

**Please note this work group made a clarification to this report. This can be found under the tab "Commission Meeting – October 6, 2009" titled "Working Group Clarification"**

## WORKING GROUP ON THE RESTRUCTURING OF, AND ACCESS TO, THE JUDICIARY

Report to the Vermont Commission on Judicial Operation

Justice Denise Johnson, Justice Brian Burgess, Representative Donna Sweaney, Representative Stephen Morse (Ret.), Deputy Secretary of Administration Linda McIntire (Ret.), Judge Brian Grearson, Judge Kathleen Manley, Secretary of State Deborah Markowitz.

### Introduction

The working group examined comparative work and staffing levels in the trial and probate courts, and considered possible consolidation or restructuring of the judiciary to achieve economies consistent with the Legislature's mandate to the Commission. According to that mandate, access to justice was to be improved or substantially maintained. The working group considered data compiled by the Court Administrator, comments and suggestions from the many focus groups assembled over the summer months and reactions from several specialized probate practitioners, as well as comments from probate judges.

### **CONSOLIDATING AND RESTRUCTURING TRIAL COURTS**

The current structure of the trial courts, including the probate court, has advantages in terms of specialization, but the advantages are greatly outweighed by the disadvantages in inflexible assignment of resources and duplication of functions. Maintenance of 63 courts in the State has meant that it is impossible to conform to resource limitations without substantial cuts in services to litigants in high priority cases, particularly criminal and family cases. The deficiencies in the current structure are aggravated by the fact that the Superior Court is administered at the county level and the Probate Court is administered at both the county and state levels.

In 1974, the Vermont Constitution was amended to create a unified judicial system under the administrative control of the Vermont Supreme Court. That unification was never fully implemented despite the constitutional requirement. The need for unification is even greater today than it was in 1974. As caseloads grow, and litigation becomes more complex, the need for flexibility in allocating trial court resources becomes ever greater. At the same time, technology creates opportunities to improve service to the public in a more efficient way as long as rigid structural lines can be crossed.

The promise of a unified court system cannot be fulfilled unless the current superior and probate courts are brought under full state control. State operation of these courts has been endorsed overwhelmingly in the focus groups. Although substituting state control and funding will increase state budget costs in the short run, the gains from restructuring will allow overall reductions in general fund support for the judiciary, gains that will increase as new technologies are implemented. The working group recommends that the Commission endorse full state control and operation of the superior court and control, and substantial restructuring of the probate court, as described below.

Once control of all the courts is achieved, we concur with the observations of the Working Group on Resources, Facilities and Personnel that the current four-courts-per-county construct of the judicial branch is duplicative, overly expensive and inefficient. We endorse the elimination of the four separate courts, each organized according to jurisdiction (superior court-civil with vestigial criminal jurisdiction, district court-criminal with civil appellate jurisdiction for traffic violations, family and probate) and the replacement of them with a single superior court with four divisions: civil, criminal, family and probate. Generally, this trial court should be administered on a county basis with staff support directed by a single manager appointed by the Court Administrator and a presiding judge designated by the Administrative judge for Trial Courts.

We endorse the new division organization to allow specialized and responsive service to the public, while allowing court management to move resources to where the need is and organize staff and judicial officers efficiently to perform all judicial functions. There should not, however, be jurisdictional lines between divisions of the court.

The consolidated superior court will meet the constitutional and Commission's principle of establishing a unified judiciary under the centralized administration of the Supreme Court. As detailed in the report of the Working Group on Resources, implementation of the one trial court recommendation will result in substantial staff savings, largely from reducing the number of middle managers but also from reducing duplication of functions.

#### Underused Courts and Staff

The trial court work of Grand Isle and in Essex Counties should be transferred to the operations of the consolidated trial courts in their neighboring Franklin and Caledonia Counties. The relatively low caseloads in Grand Isle and Essex Counties do not justify the extraordinarily high staff and cost levels in comparison to every other trial court. Access to judicial service for the residents of Grand Isle and Essex counties can be substantially met at the state courthouses at St. Albans and St. Johnsbury (and also, perhaps, at Chittenden and Newport), respectively, together with keeping one support position at each of the North Hero and Guildhall courthouses.

