

**COURT STAFF FOCUS GROUP
JUNE 17 PM SESSION (MONTPELIER)
FACILITATOR: NEAL RODAR**

1. COURT SERVICES/ADMINISTRATIVE ACTIVITIES

- ◆ Regional courts may not equate to cost savings. Would need more information about the construction/concept
- ◆ May equate to more bureaucracy
- ◆ Consider holding court in population centers. Plaintiffs and defendants have to travel. Locus more important than regionalization. People may have trouble traveling and have to take time off from work.
- ◆ Look at Judicial Bureau model – what’s working, how is money saved? Customer service and integrity of the court need to be taken into consideration
- ◆ Probate Courts – population we serve is often elderly and handicapped – travel is an issue for them.
- ◆ Special authorizations – handle by Secretary of State
- ◆ Vital records corrections and changes centrally by Department of Health
- ◆ A lot of wasted down time with juries in District Court when cases settle and jury is sent home
- ◆ Biggest cost for jury pool process is postage. Would just transfer cost if centralized.
- ◆ Space is an issue. Not enough courtrooms. Not every courthouse was designed for where we’re going
- ◆ If courtroom is sitting empty, (judge on vacation, for example) Can case be scheduled for another court/county where courtroom is not being utilized?

2. TECHNOLOGY

- ◆ Not everyone understands technology. E-filing by pro se’s is scary. They don’t understand what forms they need. They send them all in which requires more work for staff. E-filing OK for attorneys.
- ◆ Extraordinary amount of time assisting pro se’s. Many have limited resources and education and lack of understanding of legal system and English.
- ◆ Need uniform computer systems. Electronic index. Electronic docket
- ◆ System is antiquated. DOT matrix printer
- ◆ Needs to be more efficient way to do things. No policies or procedures in place (Superior Court).
- ◆ If court is independent, and side judge doesn’t answer to anyone, why are we here?

- ◆ Problem that the judiciary is not truly unified. Probate/Superior courts are an appendage
- ◆ Juvenile cases/district cases – duplication of effort when state’s attorney’s office enters cases and then the courts enter cases. Blend together.
- ◆ Training – needs to be plenty of money for training of new computer system. Otherwise, it will not be used to its potential and is a waste
- ◆ Concerns about security at kiosks. Hackers could get into and pull files that are not public.
- ◆ Phone calls will escalate as people need assistance getting to electronic forms etc.
- ◆ Trying to use a computer with no knowledge of the courts is difficult. Would have to be very, very user friendly.
- ◆ Judiciary’s role is not to be hand-holders. The bigger we become (with social services like parent coordinators), the money shouldn’t come from the Judiciary. Not our role.
- ◆ Have social service worker assist users with court forms, services, etc.
- ◆ Many users just need someone to listen to them and give them some guidance – it can’t be the court. They need legal clinic services. We need places for them to go to talk to someone with legal experience.
- ◆ We need a system where you can actually hear what is being recorded. Quality diminishes after a number of years. And tie it into the new computer system.

3. FLEXIBILITY IN RESOURCES

- ◆ How will making county employees a state employee save money? Would require another \$7 million.
- ◆ Reexamine rotation schedule to save travel costs
- ◆ Eliminate travel reimbursement for judges
- ◆ Waste of money to bring people to focus groups – why not do as a Webinar?
- ◆ Why \$50,000 spent on artwork for a new courthouse?
- ◆ Temporary court recorders – we have 13; pay less court recorders and use them more efficiently
- ◆ Side judges not needed in Family Court. They sit there and do nothing. Duplication of judicial services.
- ◆ All judges should be law trained. Small claims judges have a lot of work to do. Not convinced a person who is not law trained can do it well.
- ◆ I have the side judge asking me questions. Amazed that not only does the judge not have a law degree, but not even a college degree.
- ◆ There needs to be someone everyone needs to be accountable to.

- ◆ Side judges make no sense. Waste of money. The presiding judge is capable of hearing the case alone. Waste of resources to have the side judges sitting too.
- ◆ What difference does it make if you are county or state? We're all Judiciary employees. Why not be under the same umbrella with the same funding source? What is the benefit of separation?
- ◆ Combined courts can exchange resources
- ◆ If under one umbrella, there might be more policies and procedures for county courts which would lead to more efficiencies.
- ◆ Why do we have 3 people walking to the post office? When all courts are in one building?
- ◆ Transport teams waste of money.
- ◆ Our court has no security. Would be desirable to have sheriff presence. No budget for civil process. Family Court has provided both.
- ◆ Why do probate courts have different hours?

4. REALLOCATING CASES TYPES

- ◆ No physical capacity to accommodate
- ◆ Move juvenile custodial guardianships to Family Court. They have resources and expenses Probate Court is not proficient in
- ◆ Move small claims to Probate Court. Have an appointed law trained probate judge.
- ◆ Cut back on supplies – coffee, tea, etc. for staff.
- ◆ Does anyone review their budgets to see how money is being spent? Need consistency policies with oversight. We need to use toilet paper when a litigant is crying because we have no tissues.
- ◆ No transparency with the budget – every employee should have access to it.
- ◆ Budget reports aren't detailed enough, needs more specificity. Hard to have accountability if you don't have transparency
- ◆ Why do we continue to hire temporary employees? Because they don't get benefits? Takes a long time to train someone and then they are gone and you have to do it again. Not efficient.
- ◆ Nobody is stepping in to oversee the problems like what is occurring in Orange County. Too much falling between the cracks.
- ◆ Security officer in White River Junction a temp for 20 years. Creates a sense of confusion and instability.
- ◆ Why do we need to find court interpreters outside the court system? There are people who are skilled in doing that working within the Judiciary and could perform this service.

CLOSING REMARKS

- ◆ Combined courts in one county with one manager with one judge and put all under per jurisdiction umbrella unification.

- ◆ There are small courts with low volume of cases that could be merged with other courts close in geography. May cross county lines
- ◆ Use what we have more wisely and more efficiently before you change anything, do better with what you have.
- ◆ Being a county employee means you have a relationship with the people you work for. Becoming a state employee may mean you lose the faces of the people who oversee you. Too many layers of supervision – you get lost.
- ◆ Becoming a state employee would help bring computer services to Probate Courts
- ◆ Go back to being a Judiciary only and fund that.
- ◆ Supreme Court should truly unify the five courts they already have. County Courts aren't broken. They aren't the biggest problem.
- ◆ Attorneys want a court where they can go and ply their trade. They would be opposed to county courts becoming state courts.
- ◆ Use social services to support the users. Being "user-friendly" is getting dangerous. Enough trouble keeping the courts running.
- ◆ Consistency between courts
- ◆ Get rid of side judges
- ◆ Equity – difference between county and state is huge. Huge divide. Different rules.
- ◆ Sheriffs need to be looked at. They will only transport two prisoners at a time. Do video to cut down on their transports.
- ◆ When they adopt legislation, they often don't give thought to unconsidered consequences. Records checks for guardianships. Increased the workload with new legislative mandates. They need more information on judicial impact. Workload increases without more staff resources. Uniformity in courts.