15%	25%	15%	30%	16%	14%

Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

More than half (57%) of the agencies represented also expect their staffing levels to stay about the same over the next two years, though concern about potential cuts is certainly in the air.

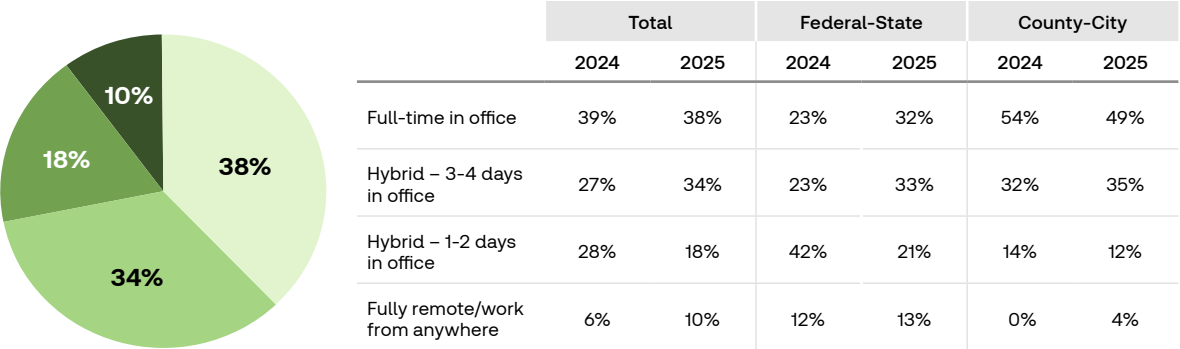
Among those who expect change, opinions are split on whether staffing levels will increase or decrease in the next couple of years, though federal/state agencies are more likely to expect a decrease than county/city agencies (30% vs. 14%, respectively).

“It’s hard to hire, attract and keep talent against much more market-friendly and attorney-friendly salaries and workloads,” lamented one respondent—a sentiment echoed by many others.

Hybrid work models:

FIGURE 15:
Current working environment

Full-time in office Hybrid – 3-4 days in office Hybrid – 1-2 days in office Fully remote/work from anywhere



Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

Since the pandemic, one tactic intended to accommodate the desires of a younger workforce is the continuation of remote and hybrid work models. Unlike the private sector, there has been no dramatic push to get government attorneys back in the office more often, though support for hybrid models that only require one or two days in the office appears to be waning somewhat.

Currently, full-time office work is the norm at 38% of reporting agencies, while about a third (34%) of agencies support a hybrid model requiring at least three or four days in the office. Overall, only 18% agencies are allowing hybrid work that only puts people in the office one or two days a week, down from an average of 28% in 2024. Federal/state agencies are much less likely to support a lighter in-office load than they did in 2024 (21% vs. 42% in 2024), and more likely to have staff in the office full time.

Outsourcing:

FIGURE 16:
Frequency of working with outside counsel

		Total			Federal-State			County-City		
		2022	2024	2025	2022	2024	2025	2022	2024	2025
Weekly or more often	<div><div></div></div> 21%	24%	23%	21%	21%	22%	19%	28%	24%	24%
Every month	<div><div></div></div> 12%	8%	13%	12%	8%	8%	11%	9%	17%	14%
Several times per year	<div><div></div></div> 15%	22%	24%	15%	21%	19%	12%	25%	29%	20%
Once a year or some years not at all	<div><div></div></div> 27%	24%	23%	27%	23%	24%	27%	25%	21%	25%
Never	<div><div></div></div> 26%	22%	18%	26%	28%	27%	30%	14%	9%	18%

Percentage of legal work sourced to outside firms

		Total			Federal-State			County-City		
		2022	2024	2025	2022	2024	2025	2022	2024	2025
0%	<div><div></div></div> 40%	41%	29%	40%	51%	38%	46%	28%	20%	27%
1 - 10%	<div><div></div></div> 30%	25%	45%	30%	15%	41%	25%	39%	49%	39%
11 - 20%	<div><div></div></div> 9%	10%	9%	9%	12%	3%	6%	9%	16%	16%
21 - 30%	<div><div></div></div> 5%	5%	5%	5%	1%	3%	3%	11%	7%	10%
31 - 40%	<div><div></div></div> 1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%	2%	3%	0%
41 - 50%	<div><div></div></div> 1%	0%	1%	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%
More than 50%	<div><div></div></div> 0%	1%	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	3%	0%
Not sure	<div><div></div></div> 14%	16%	9%	14%	18%	16%	17%	12%	3%	8%

Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

Another strategy for dealing with the chronic talent shortage is the use of outside counsel to fill skill gaps. Budget constraints prevent many agencies from regularly outsourcing work, but 48% of agencies report using outside counsel at least several times per year, and 21% say they rely on outside counsel every week.

