

## COMMISSION SURVEY ANALYSIS FOR CAO & SUPREME COURT STAFF

N=36

1. Are there court services or administrative activities currently performed at the county level that could be performed either regionally, centrally, or electronically to improve the efficiency or cost-effectiveness of court operations?

### Categorized Responses

Adjudicative: 8

Finance: 9

Case Administration: 5

Education:

General Court Services: 2

Jury Services: 3

Managerial: 28

Other: 1

Technology: 9

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### Summary of Responses

#### Adjudicative:

- Eliminate Assistant Judges in exchange for hiring regular judges that would have more training and background experience to preside over more types of cases. (x3)
- Combine some of the courts so that we don't have as much overhead - Family court should also do the functions of the Probate court, and District could include the functions of Superior court. (x4)
- Regionalize ADR (coordinators), GAL (coordinators), Small Claims (hearings, should have local points of access for paperwork & information), Probate (only for wills & estate oversight, not contested cases -- with appropriate contested cases going to either Family Court or Superior Court for hearings).

#### Case Administration:

- Centralized complex case hearings and jury trials
- Management of contact information
- Eliminate or reallocate any service being performed at the courthouse that is not directly related to adjudicated a case
- One court to accept[s] all filings for the state which then assigns it to the appropriate regional court?
- Hearing Panels located around the state to hear our cases.

#### General Court Services:

- Create a court services division (or department) which would centralize support functions for court interpreter, GAL, mediation and parent coordination programs
- Provide Kiosks or satellite offices in areas where courts currently exist and have regional hearing or trial locations would be significantly cost effective.

#### Managerial:

- One court manager per jurisdiction (x3)
- A virtual statewide centralized clerk's office.
- Regional allocation of judicial and staff resources
- Consolidate courts by region (one manager for all courts in each region)

- Combine similar court types and like cases (Family & Probate; Superior & District) with one manager.
- Review and evaluate cost sharing between the County and State courts
- Implement a unified court system for all (combining authority with responsibility (x2)
- Move the Judicial Bureau to a more central location
- Administrative activities currently performed at the county level ... could be performed centrally or regionally include financial reporting, performance reporting (case management) and potentially purchasing services. (x2)
- Administer regionally, problem solving courts, GAL support, alternative dispute resolution, and technology/data support.
- It is crucial that the Supreme Court be granted authority for all administrative and financial authority for all courts in the state.
- Some training services should be performed regionally or centrally such as training new docket clerks and other new staff
- The Judicial Bureau might better serve the public in a more central region, and might be better served closer to the CAO (x3)
- Place Superior Court under total control of the CAO.
- Unified court system
- Create regional “super center” courts with kiosk style outposts if necessary based on geographic limitations presented by each region.
- Court room reporters [should] assume responsibility by region, coordinating the schedules for court cases to accommodate a reduced staffing level;
- Create an early response team (judge, court manager or deputy, docket clerk, security officer, etc.) to meet unforeseen challenges within the regional boundaries of the “super center” court.
- Combine superior court functions as a special unit under the jurisdiction of the district court.
- All court personnel compensated from the Judiciary’s appropriated funds should be a state employee.
- Reduce the number of courts and regionalize
- If we are doing furloughs, lets close everything at once, so we will have real savings

**Technology:**

- Paperless courts.
- VCase is a big step (x3)
- [Move] RIS back to Montpelier or a more reasonable place considering network connection and other communication issue
- Paperless timesheet.
- Use of internet, e-mail [will] to make court operations more efficient
- Hearing and other types of notices from the court should be e-mailed, or delivered in some other electronic fashion
- Electronic records from all courts should be accessible from a single website.

**Finance:**

- Remove all money collections from court locations.
- Do a centralized deposit to the state accounting system.
- Centralize the VISION deposit entry for all court types through the use of enhanced technology. (x2)
- Centralize payment for jurors and close all disbursement accounts in the courts (technology assistance required).

- Centralize the collections activity of all fines past due more than 30 days
- Expand the tax referral offset to include all outstanding fines not just as an efficiency but as an opportunity to recover revenue not being collected by the courts.
- [Centralize] All ADR, money collection
- Accepting credit cards for other things than for the Judicial Bureau,

**Education:**

**Jury Services:**

- Centralize Administration for Jury Draws, Small Claims,
- Centralizing the creation of jury pools and qualification of jurors
- Payment of Jurors in central location

**Other:**

- [It will require] sufficient staff Trial Court Operations (CAO), so they can help facilitate all the changes in the courts.

