

**COURT STAFF FOCUS GROUP
JUNE 16 PM SESSION (WHITE RIVER JUNCTION)
FACILITATOR: JOHN DOUGLAS**

BURNING ISSUES

- ◆ Technology is archaic; paper waste
- ◆ All courts need to be able to access each others' computer systems
- ◆ OCS filings should be electronic
- ◆ Cut back on certified mail
- ◆ Regional arraignments more work for receiving courts
- ◆ One court manager per courthouse – positive outcome and potential savings
- ◆ Court recording technology in the courtroom – too much staff time spend recording – can it be done without human resources?
- ◆ Ever expanding list of things to do without additional staff time or resources
- ◆ More preparedness needed for probate registers and clerks. More support needed
- ◆ Hate to see anyone lose their job
- ◆ Technology system inadequate – need to be able to docket entries in multiple cases
- ◆ More responsibilities given to Judicial Bureau without staffing and judge time adequate to handle more
- ◆ Staffing – two years without a permanent manager and four months without a staff vacancy filled. Not enough judge time.
- ◆ Probate needs a uniform case (automated) management system
- ◆ Probate registers need more support – often make decisions without authority figure to bounce it off
- ◆ Encourage centralization of all courts. 33-40% of Environmental Court cases go to mediation with 66% of cases settling. Can mediation be expanded in other areas?
- ◆ Eliminate transport costs with video conferencing

1. COURT SERVICES/ADMINISTRATIVE FUNCTIONS

- ◆ Regional video conferencing will work if the technology is there to support it. Everyone needs to have consistent practices.
- ◆ Closing of some probation offices have made it problematic for defendants. If regionalization occurs, other parties, state's attorneys, public defender, probation and parole need to be a part of the planning (access issues)
- ◆ Small claims – high numbers with very needy litigants. Requires much staff time.

- ◆ Many people don't have Internet access or need training on how to use the computer. Elderly population don't have computers.
- ◆ Like DMV, put more things online but also keep in-person services for those who prefer
- ◆ Probate Courts see users who don't know what to do upon death of a spouse. Having the information online may not help them. A lot of hands on customer service needed.
- ◆ We have self motivate people to some extent. Simplification of many court forms would help. How to or FAQ sheets.
- ◆ Having online forms updated each July 1 problematic
- ◆ Telephone system – the 1st court that appears in the book gets all the calls
- ◆ Training system for new employees needed, learning the basic computer (VTADS) too difficult. One day basic computer orientation needed.
- ◆ Bail could be centralized. Return of bail from CAO in Montpelier.
- ◆ Jury payments could be done through Montpelier
- ◆ Allow fines to be paid online with credit cards or filing fees
- ◆ Take filing fees by credit card in Family Court.
- ◆ Get record checks out of the courts
- ◆ Regionalize tax referrals – or centralize

2. TECHNOLOGY

- ◆ Even if you can access other courts' computers, you can't print documents from other courts in your court.
- ◆ Every probate judge has different approach and forms

3. TYPES OF CASES

- ◆ Adoptions should go to Family Court. Contested adoptions drain resources, time, etc. A lot of people attempt to do them pro se without benefit of an adoption agency.
- ◆ Adult adoptions are growing in frequency – why are they being done, what's the reason? Inheritance? Legal decisions?
- ◆ Guardianships can go to Family Court
- ◆ Having magistrates having expanded jurisdiction would help with judges' workload
- ◆ Having a computer available at counter for user to look up information would help cut down on staff time. Or have more information available online, Vermont Courts Online not easy to use.
- ◆ Using credit cards online problematic when fines are late and late fees are attached.
- ◆ Probate Courts turn out orders quite quickly; moving cases to Family Court may not be more efficient for users.

- ◆ Grandparents' rights is heard in Superior, Probate and Family Courts. Should find one home.
- ◆ Clergy certificates for out of state clergy. Much to do about nothing. Could be routed through Secretary of State's office for \$75 Probate Court charges \$25.00. Duplication of services.
- ◆ Scheduling – schedules are always very full. Attorneys are tardy, need time to meet with clients. A legal cultural issue – judge needs to rein them in. If scheduling is done regionally, standards need to be set, not dependent on judicial demeanors.
- ◆ Consider stopping or cutting back on mileage reimbursement. (Chief isn't in favor because we don't want to marginalize education efforts)
- ◆ Stalking orders should be moved from Superior to Family Courts. Violations are in District Court.
- ◆ Sliding scale fee for stalking and relief from abuse fees. Include waiver for those who can't afford the fee

3. RESOURCES

- ◆ Cross training/floating staff
- ◆ Floating staff need to be volunteers, not forced to go
- ◆ Time an issue re: cross training, when do we do it?
- ◆ Leads to a sense of team
- ◆ One judge-one case – difficult re: scheduling depends on the type of case. Makes sense for more serious cases.
- ◆ How do we accomplish change without funding to support the transition? For instance, furlough days create backlogs. Do we get additional resources to address that?
- ◆ Implementation will be challenging. The culture between counties is so different.

WRAP UP

- ◆ Reengineering needs to be looked at as a whole. Emotions need to be removed. Business element needs to take priority. Courts need to be combined, with one manager
- ◆ Historic value of probate courts need to be considered. They preserve the history. Courts are working, don't have a backlog. What would be done with the preservation of records?
- ◆ County clerk piece is different from court piece but can be blended.