

Non Government and Government Court Partners - 9

- 1. Are there court services or administrative activities currently performed at the county level that could be performed either regionally, centrally, or electronically to improve the efficiency or cost-effectiveness of court operations? Please explain.**

What are the services performed by the 60+ employees of the Court Administrators' office in Chittenden County? Why are they all needed and what is the cost of those services? How is that cost paid for?
I am speaking from personal experience - I am not a member of a member agency. The process to file a restraining order in civil (non-family) court is burdensome and takes too long. When I went through that experience in 2007, I was required to drive my complaint from the Chittenden County courthouse to the Sheriff's office about 7 miles away. This is a big burden on the plaintiff in times of great stress and far worse for someone indigent who doesn't have a car. Could be done electronically.
With few changes, any one of these ideas would cut down costs.
Expand free legal clinics to all court houses. Make sure hours and times are consistent and well-publicized.
No opinion.
How about arraignments over ITV
Yes. Consolidation of county courts with district courts should be considered.
Yes. I think that many pleadings could be filed electronically. Similarly, many of the notices generated by the courts could be sent electronically to most parties. I think that it is likely possible to join the Essex County Courts with those in either of the adjoining counties.

- 2. Is there technology that could be introduced in the court system that would make judicial operations more cost-effective or improve access to the court system, while at the same time maintaining the quality of judicial services? Please explain.**

The more standardized technology that we have statewide in the court systems, the better the system should work. But don't make the mistake many larger states have (and are now regretting) and go paperless as it neither saves time or money or conserves paper.
Chittenden Court could use a simple fax or even an email form to communicate with the sheriff that they've received the necessary paperwork and to execute the process.
Give a time line for discussions, and get the work done more efficiently.
The Vermont Commission on Women has an information and referral line/site/email. About 36% of our calls relate to divorce in some way. Many concern pro se representation. Often the situation is that the spouse has worked and the other has stayed home to raise children. The working spouse can afford an attorney and the other (usually the wife) doesn't have the funds to afford private counsel. The Commission has researched this issue, and frankly, there are very few resources we can suggest to these women, unless there is domestic violence involved, or they speak English as a second language. More than half of all divorces in Vermont involve this issue: in families with children, pro se representation occurs in 52% of cases, and in families without children, 59% of divorce cases are pro se ('07-08 stats). While vermontjudiciary.org and vtlawhelp.org are excellent, I would encourage making this process as transparent as possible and providing the information at a low literacy level to improve access. With hours and staff limited, everyone will benefit from enabling folks to help themselves.
Yes. I suspect so, but have no expertise or advice on this matter.
Allowing our admin staff direct access to the sentencing mitts to expedite get sentence comps done, and conditions of release accurate.
Expand use of video arraignments and other hearings. More hearings held telephonically.
I think that electronic filing of most pleadings should be permitted.

3. What can be done to allow more flexibility in the use of judicial resources (people, facilities, dollars), particularly as workloads and funding levels increase and decrease?

The current use of floating judges is a good one. It allows justice to continue to be served in the communities without forcing the poor to travel long distances to appear in court and also gives a fresh face to various courts annually (which generally is a good thing).
In my case, the sheriff's representative also drove out casually at random times to try to find the person to serve the proposed order. Simple common sense would have dictated office hours, but where common sense is lacking, a simple policy could have saved unneeded trips, salaried hours and fuel (and kept me safer).
Try to tap retired professionals for their expertise, and maybe they would give some of their time.
Like education the judicial system is necessarily an expense we can ill afford to do without. I'm all for flexibility, but we must still meet the needs of the public we serve.
Consider use of four 10 hour work days.
Sharing of personnel among courts is one possibility. Promptly starting the court schedule at 8:00 am would use time not currently being employed in most courts. Much of the court's work time is lost each day, and this could be one means of cushioning that loss.

4. Are there ways in which the types of cases heard in our various courts (superior, district, family, environmental, probate, judicial bureau) could be reallocated in a way that would increase the effectiveness of judicial operations or improve court efficiency? Please explain.

Get rid of the DMV office in White River Junction and consolidate their functions with those done in the local superior courts. This is a two-tier system of confusing justice that not only is not cost-effective but is confusing to the general public (when they don't realize they have two different court appearances for one ticket).
Bundling all requests for restraining orders (family and non-family) at one location would prevent clients having to visit multiple places to identify the correct one and provide more resources to direct at streamlining the process.
Everyone needs to become more efficient, and get the work load done in a timely manner.
Insufficient experience to comment.
Determine if there are current criminal statutes that could be handled through civil hearings with a waiver fine.
I don't think so.

5. Please suggest other ideas that would enhance the efficient and effective delivery of judicial services to Vermonters.

Less administrators, more judges, more floaters.
The restraining order process in Vermont is far too slow and slanted against people in danger. Other states are far more protective. Temporary restraining orders should be granted automatically if someone reports their life is in danger; they can then be dismissed at the hearing if no cause is found. Protecting the innocent who are accused can be done by sealing or expunging the record afterward instead of by keeping people in danger during the 5 days it takes to get all the paperwork done and the hearing.
I know the system is busy; dead lines need to be met, and get the work done.
None.
divide the state into some 40 shires, abolish counties, and combine shires into 8 judicial districts replacing all present courts (except possibly environmental); appeal to VT SupCt.
Set specific timelines for resolution of cases and adhere to them.