

Blue Ribbon Commission
Norton Community Meetings, April 18, 2011
Attendance: by-invitation meeting, 15; public meeting, 9.
Feedback based on the 4 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. E.g., in Hays, 17 counties have gone together for community corrections.

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. Use video hearings.
2. Teleconferencing is part of the answer for appearances.
3. Use video systems (would also help cut down on the need for court reporters).
4. Videoconferencing to mental hospital for care and treatment (fine because witnesses' caliber - doctors and such - so great there isn't concern with not having them in person).
5. Videoconferencing for juvenile detention - great, especially when the youth is in placement in E. Kansas because then no need to transport back and forth.
6. Juvenile first hearing might be ok over video, and some other juvenile appearances
7. Review hearings could also be done through video-conferencing.
8. Videoconferencing for adult detention.
9. Videoconferencing for first appearances.
10. Use audio and video recording systems to record proceedings in case of an appeal (some courthouses/rooms have equipment & some don't).

b. E-everything:

1. Go with e-filing
2. Put records online so that one can see what is filed without having to go to courthouse.

c. Anti-technology

1. Technology is good, but there are things that can be missed in a trial by camera. Technology will not take the place of the human element - judge needs human contact.

2. Concerns with de-humanization of having people interact with courts solely through technology. Offenders are more shaken up through face-to-face contact with judge.
3. Juveniles need face-to-face contact with a judge. The nervousness of going in front of the judge impresses upon them the seriousness of the situation and their offense. Relationships can be established through face-to-face contact. Interacting with judge solely through monitor is too close to a video game.

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

a. Consolidate/Share

1. Consolidate districts, but beware: judges would have a heavier caseload; travel might prevent cases from being heard timely; must avoid judge shopping.
2. Have judges from other districts hear cases.
3. Consolidation of services with neighboring counties should be counties' choices.

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

1. Expand power of magistrates; that would free up more of the DJ's time.
2. Have DMJ in a county only certain days/week and in other counties other days.
3. Expand role of district magistrate judges so they could handle additional case types, e.g., non-contested paternity cases.
4. Counties could pay to keep a DMJ.
5. The DMJ is the face of what we do here (in several western counties). We need to cater to the least sophisticated citizen.

c. Other

1. "Cattle call" dockets for limited action, criminal first appearance, traffic, and juvenile first appearance cases.
2. Change statute on which cases can be heard "w/o a record" vs "on the record."

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

d. Access to Justice/Timeliness

1. If we consolidate courts we may not have speedy trials, other things won't be accomplished in a timely matter, workload and expenses would go up.
2. Concerned with being able to process cases in a timely manner.
3. Government is saying please come to western KS, but don't expect any services.
4. If the courthouse is closed it will be hard on sheriffs' departments as they would have to transport prisoners to hearings.
5. Concern for elderly populations - difficult time traveling and using technology.
6. People don't have a computer or don't know how to use them.

7. People walk to courthouse, e.g., for PFAs, and have no transportation to other towns.
8. Currently a small business owner who files a lot of Limited Actions and can be to the courthouse in 15 minutes - wouldn't be able to do that if he/she had to go the next county which might cut down on some of the filings.
9. If courts regionalize, it could be difficult as a court employee to work with someone else on cases that are time sensitive.
10. Whatever plans are developed, access to justice should be the priority.
11. We are destroying customer service.
12. Make sure cases are processed in a timely manner.
13. It takes a 3 hour drive from some locations to get to juvenile detention center.
14. SRS went through consolidation a while ago, & people who need services aren't getting them - when they took those local people out, the services went too.
15. Greater efficiency does not necessarily mean better access to justice.
16. SRS pulled workers from her area and feels that the recipients of SRS services are suffering by not having SRS employees in the area.

e. Process changes

1. Simplify court processes to make them better.
2. Get rid of frivolous lawsuits.
3. Not all judges do things the same way.
4. Any changes Implemented should be done uniformly throughout the state.

f. Money/Vacancies

1. Counties are full of unfunded mandates.
2. Closing the courthouse would be taking jobs away from the community including jobs which support the courts.
3. Any models of court costs should include county expenses.
4. Some court expenses are funded by counties; funds cut should go to them.
5. County budgets just don't have the money to adopt all of these new technologies.
6. If we close courts then we remove families from western counties, which contradicts the Governor's tax breaks to move families out here.

g. Legislature

1. Legislature really needs to be educated about the court system and structure.
2. Make known to all the new members of the legislature that the court system is funded partially by the state and partially by the county.

h. One judge per county

1. Stay with it.