Overall, however, the percentage of work sourced to outside firms is relatively low. Forty percent say they don’t outsource any work at all, and of those agencies that do use outside counsel, 30% estimate that less than 10% of their work is outsourced.

In general, federal/state agencies are less likely to outsource matters than county/city agencies. The rate of outsourcing has also decreased. Compared to 2024, agencies are now more likely to never outsource (26% vs. 18% in 2024), and less likely to outsource several times a year (15% vs. 24% in 2024).

FIGURE 17:
Change in legal services provided by outside law firms in the past two years

		Total			Federal-State			County-City		
		2022	2024	2025	2022	2024	2025	2022	2024	2025
Increased significantly (greater than 6%)	<div><div></div></div> 5%	2%	7%	5%	1%	1%	3%	4%	12%	8%
Increased (1-5%)	<div><div></div></div> 9%	10%	15%	9%	10%	9%	8%	11%	21%	12%
Stayed the Same	<div><div></div></div> 62%	59%	54%	62%	56%	64%	62%	63%	45%	63%
Decreased (1-5%)	<div><div></div></div> 3%	5%	10%	3%	4%	7%	1%	7%	13%	6%
Decreased significantly (greater than 6%)	<div><div></div></div> 3%	1%	4%	3%	3%	7%	3%	0%	1%	2%
Not sure	<div><div></div></div> 19%	21%	10%	19%	26%	12%	23%	16%	8%	10%

Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

That said, nearly two-thirds of reporting agencies (62%) say their current level of outsourcing has remained relatively consistent over the past two years, whereas 19% aren't sure how much work at their agency has been outsourced.

FIGURE 18:
Expected change in legal services provided by outside law firms in the next 12 months

		Total		Federal-State		County-City	
		2024	2025	2024	2025	2024	2025
Increased significantly (greater than 6%)	<div><div></div></div> 3%	2%	3%	3%	2%	1%	4%
Increased (1-5%)	<div><div></div></div> 10%	14%	10%	12%	9%	16%	12%
Stayed the Same	<div><div></div></div> 65%	63%	65%	61%	63%	66%	69%
Decreased (1-5%)	<div><div></div></div> 3%	7%	3%	5%	1%	9%	8%
Decreased significantly (greater than 6%)	<div><div></div></div> 2%	3%	2%	5%	3%	1%	0%
Not sure	<div><div></div></div> 17%	10%	17%	14%	22%	7%	8%

Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

Furthermore, 65% expect their agency's level of outsourcing to remain the same in the coming year. Only 13% expect their outsourcing level to increase either slightly (10%) or significantly (3%).

Technology adoption

Government agencies are notoriously slow to adopt new technologies and typically lag the private sector in updating their existing technologies. Budget constraints are the biggest barrier, yet four in 10 agencies also saw increases in technology investment over the past two years, so there is some evidence that budgets can indeed budge.

FIGURE 19:
Agency/department technology compared to private sector

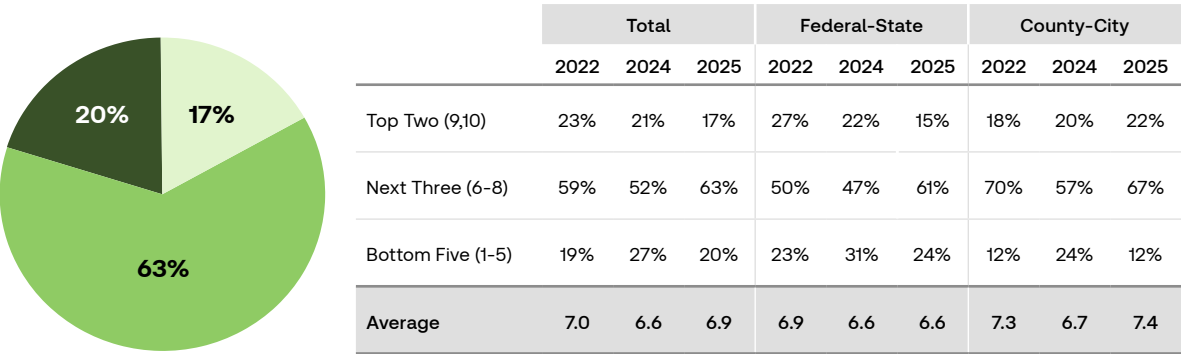
		Total			Federal-State			County-City		
		2022	2024	2025	2022	2024	2025	2022	2024	2025
Better than private sector	<div><div></div></div> 7%	10%	9%	7%	10%	4%	4%	9%	14%	12%
At par with private sector	<div><div></div></div> 21%	30%	28%	21%	27%	27%	17%	33%	29%	27%
Below private sector	<div><div></div></div> 51%	36%	40%	51%	38%	47%	55%	33%	33%	43%
Far below private sector	<div><div></div></div> 17%	21%	19%	17%	21%	18%	18%	21%	21%	16%
Not sure	<div><div></div></div> 5%	4%	3%	5%	4%	4%	6%	4%	3%	2%

Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

Still, two-thirds (68%) of respondents say their technology is inferior to private-sector systems, a tick upward since 2024.

FIGURE 20:
Confidence in having the necessary tools and technology

Top Two (9,10) Next Three (6-8) Bottom Five (1-5)



Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

Despite these shortcomings, 80% of agency respondents say they are moderately or highly confident they have the technological tools they need to do their jobs effectively and efficiently. In general, those in federal/state agencies feel they are getting the shorter end of the technology stick than county/city agencies and are somewhat less confident they have the tech tools they need, but only 20% of agencies rated their agency’s technology a “5” or less on a scale of 10.

Tech investment:

FIGURE 21:
Change in technology investment over the past two years

		Total			Federal-State			County-City		
		2022	2024	2025	2022	2024	2025	2022	2024	2025
Increased significantly (greater than 10%)	<div><div></div></div> 10%	9%	9%	10%	8%	8%	9%	11%	9%	12%
Increased (1-10%)	<div><div></div></div> 32%	30%	36%	32%	29%	35%	29%	30%	37%	37%
Stayed the Same	<div><div></div></div> 37%	39%	38%	37%	36%	36%	36%	44%	39%	37%
Decreased (1-10%)	<div><div></div></div> 8%	1%	6%	8%	3%	4%	8%	0%	8%	8%
Decreased significantly (greater than 10%)	<div><div></div></div> 4%	0%	1%	4%	0%	0%	5%	0%	1%	2%
Not sure	<div><div></div></div> 9%	21%	11%	9%	24%	16%	12%	16%	5%	4%

Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

Investment in new technology is apparently a priority at many agencies, however. Indeed, 32% of respondents say their agency’s tech investment has increased somewhat over the past two years, and 10% say it has increased “significantly” (i.e., greater than 10%). Tech investment has fallen most at the federal/state level, where 5% of agencies saw a decrease in tech funding of greater than 10%—a significant change given that in the past two years, no federal/state agencies reported cuts in their tech spend.

Tech usage:

FIGURE 22:

Technology systems used

■ Currently use
 ■ Plan to install
 ■ Don't use, don't plan to install
 ■ Not sure

		Total			Federal-State			County-City		
		2022	2024	2025	2022	2024	2025	2022	2024	2025
Document management	<div><div style="width: 65%;">65%</div><div style="width: 7%;">7%</div><div style="width: 18%;">18%</div><div style="width: 10%;">10%</div></div>	59%	71%	65%	63%	74%	64%	54%	67%	67%
Matter management	<div><div style="width: 50%;">50%</div><div style="width: 27%;">27%</div><div style="width: 21%;">21%</div></div>	55%	47%	50%	55%	45%	47%	54%	49%	55%
Document automation	<div><div style="width: 34%;">34%</div><div style="width: 10%;">10%</div><div style="width: 33%;">33%</div><div style="width: 23%;">23%</div></div>	41%	46%	34%	41%	45%	34%	40%	47%	33%
Public Records/FOIA request management	<div><div style="width: 30%;">30%</div><div style="width: 40%;">40%</div><div style="width: 25%;">25%</div></div>	47%	49%	30%	49%	54%	32%	46%	45%	25%
Knowledge management	<div><div style="width: 29%;">29%</div><div style="width: 33%;">33%</div><div style="width: 34%;">34%</div></div>	33%	33%	29%	32%	35%	29%	33%	32%	29%
Matter budgeting and cost tracking	<div><div style="width: 27%;">27%</div><div style="width: 33%;">33%</div><div style="width: 37%;">37%</div></div>	—	33%	27%	—	31%	29%	—	34%	22%
Contract management	<div><div style="width: 23%;">23%</div><div style="width: 38%;">38%</div><div style="width: 33%;">33%</div></div>	33%	26%	23%	33%	24%	27%	32%	28%	14%
APIs to third party systems	<div><div style="width: 13%;">13%</div><div style="width: 39%;">39%</div><div style="width: 47%;">47%</div></div>	—	13%	13%	—	14%	13%	—	13%	12%
Paid software/online sol'n that incorporates GenAI	<div><div style="width: 12%;">12%</div><div style="width: 56%;">56%</div><div style="width: 27%;">27%</div></div>	—	—	12%	—	—	12%	—	—	12%
AI Legal Assistant such as CoCounsel or Lexis Protégé	<div><div style="width: 9%;">9%</div><div style="width: 61%;">61%</div><div style="width: 26%;">26%</div></div>	—	—	9%	—	—	8%	—	—	10%
Open-source generative AI tools such as ChatGPT	<div><div style="width: 9%;">9%</div><div style="width: 61%;">61%</div><div style="width: 23%;">23%</div></div>	—	—	9%	—	—	5%	—	—	16%