Based on caseload, staff and costs compared to other courts, the Grand Isle and Essex courts, on average, handle far less than half the cases with almost twice as many staff at nearly three times the cost. For example, 6.9 staff at Essex and Grand Isle courts (2.3 superior and 4.6 district/family) handled 1065 cases added (Grand Isle: 184 district + 166

family + 215 superior = 565 plus Essex: 103 district + 215 family + 182 superior = 500), averaging 154 cases per staff. The average staff cost per case between Grand Isle and Essex was \$493 (\$643 at Essex district/family courts plus \$404 at Grand Isle district/family courts, plus \$362 at Essex superior court plus \$564 at Grand Isle superior court). By comparison, excluding Grand Isle and Essex, the average case:staff ratio in the other state trial courts was 378 cases per staff (370:1 district/family and 386:1 superior) at a staff cost of \$161 (\$160 per case in the district/family courts and \$163 per case in the superior courts). We emphasize here that the Grand Isle and Essex staff are no less diligent and dedicated to their work than personnel in the other courts, but that the overstaffing and excess costs arise from the redundant middle management and split staff in the duplicate state and county court systems as outlined by the Working Group on Resources, Facilities and Personnel.

The Court Administrator reports, based on experience in other courts, that a minimum staff-to-case ratio of 400:1 is attainable.<sup>1</sup> Washington district/family court operated last year at 393:1, and Windsor district/family court at 416:1. Rutland superior court operated with a staff-to-case ratio of 476:1. Those courts are generally well-regarded, and none were the subject of significant service complaints.

Reducing the staff of Essex and Grand Isle from 6.9 positions to two, one position at each courthouse, would achieve an initial 500:1 case-to-staff ratio at Essex and a 565:1 ratio at Grand Isle, while reducing staff expenditures by about \$300,000. Staff disparity can be alleviated, according to the Court Administrator, by transferring casework and dockets from Essex to neighboring trial courts, where case-to-staff levels are currently lower (e.g.: 295:1 at Caledonia, 314:1 at Orleans), and by reallocating comparatively underutilized positions elsewhere, and increasing efficiencies, to bolster the transfer of cases from Grand Isle to the Franklin County trial court.<sup>2</sup> Staff costs at Essex and Grand Isle courts currently run \$533,112 (Grand Isle superior \$121,273 + district/family \$141,357, plus Essex superior \$65,961 + district/family \$204,521). The cost for remaining support staff posted at Guildhall and North Hero is estimated at \$115,000 each, including benefits, for a total of some \$230,000; leaving a personnel savings of over \$300,000.

The cost and potential for closing the Essex and Grand Isle courts was a recurrent theme in the focus groups. Defense attorneys, based primarily in Franklin/Chittenden and in Orleans/Caledonia, were virtually unanimous for eliminating the need to travel to Essex and Grand Isle. Initial concerns expressed about litigant travel tended to resolve with the recognition that travel in Vermont is burdensome in any event, and is not so alleviated by the Grand Isle and Essex venues as to justify their expense.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Other courts significantly exceed this minimum, e.g.: 474:1 at Chittenden district/family, 556:1 at Windham superior.

<sup>2</sup> Over the longer term, electronic filing and case management in lieu of paper, as well as digital video communication, should further and substantially reduce and equalize the clerical burdens in all courts.

<sup>3</sup> In the instance of closing the Essex County courthouse at Guildhall, we note that 53% of Essex County lives within 60 miles of Newport, Orleans County, while 72% lives within 60 miles of St. Johnsbury, Caledonia County.

Until the 1980s, the Grand Isle and Essex criminal district courts had been consolidated within the Franklin and Caledonia districts. Returning to that consolidation, and applying that same organization to the civil and family courts in Grand Isle and Essex Counties, should result in significant savings with little loss in service. As circumstances warrant and money allows, the courthouses in North Hero and Guildhall could remain available for occasional trials and, through the remaining support staff, as a local access point for citizens inquiring about their case, forms and judicial operations.

### Assistant Judges

The working group also recommends the elimination of all of the judicial functions of assistant judges in accordance with the Commission's principles for the restructured judicial system—in a modern judicial system, all judicial officers should have legal training. It is also a matter of efficiency and cost savings. Having assistant judges continue to sit with the presiding judge is duplicative, and the benefits of their participation are outweighed by the cost. Similarly, their participation in uncontested divorces and small claims actions is not cost effective and raises concerns about whether they have the necessary skill and training to perform these functions. The balance of benefits and costs is closer for assistant judge work in the judicial bureau on traffic offenses, but the working group finds it preferable to return to the use of salaried hearing officers, supervised by the administrative judge, to preside over these cases. This recommendation is overwhelmingly supported by the focus groups.

