

Blue Ribbon Commission
Wichita Community Meetings, May 26, 2011
Attendance: by-invitation meeting, 22; public meeting, 33.
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

b. Keep at local level

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

a. A/V & other Technology

1. Videoconferencing/teleconferencing could be used in a variety of hearing types (first appearances, scheduling conferences, etc.), with a resultant cut in travel time and costs, but systems upgrades will be needed.
2. Means of training/assisting attorneys with presenting evidence with technology need to be implemented.
3. Search warrants and other processes thru technology need to be implemented.
4. FullCourt software is not compatible with several other systems.
5. Videoconferencing to the jails should be universal.
6. All systems used in the justice system should be compatible.
7. Transcripts and stenographers, both expensive, might be replaced by video-ing of court processes, and the placing of those on-line.
8. Audio recording of JO hearings with parents present is a need.
9. Videotaping court procedures and making them publically accessible might help prevent some perceived abuse of justice situations.
10. Transparency of CINC cases (video tape all with public access, e.g.) is a need.
11. All courts should use the same software and all data should be on the same server.
12. Some telephone appearances are OK, especially with civil cases.
13. Who pays for and supports technology?
14. Reduced travel is a benefit of technology.
15. Pro ses could be helped with forms completable on-line if instructions were included.
16. Some types of hearings could be done with video/audio/telephone.
17. Any on-line forms should have clear instructions for what is needed in the forms.

b. E-everything

1. E-filing will result eventually in substantial cost savings, streamlining of processes, and the ability to do things from any location, but with initially a substantial outlay of funds.
2. Retrieval of documents electronically should be a part of the e-filing system.
3. Go paperless in the court system.
4. Making computers accessible to the pro se public will be necessary with e-filing.
5. Web-based forms could be completed and submitted electronically.
6. E-documents must be secure – fraud is always a possibility.
7. Filling and submission of forms on-line should be available.
8. Downloading of court records should be in place.

c. Anti-technology

1. Jury trials needed to be open and in person.
2. All court hearings should be in person, even first appearances for misdemeanors.
3. Video does not solve any problems.
4. Prison inmates at times become litigation mills - a bigger problem with e-filing.

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

a. Consolidate/share

1. Supervision of and revenue from Municipal Courts should be moved under the supervision and control of the Supreme Court.
2. With any redistricting, consideration has to be given to jail locations, costs of and who pays for redistricting, possibilities for regional & statewide judicial activities, and what happens to the bonded indebtedness of facilities closed as a result.
3. Caseloads do not justify the number of judges in each district; they should be used in other districts also.
4. Consolidation will only increase travel costs.

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

1. All DMJs should be law-trained, although some non-law-trained DMJs might be usable in areas requiring selective expertise they might have
2. Statewide consistency is needed in selecting/appointing all judges.

c. Other

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

a. Access to justice/timeliness

1. Pro ses are mistreated in the system – judges should assist them.
2. Court access is a sacred right.
3. Closings will hurt pro ses and the poor disparately.
4. The people have a right to attend and see the courts in action.
5. Open accountable courts are the key.
6. With e-filing and other technologies, the risk is shutting out those without needed technologies.
7. Those in prison have to be provided access to needed technologies.
8. Judges should assist pro ses more.

b. Process changes

1. Mediation should be more widely used in the courts.
2. Community organizations can be used to provide some mediation services at reduced costs.
3. Local public oversight boards to assure transparency and accountability should be implemented.
4. Court standards (e.g., re postponements) need to be set and enforced.
5. Resolution information coming from the office of disciplinary administrator and the judicial review board in Topeka never seems to contain any information or reasons for non-actions. Detailed reasons for non-actions need to be given.
6. Longer sentences can help reduce recidivism concerns. The Attorney General of Kansas should be able to investigate and file charges anywhere.
7. Districts should consolidate, similar to school district consolidations.
8. Judges should have greater leeway in sentencing – guidelines should be just guidelines.
9. Drop-boxes at courthouses for late filings should be used.
10. Some criminal offenders should be given the opportunity to serve in the military rather than serve time in prison.
11. Re CINC, TPR, and other case types, some form of local oversight and complaint mechanisms need to be in place.
12. A help call center for pro ses should be set up with forms submittable on-line.
13. Large districts should have central staggered dockets to use all judges over extended hours.
14. Mediation should be used everywhere, not an adversary system.
15. Continuances should be stopped or at least severely limited.
16. Case management should be used more under DMJs or non-judge supervisors.
17. Case management does not work and is filled with favoritism.

c. Money/vacancies

1. Grants are used now for some tech improvements.

d. Legislature

e. One judge per county

1. All current county courts need to remain in place.

f. BRC

g. Furloughs / staffing

h. Other

1. Public education about the court system is needed.