Percent "Currently Use"

Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

As for what kinds of technology governments use most, the clear winners are document- and matter-management systems, followed by document automation and software to assist with Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)/public records requests.

More than half of all agencies have document- and matter-management systems in place, but if a system isn't already up and functioning, fewer than one in 10 agencies plans to install a new one.

Usage of FOIA software has declined somewhat from 2024, with 32% of federal/state agencies saying they use it now (vs. 54% in 2024). county/city agencies have seen a significant decline in FOIA usage as well, from 45% in 2024 to 25% in 2025.

The wish list:

FIGURE 23:
What technology solution do you most wish you had?

		Total			Federal-State			County-City		
		2022	2024	2025	2022	2024	2025	2022	2024	2025
Drafting documents	<div></div> 11%	8%	13%	11%	6%	11%	8%	11%	16%	16%
Matter/case management	<div></div> 9%	6%	8%	9%	9%	11%	11%	2%	5%	4%
Conducting legal research	<div></div> 7%	10%	6%	7%	9%	8%	7%	11%	4%	8%
Discovery	<div></div> 7%	13%	8%	7%	12%	7%	6%	16%	9%	10%
Evidence management	<div></div> 7%	6%	5%	7%	6%	5%	4%	5%	5%	14%
Document review*	<div></div> 7%	—	—	7%	—	—	6%	—	—	8%
Document management	<div></div> 6%	7%	10%	6%	10%	14%	7%	4%	7%	4%
Document automation	<div></div> 5%	3%	5%	5%	3%	5%	5%	4%	5%	6%
Scheduling	<div></div> 4%	4%	2%	4%	5%	1%	6%	4%	3%	0%
Task management	<div></div> 4%	5%	5%	4%	6%	5%	4%	4%	5%	4%
Time tracking	<div></div> 4%	1%	3%	4%	1%	1%	5%	2%	4%	2%
Analytics/reporting	<div></div> 3%	3%	5%	3%	0%	5%	4%	7%	4%	2%
Contract compliance*	<div></div> 3%	—	—	3%	—	—	2%	—	—	6%
None	<div></div> 10%	6%	4%	10%	8%	0%	11%	4%	8%	8%
Not sure	<div></div> 10%	15%	13%	10%	12%	12%	10%	19%	14%	10%

*New item in 2025

Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

The agency wish list for additional technologies is long, but no single system stood out as a must-have priority. The wish list includes technology for:










- drafting documents
 - matter/case management
 - legal research
 - discovery
 - evidence management
- document review
 - document management
 - document automation
 - scheduling
 - task management
- time tracking
 - analytics/reporting
 - contract compliance

In general, federal/state agencies are more likely to wish for matter/case management and scheduling systems, whereas county/city agencies are more likely to want evidence management systems. In 2024, however, no federal/state agencies identified a technology they specifically wished for, whereas 11% did in 2025.

Barriers to tech:

FIGURE 24:

Barriers to adopting new technology

		Total			Federal-State			County-City		
		2022	2024	2025	2022	2024	2025	2022	2024	2025
Budget/cost	 81%	79%	76%	81%	74%	74%	79%	84%	78%	84%
Approval/bureaucracy	 57%	53%	53%	57%	56%	64%	58%	47%	42%	57%
Technology not designed for Government agencies	 53%	52%	50%	53%	53%	50%	52%	51%	50%	55%
Security concerns	 45%	48%	33%	45%	50%	43%	47%	46%	22%	41%
Difficulty changing processes	 35%	32%	38%	35%	31%	34%	35%	33%	42%	35%
Employee resistance to change	 29%	27%	27%	29%	22%	27%	19%	33%	28%	47%
Time to learn	 27%	31%	26%	27%	21%	19%	20%	46%	33%	41%
Technology not developed enough	 15%	—	15%	15%	—	14%	15%	—	16%	16%
Not sure	 5%	7%	4%	5%	8%	7%	5%	5%	1%	4%

