



KANSAS DISTRICT COURT

Chambers of
NANCY E. PARRISH
Chief Judge

Shawnee County Courthouse
Division Fourteen
Topeka, Kansas 66603-3922
(785) 233-8200 Ext. 4067
Fax (785) 291-4917

Officers:
NORMA DUNNAWAY
Administrative Assistant
APRIL SHEPARD
Official Court Reporter

House Appropriations Committee

March 29, 2011

Testimony of Nancy Parrish, Chief Judge
Third Judicial District, Shawnee County

Mr. Chairman and Members of the House Appropriations Committee, I urge you to vote against H.B. 2396 which would abolish the Commission on Judicial Performance. The Commission on Judicial Performance was created by the 2006 Kansas legislature to develop a tool which would be used to conduct evaluations of judges. The stated purposes of the evaluations are to improve the performance of individual judges and the judiciary as a whole, to help voters make informed decisions in retention elections, and to protect judicial independence while promoting public accountability of the judiciary.

The individuals who are surveyed are persons who have appeared before a judge or who had professional contact with the judge or justice. The groups surveyed include jurors, witnesses, parties to the litigation, attorneys, and staff who have contact with a judge or justice.

In 2008 and 2010, the Commission evaluated all merit selected judges who were subject to retention election in those years. In 2009, the Commission evaluated elected judges. Midterm reports also were prepared for retention judges.

The initial task was mammoth and some judges were rather skeptical about the whole process. The Commission and the contractor who developed the evaluation tool have continued to refine the survey process. I believe that the Commission performs a very important function. Without the performance evaluations, there would be a total absence of information available to voters in a retention election. In addition, judges rarely receive any feedback from those who appear in their court. The surveys and the evaluations do provide judges with indications of their strengths and weaknesses.

In my personal opinion, it would be a mistake to discontinue the Commission after the difficult work of creating surveys and establishing a system to conduct judicial performance evaluations has been accomplished. I urge your opposition to H.B. 2396.

Thank you for your consideration.

Appropriations Committee

Date March 29, 2011

Attachment 7