

Senate Committee on Judiciary

Senator Tim Owens, Chair

Senator Jeff King, Vice Chair

Senator David Haley, Ranking Minority Member

February 16, 2012

9:30 a.m.

Room 548 – S

Chief Judge James R. Fleetwood

Eighteenth Judicial District

525 N Main

Wichita, Kansas 67203

jfleetwo@dc18.org

TESTIMONY ON BEHALF OF KANSAS DISTRICT JUDGE'S ASSOCIATION IN SUPPORT OF SB425

I am James Fleetwood, chief judge of the 18th Judicial District, Sedgwick County, Kansas. I wish to testify at the invitation of the Office of Judicial Administration in support of the SB425 authorizing funding for e-filing and continued maintenance and development of effective e-accessibility statewide. Specifically I would like to address the need to adopt e-access for the court. E-filing with electronic case and document management is essential for the court as it seeks to operate more efficiently and be more responsive across the state. It is also important for the court to have the ability assure continued operation and maintenance of this system once it is in operation.

In order to address the anticipated needs and benefits of a new statewide e-accessible system, which includes e-filing, I would like to explain some of the advantages we have already experienced by an early adoption of some related technologies in Sedgwick County. As chief judge of the 18th Judicial District, I have found it necessary to take advantage of every opportunity to introduce new computer based technologies as budgets allow. Reduction in staff coupled with a significant case load for staff and judges in

Sedgwick County have mandated the immediate adoption of a paperless file system. No doubt the same needs exist across the state as shown by similar recommendations made by the Blue Ribbon Commission. Circumstances in Sedgwick County have not allowed us to wait. We have had to adopt new staffing allocations and modifications in delivery of services to the community.

Prior to our local effort to introduce paperless files we had to dedicate 6 full-time employees to the task of simply handling paper. The immediate benefit was the shifting of these employees to other duties of vital concern such as post judgment processing of payments and responding to information requests from citizens. The employee cost related to these clerks is approximately \$201,000 in salaries and benefits annually.

Another measurable savings from increased reliance on new technology is the elimination of specialized court file folders. 70,000 folders in Sedgwick County alone amounted to \$15,000 annually. Other cost savings arise from discontinuing the preparation and storage of microfilm as well as reduced copying and paper storage. Adopting software solutions has also allowed us to institute previously unanticipated efficiencies such as instantly providing document requests and viewing to offsite locations such as private law offices. Some data entry has also been automated by using smartware developed internally. This program allows scanners and computers to harvest information from court filings automatically overnight and enter it into court databases reducing the employee time dedicated to these costs. The total savings in operation to local and state budgets is approximately \$250,000.

Normally these functions of document and case management would have been developed simultaneously with e-filing. However, due to the fact that over the last 4 years Sedgwick County has experienced a 4.5% increase in filings and a corresponding decrease of 15% in staffing we have had to “jump the gun” with a regional solution. Our success in these projects justifies the development and implementation of a statewide

program that would allow the same successes elsewhere. In Sedgwick County alone the addition of an e-filing system will further augment and enhance the inherent efficiencies and cost savings already proven in the 18th Judicial District.

For these reasons I strongly encourage you to approve the court requested funding for the initial development and implementation of a statewide e-accessible system including e-filing with case and document management. Anticipations that the business of the court will increase over the long term, coupled with demands that the court handle its business with less staffing will require this technology advancement sooner or later. I am hoping for now. My involvement with development committees over the past year convinces me that the costs associated with this advancement will only increase in time. I also encourage you to give the court authority to provide for the ongoing maintenance and upgrades to an e-accessible system through e-filing user fees tied to the regular docket or filing fee of each case.

In closing I have to say that my involvement with this process has been exciting. Even though the genesis of these technological advancements was born in a need to cope with the economic difficulties of past recessionary times. It is still the future rushing up to meet us when it is most needed. I encourage you to allow the funding and authority to operate and manage the proposed e-accessible system this year and assure best practices be continued into future through SB 425.

Thank you.

James R. Fleetwood
Chief Judge
18th Judicial District
Sedgwick County, Kansas