

## Judicial Branch Efficiency Measures

The State of Vermont has faced difficult fiscal times in the past. The Judiciary has recognized its responsibility to administer the courts and programs as prudently as possible and the Supreme Court takes its responsibility as stewards of the system very seriously. For example over the past number of years, the Supreme Court has worked with the legislature and administration to accomplish the following efficiencies.

**Court Reporting** - Changed to using technology to record court proceedings. Reduced reliance on Court Reporters from 23 positions in 1992 to 2 positions today. In today's dollars, this represents **\$1.7 million** not being spent for these services.

**Court Managers** - Reduced the number of Trial Court Managers from 33 to 27 positions by combining courts under single managers where possible. This created about **\$550,000 in savings**.

**Alternative Dispute Resolution** - Established programs to settle disputes through means other than court hearings. Reduced the number of proceedings in certain caseloads so judge time can be devoted to cases that require judicial decisions to reach resolution. Mediation efforts in the Superior Court appear to have significantly reduced the demand for jury trials thereby saving jury expenses and allowing court time to be used for other matters. This has contributed to the cost of jury trials in the Superior Court decreasing from a peak of \$400,000 per year to about \$150,000 or **\$250,000 in annual savings**.

**Moving cases to be heard by less expensive judicial resources** - Lower paid judicial officer positions were created to hear certain caseloads such as traffic and child support. Also greater use of acting judges and assistant judges for hearing small claims cases, uncontested divorces, traffic cases, and child support matters. Greater use of retired judge resources to fill in on the trial bench to move cases. The Judiciary has been carrying a vacant judge position during this time **saving \$160,000**.

**Changed responsibility of certain expenses for operating County owned property to County Government** - When jurisdiction of the small claims court was moved to the Superior Court, the expense of custodial services and utilities was moved to the county. The county was in control of how these services were to be provided but could bill the State for the expense. The system did not give those responsible for the decisions the accountability for the financial impact of those decisions. The counties were allowed to keep small claims fees to offset the financial impact on the property tax. **This resulted in \$350,000 in annual savings**.

**Reduced the expense of Jury Service** - Reduced the amount of money paid to jurors by making no payment if a juror's employment contract allowed them to be paid by the employer. This reduced jury payments from an annual sum of \$900,000 fifteen years ago to about \$225,000 a year today **saving \$675,000 annually**.

**Greater use of technology to provide legal research resources** - With insufficient law clerk resources to make more effective use of judicial officer resources, we have created automated research tools to assist existing law clerks and judges. These tools cannot fully make up for what a law clerk could accomplish but they help fill the void at a very small cost. This efficiency has allowed us to **reduce spending of upwards to \$40,000 per year** on legal books that were needed to maintain basic law libraries.

**Use of line staff to reduce positions in the central office** - Work reorganization by using the staff members of the courts around the state to work on projects and committees to develop and implement as many best practices as feasible. This has reduced allowed central office staff to be reduced by three positions. It is now allowing one director position to remain vacant **saving \$120,000 per year**.

**Change traffic ticket processing from criminal to civil** - In 1989, the Department of Motor Vehicles presented a plan to change traffic tickets from criminal cases to civil cases so judgments could be entered when respondents failed to comply with the terms of the ticket. The administrative law process that was proposed would cost about \$3 million. The Judiciary was centrally processing the tickets in a centralized criminal process at a cost of about \$.5 million per year. The Judiciary agreed to change to a civil processing of the tickets adding hearing officers and today does the job for a cost of \$1.3 million per year.

These efficiencies have not only saved state dollars but also countless resources of the litigants in the courts.