**2. Is there technology that could be introduced into the court system that would make judicial operations more cost-effective or improve access to the court system, while at the same time maintaining the quality of justice services?**

**Categorized Responses**

**Adjudicative:**

**Finance: 1**

**Case Administration: 4**

**Education: 5**

**General Court Services: 8**

**Jury Services: 2**

**Managerial: 10**

**Other**

**Technology: 42**

**Summary of Responses**

**Adjudicative**

**Case Administration:**

- web conference to save cost of travel (x3)
- [Utilize] new case management system for opportunities to centralize workflow as much as possible

**General Court Services**

- Install a kiosk in each court (or each region) for the public to access, complete, and submit forms (x3)
- There should be points of service (regional) for intensive customer assistance aided by both trained and qualified staff as well
- We should adopt data input standards for pro se court customers and attorneys.
- Institute a state-wide Judiciary 800 number and staff it with an adequate number of people and phone lines, so callers do not experience extremely long waiting periods
- [Become] more web-based with outreach directly to Vermonters. Allowing access to case information
- A better URL address, (Professional Responsibility Program) and wasn't so difficult to locate on the Internet, members of the public might be more inclined to use it.

**Managerial**

- Reports can be printed to file vs. printer
- Permitting individuals whose jobs do not require face-to-face contact with the public to work remotely (x3)
- [Utilize] a courier go from courts to CAO or some regional arrangement
- Encourage internal communications via email not phone
- [Create] a partnership that consolidates the mail function with executive branch correctional offices also located throughout the State.
- Email distribution lists for other components of the justice system (i.e. elected clerks and officers, sheriffs, municipal law enforcement personnel, etc.)
- Ensure record management policies are updated and allow for archiving data
- Combining technology support and services completely will greatly enhance court services

#### **Technology:**

- Digital audio recording systems
- Electronic notifications (x4)
- Electronic filing (x3)
- Online assistance with court filings
- Online access to court files
- Scanning capability in all courts (x8)
- Standardize equipment and applications in every court. (x2)
- [The] implementation of the V-Case system is instrumental in the evolution of the Judiciary. (x8)
- Data exchanges with agency users of the courts
- Replacement of hardware that is energy efficient and multi-functional.
- Video arraignments(x2)
- Technology such as VOIP (Voice over IP) for phones
- Larger Servers using Virtualization Technology
- Vcase we will need a 2nd data center
- Allow data to be exported from the case management system to the judiciary website that allows report retrieval by other components of the justice system (i.e. monthly traffic ticket reports for municipal law enforcement agencies, report requests coming from the Legislative & Executive branches, etc.) (x5)
- Adding those courts who are not part of the State system to the new VCASE will allow the State a better ability to serve the public
- Incorporating the attorney licensing/bar admissions/CLE database with the current efforts to update VTADS so that all courts use the same attorney number, and the contact information

#### **Finance**

- Stamps.com Enterprise. This is a Citrix ready service that requires every user to have a unique ID so funds can be drawn from a central account and the billing function is consolidated

#### **Education:**

- Technology can be utilized to deliver a wide range of training for staff as well either regionally or centrally.(x5)

#### **Jury Services**

- [Create] a Juror Management System that interfaces with the VISION accounting system or JustUsNet (in a format that allows data to be uploaded into VISION) so juror payments can be processed as a regular vendor payment (x2)

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**3. What can be done to allow more flexibility in the use of judicial resources (people facilities, dollars), particularly as workloads and funding levels increase and decrease?**

**Categorized Responses**

**Adjudicative: 2**

**Finance: 1**

**Case Administration: 4**

**Education:**

**General Court Services: 2**

**Jury Services**

**Managerial: 44**

**Other: 4**

**Technology: 4**

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**Summary of Responses**

**Adjudicative**

- In Superior Court cases, you don't need 2 side judges sitting on cases with a presiding judge.
- Trial judges should be encouraged to exercise more vigorous administrative authority in their courts (and get more training in that area), and should rotate a lot LESS frequently.

**Case Administration:**

- Multiple Probate Courts in each county [isn't] necessary.
- Uniformity (everybody needs to be giving out the same forms, same information about each process, same type of entry into the system for a similar case (x2)
- Superior court practices should be better standardized.

**General Court Services**

- One service point per court district
- Night court

**Managerial:**

- Use case management system to create centralized clerk office resources.
- Centralized management of all judicial resources.(x2)
- All court staff should be State employees
- Create "floater" support units to travel between short-staffed courts to fill in as needed and help manage the increased workload.(x5)
- Create uniformity in positions and corresponding salaries
- Diversify positions and cross-train staff(x7)
- Implement better controls and planning when placing [supply] orders.
- Increase communication regarding changes in policies or practices
- Strive for a cooperative work environment between departments
- Working from home is very possible to reach the same goal, save money for renting office space and lower staff's cost and time on commuting (x3)
- If it is not an emergency, don't call help-desk, especially for developers, use email
- We should be using our current employees vs. contract employees (x2)
- Flex time (including part time)in general would help people juggle home life and work life and not take off valuable time (x3)
- I propose a regional structure. i.e., there could be 4-6 districts in the state and each district could have divisions by subject matter jurisdiction, or some other distinction.

