

Blue Ribbon Commission
Beloit Community Meetings, May 2, 2011
Attendance: by-invitation meeting, 35; public meeting, 8.
Feedback based on the four questions asked at the meetings

1. Are there things the courts do locally that could be performed regionally or at one central statewide location to improve their efficiency?

a. Regionalize

1. Why is technology not being used to bring urban work to the rural areas? That would save jobs and keep services intact.
2. If hearings by video conference are acceptable, we can transport our productivity to other areas.

b. Keep at local level

1. Centralizing services is more expensive for the counties. When the state wants to cut costs they pass them down to the counties. It is felt that is being done now with DUIs, medical bills, and other items.
2. If a sheriff has to drive all over the region to get a prisoner to court, not only will the county pay more for gas, but the county will have to pay overtime to get an off-duty deputy to transport prisoners.
3. When the state collects taxes, there is a promise of a certain level of services, and public safety is a promise.
4. The district previously purchased community services from Salina, and things did not work as well when they were part of a larger district. They do not want to go back to the way things were.
5. If you can file cases anywhere in the district, how would that work for title work? How would you do title searches?
6. The counties are just barely making it now, and if the state shifts more expenses to the counties, how will they meet them?

7. Criminals come from the cities to prey on the elderly in the rural counties. The counties need more help, not more of a burden.
8. The judge in every county is the one person who can make the best decision to address a problem.
9. You have to look at the people the courts are serving. High gas prices affect the poor and disabled. You cannot ask them to drive longer distances for services.
10. A benefit of the local system is that local youth can see how the judicial process works. Leadership groups also are exposed to the court system and the judicial process.
11. The court system is part of the quality of life across the state.
12. As we lose protection and the opportunity to access the system, what tends to happen is that we place a greater burden on those who live in rural areas in terms of travel and the ability to find counsel.

2. How could the courts use technology to make their operations more cost-effective or improve access to the courts?

a. A/V Technology

1. Video conferencing should be used for some hearings, such as first appearances.
2. Technology can sometimes pay for itself.
3. Sometimes counties are willing to share technology. Driving from one county to another could still present a savings over driving to Larned or Osawatomie for mental health hearings.
4. Teleconferencing does not replace the need for judges.

c. Anti-technology

1. Security can become an issue if prisoners are taken to a centralized place (such as a video conferencing facility shared by two or more counties).

2. If video conferencing is used for domestic violence hearings, the perpetrator will have the edge.
3. You cannot get the same personal connection using Skype and e-mails that can be achieved by providing services in person.
4. While technology may work for routine cases, sometimes you need to see a witness in person to see if they are telling the truth.
5. There is an expense involved in technology, because local attorneys also need to have the technology to make it work.
6. Self represented litigants present an issue, because they likely will not have technology available to them.

3. How can the court become more flexible in the use of people and facilities as workloads and funding fluctuate?

1. The makeup of judicial districts is going to change. We can either take part in developing that plan, or we can have the Legislative Post Audit plan put into place.
2. We need to look outside the box for ways to do more with less.

b. District Magistrate Judges (DMJs) & District court Judges (DJs)

1. In the urban areas, district judges are hearing juvenile and other types of cases that district magistrate judges could hear. There could be tremendous economic savings in the urban areas if district magistrate judges were used.
2. The focus needs to be on the efficiency of the urban counties.
3. Every urban district should have at least 60 percent district magistrate judges.

4. With regionalization, attorneys would tend to congregate in the cities or counties in which the courthouse is located, and would not be spread throughout the district.
5. We owe it to the accused, particularly those who are innocent, to be able to get a judge in the middle of the night, if necessary.

4. What other ideas, issues, or concerns do you want the BRC to consider?

a. Access to justice/timeliness

1. There is a real concern about access to justice in rural areas. How far can we ask low income persons involved in child in need or care or protection from abuse cases to drive?
2. How efficient can a system be if it requires people to drive a lot more?
3. K.S.A. 20-301b (which requires one judge per county) is all about access.
4. District court system works well because you don't need immediate access to district judges, but the magistrates that you do need immediate access to are located in the counties.
5. What would happen if PFAs were inaccessible to the public?
6. Unemployment also affects access to justice. With the child support docket, they have to constantly deal with unemployed persons to make sure that they are looking for work. If the court is even further away, there will be problems with people who are unable to appear. Bench warrants will be issued, and the sheriffs will have to go get people.

e. One judge per county

1. Our forefathers made a decision as to reasonable access, placing it at the county level.
2. If there is not a judicial system in the rural areas, people from the cities and eastern Kansas may not venture out into the rural areas of the state.

h. Other

1. **The country of Norway has a policy that helps to keep rural areas populated. The further away people live from the center of government, the lower their taxes.**