Source: Thomson Reuters 2025






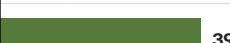
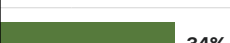
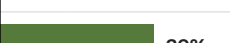




Not surprisingly, lean budgets and rising costs are the biggest barriers to adoption of new technology, with 81% citing them as the primary obstacles. More than half (57%) also indicated that a highly bureaucratic approval process made permission to purchase new technology difficult to obtain. Fifty-three percent also noted that much of the technology developed by third parties in the private sector are not designed to meet the needs of government agencies. Forty-five percent cited security concerns.

Interestingly, county/city agencies are much more likely than federal/state agencies to mention employee **resistance to change** as a barrier to new-technology adoption (47% vs. 19%). County/city agencies are also more likely to cite lack of time to learn as an obstacle, and they appear to face more challenges to new-tech adoption overall.

Purchasing factors:

FIGURE 25:

Motivations for adopting new technology

		Total			Federal-State			County-City		
		2022	2024	2025	2022	2024	2025	2022	2024	2025
Low cost/ reasonable price	 57%	52%	52%	57%	45%	43%	52%	61%	61%	67%
More efficient/save time	 53%	56%	57%	53%	47%	50%	52%	68%	64%	57%
Save money/cost efficient	 45%	54%	47%	45%	49%	45%	44%	61%	50%	45%
Easier to use than current process	 41%	40%	47%	41%	35%	36%	35%	47%	58%	51%
If it was mandated	 41%	49%	37%	41%	51%	47%	43%	46%	28%	35%
If the product meets our needs	 39%	44%	41%	39%	42%	35%	39%	47%	46%	37%
If it integrated with existing systems/tools*	 34%	—	—	34%	—	—	30%	—	—	41%
If something happened to trigger the need	 30%	37%	31%	30%	41%	43%	31%	32%	18%	27%
Requests from your partner agencies	 9%	8%	10%	9%	8%	14%	7%	9%	7%	12%
Requests from the public	 4%	6%	7%	4%	8%	4%	4%	4%	9%	4%
Other	 2%	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%	2%	2%	1%	2%
Not sure	 5%	8%	3%	5%	9%	5%	5%	7%	1%	4%

*New item in 2025

Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

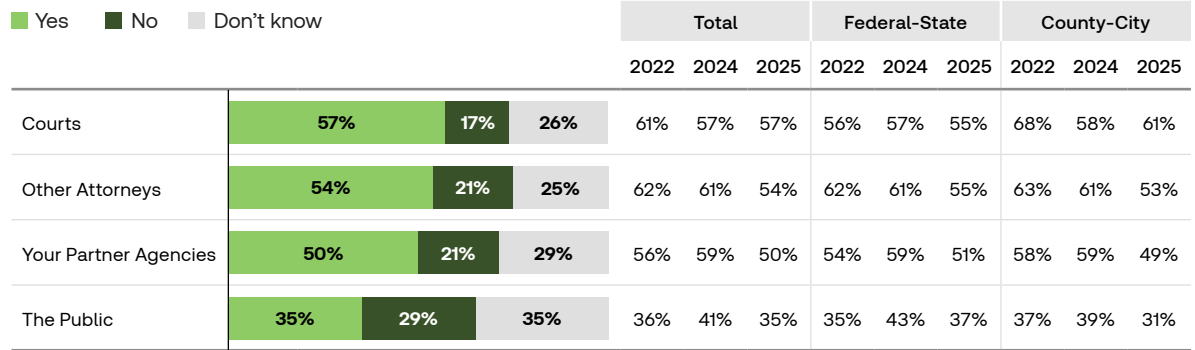
If an agency does decide to pull the trigger on purchasing a new technology system, the confluence of deciding factors includes:

- a reasonable price -the lower the better (57%)
- increased efficiency (53%)
- cost-effectiveness (45%)
- ease of use (41%)
- response to a mandate (41%)
- product meets a need (39%)
- integrative capability with existing systems (34%)
- a triggering event (30%)

Digital resources:

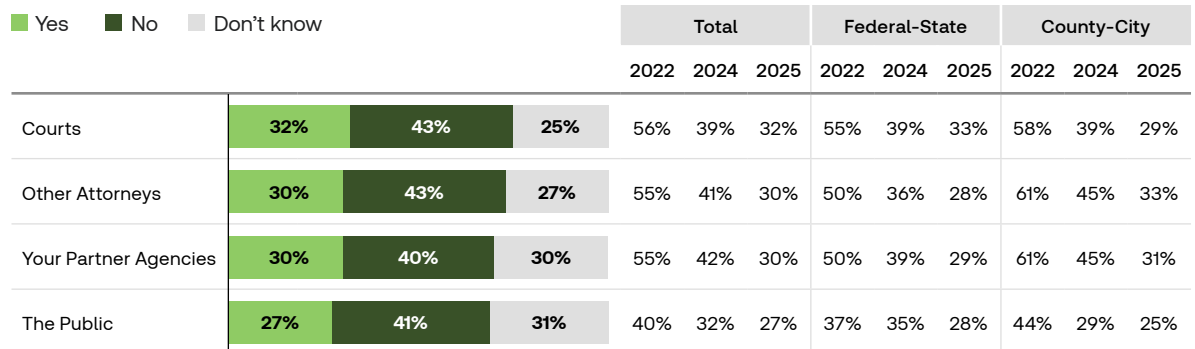
FIGURE 26:

Digital transaction requests: yes or no?



Percent "Yes"

Adopted new technologies to transact digitally: yes or no?



Percent "Yes"

Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

Pressure to digitize is growing, though. More than half of agencies have been asked by the courts, other attorneys and partner agencies to provide digital and/or virtual access to resources. Thirty-five percent of agencies have received similar requests from the public.

For government entities, the desired resources could include electronic filing (e-filing), digital case management, automated document and contract review and some automation of case assignments and other administrative tasks.

For the general public, digitized resources could include 24/7 access to court records, case statuses and schedules, as well as remote access to court hearings and online filing for pro se litigants. Online help with legal, including AI-powered chatbots, can help people navigate the legal system.

Tepid responses: Despite the clear desire for more digital access, less than a third of attorneys, courts and partner agencies have responded to those requests by actually adding new technology. And over the past two years, agencies have been *less likely* to add new technology for digital transactions, a significant drop from 2022, when more than half of respondents said their agencies were adding new digital capabilities.

The GenAI question:

FIGURE 27:
Agency usage of GenAI

		Total		Federal-State		County-City	
		2024	2025	2024	2025	2024	2025
We are already using	<div><div></div></div> 6%	3%	6%	1%	5%	5%	8%
We are planning to use	<div><div></div></div> 3%	1%	3%	—	4%	3%	2%
We are considering whether or not to use	<div><div></div></div> 25%	25%	25%	26%	25%	24%	25%
Right now, we have no plans to use	<div><div></div></div> 45%	71%	45%	73%	42%	68%	49%
Not sure	<div><div></div></div> 21%	—	21%	—	23%	—	16%

Agency attitudes toward GenAI

		Total		Federal-State		County-City	
		2024	2025	2024	2025	2024	2025
Optimistic	<div><div></div></div> 18%	15%	18%	11%	19%	20%	16%
Neutral	<div><div></div></div> 45%	47%	45%	49%	47%	46%	41%
Pessimistic	<div><div></div></div> 29%	29%	29%	34%	25%	24%	37%
Apocalyptic	<div><div></div></div> 7%	9%	7%	7%	8%	11%	6%

Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

Finally, government legal professionals tend to be either neutral or pessimistic about the use of GenAI in their work. Almost no one currently uses GenAI for anything but basic research, and most agencies have no plans to use the technology at all, though some are considering it.

Only 18% of the survey’s respondents said they are optimistic about the use of GenAI, whereas 45% said they are neutral and 29% said they are pessimistic about the technology. A few (7%) went even further and described their attitude toward GenAI as “apocalyptic,” though in what sense they meant it was outside the scope of the survey.