- Redefinition of the regions into which the state courts – district and family courts - are divided would probably be helpful.
- Regionalize the court system so instead of one in every county, there are 5 or 6 for the state.
- The CA could reassign CAO personnel (on a temporary basis) to other divisions to assist with large projects and to fill in when staff absences, illnesses or vacancies occur
- Closure and consolidation of several courthouses would reduce staff, facilities maint and cost
- Too many committee's equals not enough time to do your daily job which creates added work and stress on other employees.
- Get rid of specialized positions
- 4 day work week....even 10 hour days and have buildings closed for 1 day to save on cost to run buildings, electricity, security, etc.(x2)
- Communicate with all employees involved on ALL changes concerning their jobs...
- Move environmental court to exiting court house or maybe even the Supreme Court building to free up building costs
- CAO needs to actively pursue a “cooperative” work environment.
- More focus and support are needed on critical infrastructure functions such as IT, HR, and Finance - especially if workflow becomes more centralized.
- There are long standing work processes (annual traffic ticket refund process) that should be reviewed, revised, and updated for both appropriateness and methodology
- It might be possible to have some courts open only part time (based upon statistics about caseloads, etc.).
- The judiciary having more control over it's budget

#### **Technology:**

- Electronic import and export of data from and to filing agencies and individuals and supporting services.
- An investment in video technology would allow, a case manager in location B to interact with litigants in location A
- Increase the amount of Occupancy sensors to turn off lights/heating
- Using more of the advanced features of OnBase

#### **Finance:**

- Bulk Purchasing - have 1 person for the judicial branch order supplies for the whole branch, work on contracts, and contract with one major vendor to get all of our supplies and set up deliveries for all branches

#### **Education**

#### **Jury Services**

#### **Other**

- Create one major mail center for all mail to come into and be sorted out and couriered (by state vehicle) to all courts and offices
- Ask staff to turn off monitors, computers, copiers, printers, etc which are often left on using unnecessary power
- I have heard that there is a free service called "pink mail" or something like that, where the state picks up intra-state mail and delivers it.
- After the work of the Commission is complete, Justices may want to continue engaging with CAO in specific areas such as Information Technology, Budget & Finance, Organization Effectiveness (operations), Facility Management, and Public Relations.

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**4. Are there ways in which the types of cases heard in our various courts (superior, district, family, environmental, probate, judicial bureau) could be reallocated in a way that would increase the effectiveness of judicial operations or improve court efficiency?**

**Categorized Reponses**

**Adjudicative: 18**

**Finance**

**Case Administration: 8**

**Education:**

**General Court Services**

**Jury Services**

**Managerial: 6**

**Other:**

**Technology**

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**Summary of Response**

**Adjudicative:**

- Court system should consolidate all cases involving a family regardless of venue and jurisdiction.
- Combine similar courts in each region, or multiple regions if nearby, (Family & Probate; Superior & District) with one manager.
- Move snowmobile, ATV, and Fish & Wildlife cases from District Court to the Judicial Bureau
- These programs (ADR and Treatment/ Drug Courts) could be moved to the Agency of Human Services
- I think the non-contested and/or non-complex cases could be decided without court time or at least via phone.
- Side judges at some hearings don't "appear" to be needed (x2)
- We can be more effective and efficient by combining some jurisdictions, such as hearing probate matters in Family Court or hearing misdemeanor criminal cases in Superior Court and only felony cases in District Court (x3)
- Consolidate limited jurisdiction courts with general jurisdiction courts; for example, merge the environmental court with superior court (x2)
- At one extreme, a simpler structure might include a large court for most initial filings, a much smaller court for appeals that shouldn't be filed directly with the supreme court and the supreme court.
- Probate has too many courts with only one person in the office beside the judge.
- Move snow machine, ATV and all Muni (inc. Fish and Game) fines to Judicial Bureau
- Magistrates authority should be expanded so they are allowed to hear Child Custody contempt cases.
- We should also look at the need for a separate Environmental Courthouse.
- One family court, or maybe two family courts, could be designated to hear all magistrate appeals.

**Case Administration**

- Perhaps (mediation) is more of a human services function with a judge involved than a program the Judiciary (x3)
- Reduce the number of status conferences

- If prisoner cases were funneled into one court, at least for motion practice, it would be far easier to separate the cases with merit from the meritless cases, and not waste so much time on the latter.
- Abatement and cleanup cases; petroleum cleanup fund cases; etc. can be very complicated and can include complex related issues (such as insurance coverage issues; accrual questions on statutes of limitation; etc.)...these cases should go to the E.Ct.,
- Motion practice in tort cases could all be funneled to fewer courts, which presumably could develop all the efficiencies that can arise with specialization
- Perhaps specialized courts; similar in model to the Environmental Court.

