

New year improvements made to local court systems

Written by Administrator

Wednesday, 04 March 2009 00:00 - Last Updated Wednesday, 04 March 2009 10:01

The Judges of the Clark Circuit and Superior Courts have made a number of changes to the operations of the local courts after a month and a half in office.

New judges Daniel Moore, Jerry Jacobi and Joseph Weber, acting together with Judge Vicki Carmichael of Superior Court No. 1, have addressed several areas of operations that are aimed at making delivery of judicial services more consistent and accessible. Acting in concert with the Clark of Courts Barbara Haas, changes already made in 2009 are:

1.

Fixing specific job descriptions for the two local appointed Magistrates in areas of small claims, child support, evictions, uncontested foreclosures and other areas.

2.

Implementing new and consistent procedures for filing and processing contempt charges in civil cases involving child support, visitation or enforcement of court orders already made.

3.

Assigning one Magistrate to hear cases for all prosecutor-initiated child support matters.

4.

Relocating juvenile and circuit probation departments to the third-floor area of the County Building so that all such services can be offered in the same business area and to facilitate professional and documentary cooperation among probation officers of different courts.

5.

Using existing space on the judicial wing to create Magistrate courtroom B. The county's second Magistrate has not had a courtroom to date and the fixed job assignments will allow this judicial officer to help move the heavy caseload of the

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local courts.

6.

Implementing a case transfer procedure among the courts, after filing, when it is learned that a criminal defendant has cases already existing in other courts. Transfer to the first court of filing will allow that court to dispose of all claims and charges against the same individual, with fewer opportunities for a minor case to “fall through the cracks”.

7.

Beginning the process of transferring probation supervision, in cases where a person has convictions from different courts, to just one all-inclusive supervising probation officer. This will avoid inconsistent information being delivered to many different supervisors under the old system.

8.

Working together to streamline many cumbersome local rules of practice so that cases can be processed within established rules of law, while not being overburdened by unnecessary technicalities.

9.

Working with many officers of government to prepare for greater computerization of the courts so that a person's cases can be tracked and located in any court in the state.

10.

Implementing the Family Court concept in stages so that all cases impacting a family (divorce, juvenile, minors arrested, etc.) Can be managed by just one court, with the goal being to resolve the issues and support the family in its recovery from interacting with legal and family, problems brought to the court.

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Clark Superior 1 Judge Carmichael said, "this has been an energetic and dedicated month and a half starting from the first of the year. We have more things yet to do, however, this group of judges have shown a great start in trying to modernize the system in ways not attempted before."

Clark Circuit Judge Daniel Moore and Superior 2 Judge Jerry Jacobi echoed Carmichael's comments.

Jacob said, "all of these changes make good sense and some are long overdue. From my past years on the bench I have the perspective to say that these changes are a great break from structures and practices of the past." Jacobi had previously served as Superior Court 1 judge and brings a background from that prior service into 2009.

Moore stated, "it's time we moved toward coordinating many of these areas, getting the Magistrates written assignments and working harder. These transfer procedures should help the Sheriff decrease the number of times he has to bring the same prisoner to different courts at different times."

Superior 3 Judge Weber called the first six weeks of collaboration for improvements very encouraging. "Plans for these changes have moved quickly, but thoughtfully," Weber said. He said that he anticipated additional steps to make the court systems, and all related officers, more progressive and user friendly.

All judges expressed their thanks and appreciation to the county commissioners and county building authority with respect to the space changes and constructing Magistrate Court B and the relocating of probation offices. Under law commissioners are responsible for providing facilities for local courts. Judge Carmichael is coordinating the probation office changes with the commissioner office. They also expressed gratitude to Clerk Haas for working with them in these improvements.