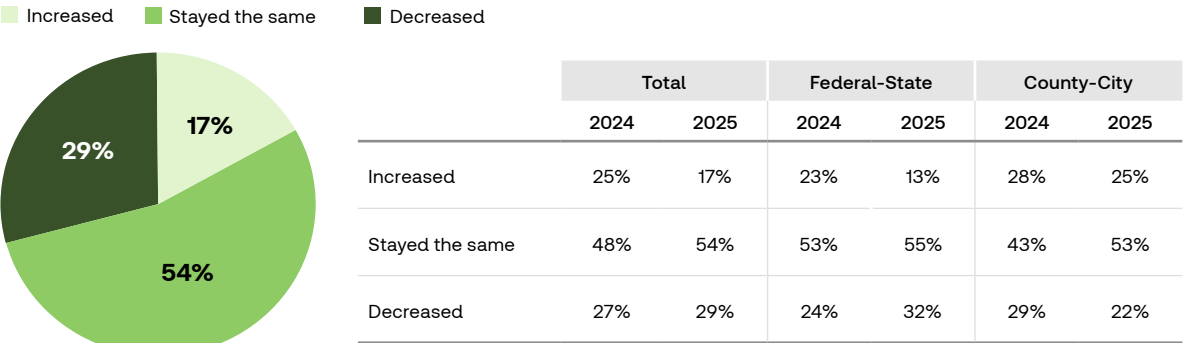
Interestingly, most attitudes toward GenAI remained consistent from 2024 to 2025, even though the technology itself has improved considerably in terms of accuracy and reliability. The biggest change from 2024 to 2025 was in the number of respondents who said their department or agency had no plans to use GenAI. In 2024, 71% of respondents had no plans to use GenAI, whereas the percentage of agencies disavowing use of GenAI dropped to 45% in 2025.

Access to justice

As a class, government attorneys—especially county/city DAs and public defenders—interact with the general public more than other attorneys, so access to justice is an important issue to them. We asked questions about access to justice to gauge how attorneys feel the court system is working and whether they think access to the system’s resources is improving or not.

Access in decline?:

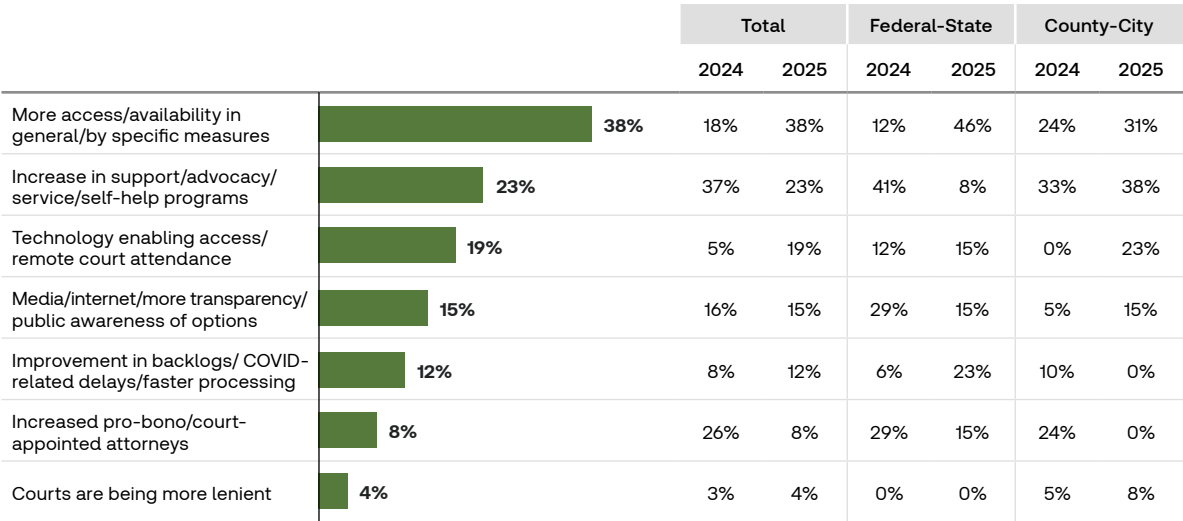
FIGURE 28:
Has access to justice changes in the past two years?



Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

A majority (54%) of respondents to this year’s survey think access to justice has been fairly stable over the past two years. The rest are split on whether access has increased or decreased over that same period. Of those who say access has changed, 29% say it has decreased and 17% say access has increased, though a majority expect access to justice to *decline* in the coming years.

FIGURE 29:
Ways access to justice has increased



Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

Those who say access to justice has increased cite an increase in support services and self-help programs, as well as technological advances that allow remote court attendance and access to legal information on the internet.

FIGURE 30:

Ways access to justice has decreased

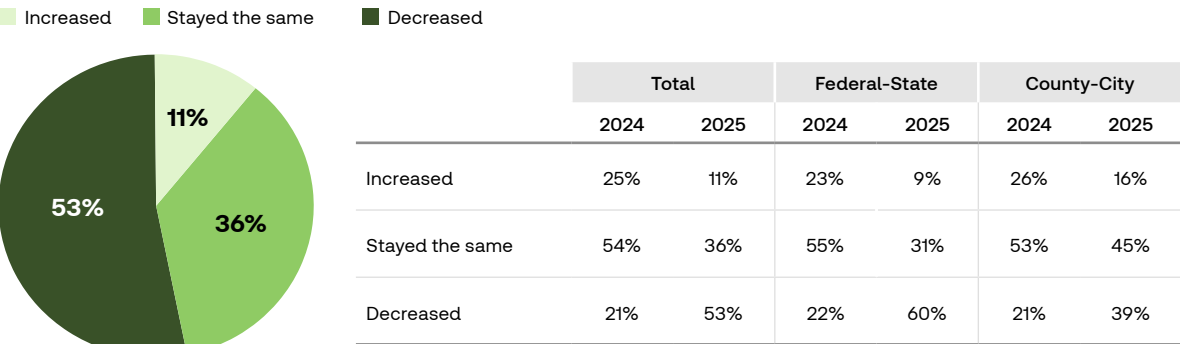
			Total		Federal-State		County-City	
			2024	2025	2024	2025	2024	2025
Budgetary constraints/lack of funding/resource limitations	<div><div></div></div> 33%		18%	33%	28%	31%	9%	36%
Corruption/lack of respect for law/more focus on politics than justice	<div><div></div></div> 23%		23%	23%	33%	19%	14%	36%
Decreasing individual rights/limitations to rights/govt. infringement on rights	<div><div></div></div> 23%		10%	23%	6%	22%	14%	27%
Generally less access to courts/physical barriers to accessing courts	<div><div></div></div> 16%		5%	16%	0%	13%	9%	27%
Increased case loads competing for attorney attention/demand outweighing attorney supply/lack of time for adequate case prep	<div><div></div></div> 14%		18%	14%	17%	16%	18%	9%
Costs associated with cases/legal representation/lack of affordable attorney access/court-appointed attorneys	<div><div></div></div> 9%		25%	9%	22%	9%	27%	9%
Delays/backlogs	<div><div></div></div> 5%		8%	5%	0%	6%	14%	0%
Pace of changes to/increasing complexity of laws and regulations challenge attorneys/courts/public	<div><div></div></div> 2%		10%	2%	6%	3%	14%	0%

Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

Meanwhile, those who feel access to justice has *decreased* point to budgetary constraints, a growing lack of respect for the law, human rights violations and heavy caseloads that prevent attorneys from providing adequate representation.

Growing pessimism:

FIGURE 31:
Access to justice: expected change over the next two years



Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

Looking ahead, however, there is a growing belief that access to justice is likely to decrease over the next two years, especially at the federal and state level. Indeed, last year only 22% of federal/state attorneys thought there would be a future decline in access to justice, whereas 60% think so now.

At the county/city level, 39% are in the decrease camp this year, up from 21% last year. Overall, more than half (53%) of agency respondents expect access to justice to decline in the next two years. Only 11% think access will improve.

“Post-Covid, access to justice has increased due to the availability of Zoom and similar platforms. This allows parties who are out of the area to participate in a meaningful way in proceedings.”

Survey respondent

Conclusion

Though most government legal professionals consider their work successful by several measures, this report illustrates how difficult it is to achieve that success given the many challenges that bedevil government law departments and agencies.

Over the years, the most familiar obstacles—budget woes, staff shortages and work overload—have not prevented government attorneys from doing their work. But it isn't difficult for these dedicated civil servants to envision a world where they have access to more resources, better technology, a better work/life balance and higher compensation.

Past surveys have been more optimistic about the prospects for positive change, but this year's report is colored by a growing suspicion that things are unlikely to improve anytime soon. This report arrives during a period of shifting political priorities, however, so it remains to be seen how government legal departments and agencies will be affected.

For now, government legal professionals will continue to serve the public to the best of their abilities and take their daily challenges in stride. However, if government leaders really want their legal representatives to function more effectively and efficiently, it is clear from this report that a more generous investment in additional resources, talent and technology should be a higher priority.

Thomson Reuters

Thomson Reuters is a leading provider of business information services. Our products include highly specialized information-enabled software and tools for legal, tax, accounting and compliance professionals combined with the world's most global news service – Reuters.

For more information on Thomson Reuters, visit tr.com and for the latest world news, reuters.com.

Thomson Reuters Institute

The Thomson Reuters Institute brings together people from across the legal, corporate, tax & accounting and government communities to ignite conversation and debate, make sense of the latest events and trends and provide essential guidance on the opportunities and challenges facing their world today. As the dedicated thought leadership arm of Thomson Reuters, our content spans blog commentaries, industry-leading data sets, informed analyses, interviews with industry leaders, videos, podcasts and world-class events that deliver keen insight into a dynamic business landscape.

Visit thomsonreuters.com/institute for more details.