## **CONSOLIDATING AND RESTRUCTURING PROBATE COURTS**

### Overall Current Organization

“Judges of Probate shall be elected by the voters of their districts as established by law.” Vt. Const., Ch II, § 43.

There are currently seventeen probate districts in the fourteen counties. Each of eleven counties is a district (Addison, Bennington, Caledonia, Chittenden, Essex, Franklin, Grand Isle, Lamoille, Orange, and Washington), while three counties (Rutland, Windham and Windsor) are split into two districts (Rutland & Fair Haven, Windsor & Hartland, Marlboro & Westminster). These double districts will be consolidated one per county, as of February, 2011. 2009 Vt. Acts & Resolves, pp. 83-4, §§ 124-125. Each district has one judge. Each district has at least one register/clerical staff, except for Essex (.70 support position) and Grand Isle (0 position-support function is performed by unified county/state court manager).

The probate judges are paid by the state, funded through the Supreme Court's budget. Their salaries are set by statute “in lieu of all fees or other compensation.” 33 V.S.A. § 1142(a). The salaries range from a high of \$91,402 at Chittenden to a low of \$28,853 at Essex and Grand Isle.

The registers of probate and clerical assistants are appointed, supervised and removed by the probate judges. These support staff are paid by the state, 4 V.S.A. § 357(a), funded through the Supreme Court's budget. Their salaries are governed by the collective bargaining agreement for similarly situated state employees as determined by the state court administrator.

Probate courts are typically located within the county superior court buildings. The state does not pay for probate court space, except in Addison County and Caledonia County, where probate courts at the state-owned consolidated Middlebury courthouse and St. Johnsbury courthouse are included in the fee for space paid by the state judiciary. The other five probate courts not housed in county courthouses (Essex, Fair Haven, Marlboro, Westminster and Windsor) are in facilities determined and paid for by the counties' assistant judges.

General jurisdiction of the probate court includes administration and enforcement of estates and trusts, guardian and ward, and the relinquishment and adoption of children. 4 V.S.A. § 311. Venue is governed by statute, and generally follows the district having a logical connection with the subject matter, such as the district in which the decedent resided, or where a nonresident decedent's estate is located, or the district where an adoptive parent resides. 4 V.S.A. § 311a. Disputes limited to purely legal questions may be appealed directly to the Supreme Court. 12 V.S.A. § 2551. Factual disputes, however, may be appealed to the superior court, 12 V.S.A. § 2553, where a litigant may insist on a wholly new trial of any and all claims. Clark v. Heirs of Clark, 21 Vt. 490 (1849).

#### Some General Probate Court Numbers

Chittenden District, the busiest probate docket, handled 727 (424 estate/trusts, 181 guardianships and 122 adoptions) cases added to its docket in FY 09,<sup>4</sup> with one probate judge and three staff (2 registers, 1 clerk), at a state cost of \$318,019 (personnel: \$306,646 and operating: \$11,373).

As an example of its caseload, Chittenden reports that for the quarter ending December 31, 2008, it opened 106 estates/trusts, closed 111 estates/trusts, issued 127 motions, licenses and noncompliance notices, and held 29 evidentiary hearings relating to estates/trusts. Trusts and estates require a report and accounting annually. At the same time, 1023 guardianships (361 involuntary adult, 200 voluntary adult and 462 minors)

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<sup>4</sup> Overall, cases disposed of by the probate courts amounted to 94% of cases added. Since dispositions are close to intake, we refer only to cases added as a measure of case load, and do the same when considering the caseload of other courts. Actual workload will be higher. The Working Group acknowledges that the Chittenden Probate Judge, and the probate judges as a body, disagrees with this analysis as under-reporting the total work in the probate courts where many cases, requiring ongoing supervision, never really "close" and any one case can involve disposition of many matters. We understand that the number of cases added during a year is not the sole measure of work in any court, and that all courts have more, and less, demanding cases. Since cases added is a common denominator for all court examined here, the Working Group believes it to be a generally accurate, if not precise, measurement. If, as the probate judges expect, the NCSC weighted caseload study yields data substantially at odds with our conclusions here, we will reevaluate in light of those results.

were under administration, requiring 87 noncompliance notices and 56 evidentiary hearings. Also conducted were 40 hearings relating to adoptions, with 22 new adoptions filed and 29 adoptions finalized. Other matters included closure of 5 terminations of parental rights, 26 name changes which can sometimes be contentious and 8 birth/death certificate corrections.