**General Court Services**

**Managerial:**

- We should go after grants that support services we already provide instead of funding new initiatives to add to our workload
- Combine all courts to one location in the County
- Do a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis for each committee to evaluate its purpose and value
- Employees should be able to float amongst dockets
- Fewer Managers over time - make them regional –
- Look at the case managers to see whether those positions can be combined

**Technology**

**Finance**

**Education:**

**Jury Services**

**Other**

**5. Please suggest other ideas that would enhance the efficient and effective delivery of judicial services to Vermonters.**

**Categorized Responses**

**Adjudicative: 7**

**Finance: 5**

**Case Administration: 3**

**Education: 3**

**General Court Services: 4**

**Jury Services**

**Managerial: 27**

**Other: 1**

**Technology: 3**

**Summary of Responses**

**Adjudicative:**

- [We should] question whether assistant judges and acting judges provide quality judicial services.(x2)
- Eliminate Rule 80.6 OR hold the officers accountable for their part in the process.

- Child support should be addressed in an administrative proceeding rather than a judicial one
- [Eliminate] de novo hearings on routine establishments/modifications of child support
- The appeals system should be changed to alleviate the high burden on the Supreme Court (for e.g., small claims appeals)
- Assistant judges should become elected county commissioners, and not have any authority in any of our courts.

#### **Case Administration**

- Better use of e-mailing documents to/from counsel, litigants to reduce mailing costs.
- Family Court mediation should be mandated pre-judgment (not just post-judgment), significantly reducing trial days for contested divorces.
- Push to promote private mediation and arbitration

#### **General Court Services:**

- The use of the web and e-mail would be a big savings for most people and it seems welcome from the public. Judicial Bureau NEEDS to be accessible/searchable via the web for traffic tickets
- Provide a traveling customer service arena
- All pro se litigants in small claims should be given a handbook telling them exactly what to do at their hearing; that they need to bring their evidence and witnesses
- Attorneys should be encouraged to spend time volunteering in each courthouse giving general, non-specific guidance to pro se litigants.

#### **Managerial:**

- Grant Protocol should remain a top priority.
- The implementation of a “floater” support unit would help to alleviate delays and help maintain a manageable workload for the courts.
- Establish clear [work] protocols and procedures (in writing) and adhere to them(x4)
- Review allowable costs vs. unallowable costs – For cost savings, prohibit the purchase of juror coffee and personal acknowledgements (flowers, gifts, etc). (x5)
- Strive for a solution to the struggle of being held hostage by the inefficiencies of the Executive Branch – especially regarding grant reimbursements
- The courts should be completely closed during [furlough] times for a better cost saving measures,
- We should have fewer court managers responsible for more courts, or larger courts or regions.
- There should be regional administrative trial court operations staff who will be very familiar with the operations of individual courts within their assigned region
- Court managers should be required to monitor and respond to case management performance reports.
- Court managers should have recourse to a process or protocol when trial court judges interfere with effective administration of the trial courts.
- Extend the hours of court operation once or twice a week Keeping courts open for a few extra hours could lessen the need for Vermonters to leave their jobs for court proceedings.
- Let managers manage a couple of courts and then have staff to do the work, instead of having a manager deal with litigants as well as manage the court
- Be more pro-active than reactive. i.e. the new juvenile law that put new forms (87 & 101) in effect January

- Review people's positions to see if just one person can do the job that you might have 2 or more people doing right now
- Give current employees the opportunity to be "acting" for more positions. Not just for Manager vacancies.
- Consider the creation of regional courts that would cover several counties
- Fill positions that need to be filled.
- Cross training; sharing of resources, avoiding duplication of efforts(x2)
- [Take] the Judicial Bureau approach specifically a single court clerks' office with satellite courtroom facilities around the state to hold hearings locally but manage all administration centrally.

**Technology:**

- [Take] advantage of internet, web-based system to deliver judicial services
- If regional courts are created, I believe it would make sense to have some technical support at each of these courts to serve the area rather than having all your technical support centrally located
- If getting VCase in place is truly a high priority, "flexibility" in staffing will be key,

**Finance**

- Discontinue the reimbursement of judge mileage from their home to work and back(x3)
- Transparency for court budgets to allow staff to create efficiencies and see the results reported back to them on the savings they have made
- The judiciary [need] more control over its budget.

**Education:**

- -Educate staff
- Team building activities in the courts
- Public education about the courts, the current county/state situation, how to use our services.

**Jury Services**

**Other:**

- Cut down on paper cost/use. (x2)