

**COURT STAFF FOCUS GROUP
JUNE 16 AM SESSION (RUTLAND)
FACILITATOR: JOHN DOUGLAS**

1. COURT SERVICES/ADMINISTRATIVE FUNCTIONS

- ◆ Combine Traffic, Judicial Bureau and Superior Courts, a lot of Superior Court judge time eliminated through mediation, freeing them up to do additional traffic or Judicial Bureau hearings.
- ◆ Majority of Superior Court cases are successfully mediated. Judge, court officer, recorder has a lot of down time while the parties mediate. Court is "on call" if parties can't mediate.
- ◆ Having side judges do small claims not a good idea. A lot of appeals result which doesn't save money.
- ◆ Vermont is so rural, with no public transportation; regionalization could make it difficult to access services for some folks.
- ◆ Technology also makes it difficult for some folks to access services – not computer literate or don't have or know how to use a computer.

BURNING ISSUES

- ◆ County government vis a vis Superior Court-- some functions of county government are duplicated by Secretary of State's office.
- ◆ Outstanding fines and surcharges due to State of Vermont are supposed to be at Tax Department (as of 2006), but no movement/follow up.
- ◆ Stalking docket – not what it was intended, very time consuming, not accomplishing intent, docket numbers are very high – if there was a filing fee it might discourage frivolous filers.
- ◆ Consolidation – concern with overlap with guardianships between Probate and Family Courts – cases belong in one place.
- ◆ IFP forms should be abolished – replace with a sliding fee scale; just make a nominal charge at the least.
- ◆ Revisit assistant judge role
- ◆ If filing fee waived, at least pay restricted delivery charge of \$13.00
- ◆ Law enforcement sends everyone to the court for a civil stalking order.
- ◆ There are criminal charges for stalking – the civil stalking docket is redundant.
- ◆ Legislature should revisit the stalking laws...should apply a filing fee.
- ◆ Should law enforcement issue more no trespass orders?
- ◆ Sharing jury resources might work, although jurors don't like to travel great distances and are upset if they travel and cases have settled.
- ◆ Whatever it takes to collect fines/fees needs to be done – regional collection agent might work (like Chittenden model)

- ◆ CAO should track overdue fines and refer to someone for collection – take out of the court’s hands.
- ◆ Collection agent in Chittenden cuts down on time court staff spend on doing AW’s (and hearing them sit)
- ◆ Courts don’t have time/staff to manage the show cause orders
- ◆ Referrals to Tax Department could be done centrally (by CAO) take out of the courts

2. TECHNOLOGY

- ◆ Case management system needs to be more user friendly
- ◆ Savings gained through video arraignments, hearings, etc. if technology worked well.
- ◆ Regional arraignments work well for originating courts but not receiving courts. Corrections is mismarking the originating court. The receiving court needs access to the originating court’s computer system. (could be alleviated through V-CASE)
- ◆ Floater staff to help support other courts “a SWAT team”
- ◆ All courts do things differently – no standardization – makes it difficult to be a floater. (e.g. file set ups, conditions of release) would only work with uniformity of judges, public defenders, states attorneys etc.
- ◆ Procedural manuals do not cover a lot of issues (e.g. file set ups)
- ◆ Consider hearing notices via email or electronic FAXes to email versus 1st class mail. We spend way too much on postage.
- ◆ Confusing invoices between county and state (equipment, supplies, etc.)
- ◆ Court security 10% of our budget because we have to negotiate county by county.

3. JUDICIAL RESOURCES

- ◆ One manager per county only works if the manager “manages” and doesn’t do the clerical work
- ◆ Superior Courts sometimes feel like the orphan child – isolated from the system. The State should be accountable for the hiring of county clerks – not assistant judges. Law needs to be changed.
- ◆ Probate doesn’t have the resources to do its work well – more trusts, guardianship, emancipations, adoptions, over to Family Court.
- ◆ To cut back on information calls to the wrong court or seeking phone number for another agency: change listings in phone book beginning with Vermont Superior, not under name of County or install an automated system with a centralized number for all courts in a county with an operator.
- ◆ Customer service is our # 1 job. Automated phone system is contrary to that.

- ◆ Judge rotation – attorneys will judge-shop. With large volume courts may be difficult to do one judge – one case.
- ◆ Consider having court staff travel with the judge to support them if they move to another court
- ◆ Regionalizing the Judicial Bureau into four regions would cut down on travel costs for their court officers as they would stay within their region.

4. TYPES OF CASES REALLOCATED

- ◆ Utilize magistrates more. They are law trained. Expand their jurisdiction.
- ◆ Merge Superior and Environmental Courts
- ◆ Merge Probate and Family Courts
- ◆ Merge District Court and Judicial Bureau
- ◆ If Judicial Bureau is regionalized, would that present an issue for sheriffs who may not travel outside their county?

WRAP UP

- ◆ Regionalize the accounting department (VISION)
- ◆ VISION is not user friendly, need a new model.