Excluding Chittenden, the seventeen remaining probate courts handled 3,200 cases (1,972 estates/trusts, 921 guardianships and 307 adoptions) added to docket.

Excluding Chittenden, the remaining seventeen probate courts employed 17 judges and 24 clerical staff, at a total state cost of \$2,633,135 (personnel: \$2,480,502 and operating: \$152,633).

	Chittenden District	Remaining Probate Districts Combined
Avg. Judge:case ratio	1: 727	1: 188
Avg. staff:case ratio	1: 242	1: 133
Avg. cost:case ratio	\$437 p/case	\$822 p/case

It is important to recognize that the Chittenden probate judge works fulltime, while the remaining seventeen judges may not. The other probate judges receive lower salaries presumably commensurate with their lower caseloads or part-time work. Chittenden demonstrates, however, that one judge and three staff can handle at least 727 new probate cases annually. Chittenden’s probate judge emphasizes, as do numerous commentators, that probate court must accommodate a largely pro se clientele in various stages of stress or grief, or both, and that probate court “works.” One of the reasons for its perceived success is its “friendliness,” in that litigation is discouraged by personalized attention, a non-adversarial atmosphere and informal mediation. Descriptions of Chittenden Probate Court are no less “user friendly,” but Chittenden’s experience also suggests that in the remaining districts, combined and on average, four times the number of probate cases might be handled for about half of the cost.

Some General Statewide Caseload Numbers

Appreciating the positive aspects of the slower pace and user friendly tradition of probate court, its relatively low caseload still stands in stark contrast to other dockets. Excluding probate, Vermont’s other courts handled 51,776 cases (20,530 district, 23,322 family and 7924 civil<sup>5</sup>) added to docket in FY09, with 30 judges (24 district/family, 6 superior and 4 magistrates)<sup>6</sup> and 171 staff, at a total state cost of \$15,351,908 (\$13,584,857 district/family, \$1,767,051 superior). For comparison purposes:

Criminal/Family/Civil	Remaining Probate
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<sup>5</sup> Not including small claims.

<sup>6</sup> Not including judicial bureau hearing officers and assistant judges.

Districts Combined

Avg. judge:case ratio	1:1725	1:188
Avg. staff:case ratio	1:303	1:133
Avg. cost:case ratio	\$297 p/case	\$822 p/case

Reconfiguring Probate Districts and Caseload

The following analysis assumes that the same fulltime judge and staffing level as in Chittenden probate court can handle the same level of caseload statewide. Accordingly, the 3200 matters in the remaining probate districts combined, divided by the Chittenden caseload of 727, results in a quotient of 4.4 districts. Theoretically, then, the state’s probate caseload could be managed to the same degree by 5.4 (Chittenden model as 1, plus 4.4) probate districts drawn by roughly equivalent number of cases. Rounding down, the total statewide caseload of 3,927 (Chittenden’s 727 plus 3,200 remaining) can be served by five districts with an average caseload of 785.

Relative caseloads in the consolidated districts can be reduced by removing contested cases to the trial courts.<sup>7</sup> This would eliminate de novo appeals to the superior court, described by several practitioners as wasteful “do-overs.” Probate support staff generally agreed that cases not likely to resolve and destined for litigation can usually, although not always, be identified early on. Docketing contested guardianship and adoption petitions in the family division of the trial court, and contested estate matters in the civil division of the trial court, for single trials, is consistent with the Commission’s principles of eliminating redundancy and ensuring adjudication by law-trained judges. It is also consistent with a preference for litigation to be conducted before judges vetted, appointed and confirmed for that purpose.

Assignment of litigation to the trial courts can be implemented through a case-management system. Recently adopted in the state’s family court, and currently under development in superior court, differentiated case management tracks cases as they mature according to their complexity, difficulty, demands on court resources and likelihood of settlement. The probate court would continue its tradition of non-adversarial resolution, unless it is apparent that a case should be on a litigation track.

The budgetary impact of five probate districts appears as follows:

Five Districts @ Chittenden  
judge/staff/cost levels

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<sup>7</sup> The former chair of the VBA probate subcommittee recommended an estate probate system without judicial intervention unless invoked by a party in the event of a dispute. Such an approach is said to reduce or eliminate needless judicial review of periodic, but uncontested, accountings and reports and could streamline probate in a manner consistent with the advent of form-based electronic filing and case processing. The Working Group recommends that the Legislature consider adoption of the Uniform Probate Code or similar approach if it is satisfied the public interest can be served by the proposed reduction of judicial intervention in probate matters.

Avg.judge:case ratio           1: 785  
 Avg. 3 staff:case ratio        1: 261  
 Avg. \$318K cost:case ratio   \$405 p/case

	Five districts @ 1 judge, 3 staff @ \$318K (Chittenden level)	Current statewide	difference in personnel
Totals	5 judges 15 staff	17 judges 27 staff	(9) (9)
Difference in state cost	\$1,590,000	\$2,951,000	(\$1,361,000)

Redrawing lines is difficult. Rather than contrive districts of equal population, the Working Group preferred to combine and follow the contours of familiar county boundaries that would result in roughly equivalent proportions of added cases.<sup>8</sup> Understanding that the following outline is imperfect, the Working Group proposes:

“Northern Probate District” composed of Grand Isle, Franklin, Orleans, Essex and Caledonia Counties (population 116,246/cases added 742);  
 “Chittenden Probate District” composed of Chittenden County (population 148,916/cases added 727);

“Central Probate District” composed of Lamoille, Washington and Orange Counties (population 111,432/cases added 714);

“Southwest Probate District” composed of Addison, Rutland and Bennington Counties (population 136,947/cases added 974);

“Southeastern Probate District” composed of Windsor and Windham Counties (population 102,051/cases added 770).

The forgoing districts all have populations of at least 100,000<sup>9</sup> and, except for “Southwest,” had between 714 to 770 cases added last year—within the equalized target of 785. Removal of litigation to the trial courts should reduce some of the probate docket, and the Administrative Judge advises that, with revised legislative authorization, she could further equalize the casework between districts by cross-assigning probate

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<sup>8</sup> Because judicial districts have no constituents and are not “representative” in the legislative or executive sense, the Working Group understands that the constitutional mandate of equal apportionment of voters has no application. See Wells v. Edwards, 347 F. Supp. 453, 454-55 (M.D. La.1972), aff’d, 409 U.S. 1095 (1973) (holding that “the concept of one-man, one-vote apportionment does not apply to the judicial branch of government. ... [Judges] are not representatives... Their function is to administer law, not to espouse the cause of a particular constituency.”)

<sup>9</sup> For comparison purposes, the total population of 621,733 divided by 5 = 124,346. Interestingly, population is no indicator of cases added (“Southeast” has smallest population, but second largest number of cases added; “Southwest” has 8% fewer people than “Chittenden,” but 25% more cases added).



judges with lower caseloads to neighboring districts with higher caseloads, consistent with the Commission's principle of a unified judiciary.

## **VENUE**

Venue refers to the geographical place where a case will be filed and processed. Historically, all cases were filed and processed in the same county and the correct county was determined by statutory rules. Occasionally, the venue for cases is changed – for example, to reduce the effect of pretrial publicity in high profile criminal cases – which means the paper file of the case is moved to another county and the case proceeds in that county.

In recent years, some flexibility has been introduced into venue rules. For example, the venue statutes for criminal cases allow the Supreme Court to divide the district court into geographical units and circuits and move cases within units. By rule, the Supreme Court has introduced regional arraignments to reduce prisoner transport costs. Telephone hearings are becoming common, even though the judge and the litigants may be at places different from the venue location of the case.

The introduction of new technologies, particularly the electronic case file, will make current venue restrictions obsolete and often a barrier to effective processing of cases and access to the courts. Cases will be filed through an electronic portal so there will be no geographical location for filing most cases. The case file will be accessible from anywhere in the system so work can proceed from anywhere. In fact, this is essentially the manner in which the federal court for the District of Vermont successfully operates. A case is filed in any location in Vermont, assigned to a U. S. district judge, and matters proceed without respect to any fixed venue requirements. Vermont attorneys are entirely familiar with this process and many suggested that this kind of system could work for the state courts.

Another important technological innovation is the introduction of video conferencing between court facilities building on the telephone conferencing now available. Many types of hearings can occur with parties and the judge in different locations. The pilot applications of video arraignments show the feasibility of using this technology, and the United States Bankruptcy Court is now using it regularly with success.

Recent experience, and the coming technology, shows that the concept of venue must become more flexible, generally following the principle that a case can have multiple venues in order to process it efficiently and give access to the litigants. Further, this concept will necessarily change over time as new technologies, some not yet available, are implemented. In order to create necessary flexibility, the working group recommends that venue statutes be repealed and replaced with the general authorization for the Supreme Court to establish venue policies by rules, which under the statutes are reviewable by the Legislature. Such rules will be developed in view of a number of

factors, including convenience to litigants, access to justice, potential technology requirements for trial, and available judicial resources. New venue rules should be in place when restructuring occurs.

## **ACCESS TO JUSTICE RECOMMENDATIONS**

Under restructuring, all current facilities may not be in use during all business hours. Therefore, to promote a good customer service model, the working group recommends that the Commission adopt the following principles.

### Access to Justice Principles

It is the goal of these principles to preserve and improve local access to justice for court users. Local access means that, in each county, there should be a place where court users may obtain information, file papers, obtain appropriate referrals, and receive pro se assistance for all dockets—civil, criminal, family, and probate. The person(s) staffing this access point should be knowledgeable about all dockets and/or able to make appropriate referrals to people with knowledge, and capable and willing to assist pro se litigants (those appearing in court on behalf of themselves and without lawyers) and other members of the public with information. The access point may be at the courthouse, or if no courthouse is open, at another location at designated hours appropriate to demand. The staff person is not intended to be a substitute for the clerk's office, but will work in conjunction with it. In addition, the Court should explore the cost of a state-wide 800 number, which is similarly staffed, to handle telephone inquiries and make referrals as necessary.

### Pro Se Service Centers

Significant numbers of litigants now appear pro se. For example, eighty per cent of Family Court cases have at least one pro se litigant. Therefore, the working group recommends that, in addition to the basic information available at all courts and on the telephone, as outlined above, the Court Administrator's office should create a pro se service center in each major court center, and a network of services in more rural areas, possibly utilizing public libraries. The pro se service center is a key building block to supporting access to justice for pro se litigants, and has been used successfully in other state judicial systems. The center provides a place, apart from the court clerk's office, that is staffed and designed to help pro se litigants with information, both oral and written, work places, computers and printers, access to the web and to DVD media. The centers should be staffed by trained people who understand and are sensitive to the needs of pro se litigants. Centralized training of staff by the Court Administrator's Office is critical so that guidelines for staff assistance to pro se parties are effectively carried out statewide. The service center should maintain hours appropriate to the pro se demand in the particular court. With the advent of electronic filing, pro se service centers will be an important source of assistance for those litigants who do not have computers or who need assistance in using them. The group also recommends that the Court consider the foreign

language needs of pro se litigants and staff interpreters on a schedule appropriate to demand, as well as provide the language line service now available at the clerk's office. Although designed and staffed for pro se litigants, the centers will be available for the use of the general public and the bar.

The working group endorses the Court's current project in partnership with LawLine of Vermont to develop software to allow pro se parties to create documents online, in an interactive format, for family cases. The software is similar to programs used to create tax returns, with which a large majority of the public is already familiar. Staff in the pro se service centers should be trained to assist in the use of these programs. The group supports further development of such software programs as the Court and Court Administrator's Office determine will be useful to pro se litigants and further access to justice.

Pro se service centers and the development of court specific case filing software helps litigants and promotes access to justice, but it also makes courts more efficient and effective. During the Commission's outreach process to stakeholders and partners, the Commission heard that one of the problems with pro se litigation is that filings are not focused on the legal issues in the case and contain an abundance of irrelevant and inappropriate supporting materials. A properly drafted pleading with appropriate supporting material narrows and focuses the issues at hand, and reduces the amount of staff and judge time necessary to resolve the dispute.

Reinvesting some of the resources saved in the second and third phases of the restructuring process can help to develop the centers and improve access to justice. As staff consolidations occur, and electronic filing moves forward, clerical jobs will change, and staff may be trained and reallocated to staff the centers. Space may be reassigned in existing facilities and can be modestly renovated to serve the service center purpose. Access to broadband used to provide WiFi capability to court users will be available to the service centers for access to files, to view self-help materials, and to utilize interactive programming that is web-based. When electronic filing is in place, documents may be filed from the service center. On an ongoing basis, the cost estimate is about \$60,000 for each full time equivalent position assigned to a center plus costs associated with internet access and use of space. Initially, the center would have to be equipped with public use computers, furniture appropriate to computer work stations and research tasks, a service counter and equipment to store and display reference materials, with an estimated cost of \$20,000 per center.

Respectfully submitted to the Commission on Judicial Operation

By: \_\_\_\_\_  
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