

Testimony
Kelly Johnson, Chief Court Services Officer, 4th Judicial District
House Corrections and Juvenile Justice Committee
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Overview of 4th Judicial District Court Services Office

Role of Court Services in a Multi-County Rural District

My name is Kelly Johnson, I am the Chief Court Services Officer in the 4th Judicial District (Anderson, Coffey, Franklin, and Osage Counties) Court. I began working in the 4th District in 1996 as a Court Services Officer I. I was promoted to the Chief Court Services Officer position in 2008. Prior to that I worked in the same capacity for the 28th Judicial District (Saline and Ottawa Counties) Court for a little over a year. While a CSO I, my caseload was adults and juveniles in Anderson and Franklin County. At various times, I have covered the caseloads in all of the counties in our district. Having maintained a caseload for over 13 years, and now having been a supervisor for almost five years, I have firsthand knowledge of the variety of work a CSO must perform in a rural district.

All of the CSOs in our district are educated, trained, and fully capable of carrying out all duties required of CSOs in our district. All staff have a Bachelor's Degree and two staff have Master's Degrees, and all degrees are from colleges or universities in Kansas. Due to minimal human resources, geographic dispersion, and the goal of caseload equality, we do not have specialized caseloads in the 4th district. The offices in Anderson and Coffey County are staffed two days per week. The office in Osage County is staffed four days per week. The officer in each of those counties is in the Franklin County office the remaining days of the week. Officers that work in two counties handle many job duties from both counties on a daily basis. They perform these functions with a variety of tools. FullCourt, our case management system is available remotely between counties for all staff that work in those counties. For example, a CSO in Franklin County can access FullCourt in Coffey County and print any necessary documents in Franklin County. Our CSOs are also able to access and utilize a single electronic calendar and email account from the other counties. Last, but not least, the old, reliable telephone (with remote voicemail access) remains an integral part of doing business for us on a daily basis. Juggling the responsibilities of two offices also requires those officers to be efficient time-managers as their travel time between offices is considered work time under most circumstances. Our office has one secretary that provides service to the CSOs in all counties in the district from her office in Franklin County. She is able to remotely connect to all counties in the district and does a remarkable job meeting the varied demands of her position.

In the 4th Judicial District, the Court Services Office provides the following services:

- Pre-Sentence Investigation (all five CSOs including the Chief CSO perform the task of investigating defendants' prior criminal records and identifying applicable special rules of

the current case. Staff meet with the adult offender, the youth offender and parents, and gather background information in order to submit accurate reports to the court and provide recommendations for sentencing).

- Probation Supervision (CSOs all handle both misdemeanor and felony cases for adults and juveniles).
- Bond Supervision (monitoring defendants for misdemeanor and felony offenses while the cases are pending).
- Drug Screens (in any case they are ordered by the Court including Criminal, Juvenile, Traffic, CINC, Domestic).
- Juvenile Drug Court (the Magistrate Judge orders an assessment to determine eligibility/appropriateness for the program. The assessment includes completion of the YLS-CMI and SASSI).

All CSOs in our district are trained and certified to use the LSI-R, a validated risk/needs assessment tool. The LSI-R is completed prior to sentencing for all third and subsequent DUI offenses that occurred on or after July 1, 2011. In the 4th Judicial District, a shorter version of the LSI-R, the LSI-R SV, is completed prior to sentencing for all other felony cases that are not presumptive prison on the sentencing grid. The score of the SV determines whether the client is supervised by Court Services or Community Corrections. This program was approved by the judges in our district a few years ago, and has provided good results.

The average CSO caseload in the 4th is between 90 to 100 offenders per officer. Each officer is also conducting an average of 4 to 6 PSIs at any one time. The officers work very hard with each offender to assist them toward a successful release from probation while also ensuring public safety. The supervision process is much more than just meeting with the offender on a regular basis. The CSO maintains contact with treatment providers, monitors drug screen results, monitors arrest and detention logs, monitors work and/or school performance, and monitors the financial responsibilities that come with probation including the payment of restitution to victims of crime. Victims owed restitution routinely contact the CSO for information on the process and payment updates. When appropriate, the CSO utilizes our district's incentives and sanctions program for outstanding performance or technical violations. The program affords officers the opportunity to recognize those offenders that are doing exceptionally well on probation. It also allows the officer to address technical violations immediately if appropriate. When an officer refers a case back to court for revocation other than for a new law violation, all other resources have been exhausted. Due to high caseloads and safety concerns, probation staff do not make home visits as part of the standard supervision practice.

Identifying needed community resources is often a challenge for CSOs. The lack of local resources is one of the major obstacles CSOs encounter as they assist offenders in complying with the court's directives. Franklin County, as the most populous in our district has an adequate level of resources available. Offenders in the other counties in our district, must often travel to adjoining counties or farther to obtain services. The cost of or lack of transportation is

often an obstacle to our offenders receiving services. Public transportation in rural areas is virtually non-existent, especially between communities. We maintain and distribute a list of providers for many of the services our clients need on a regular basis. Some of these lists have only one provider in the county with others on the list being in adjoining counties and not necessarily in our district. These providers offer ADSAP evaluations, other drug/alcohol assessments, substance abuse education and treatment, electronic monitoring, anger control assessments, anger control groups, Batterer's Intervention programs, sex offender assessments and sex offender treatment, etc.

Court Services is often viewed as the first step in the probation process. While that is accurate, what is often lost is the fact that we deal with virtually every adult and juvenile offender in the correctional system at some point. The offender that is placed directly in a correctional facility, we've met with during the presentence process. The offender that is on intensive supervision probation, we've met with during the presentence process and often times supervised them prior to their placement on ISP. The offender that is convicted of "only" a misdemeanor often was originally charged as a felony and/or has a prior felony conviction. Any notion that Court Services handles only the "easy" cases is simply not accurate. Despite the respect and professionalism with which we treat offenders, CSOs in the 4th have been threatened and intimidated by offenders. The work we do is stressful and comes with an element of risk as we work directly with offenders of all types. Additionally, working in small, rural communities adds the additional risks of officer familiarity. It is difficult for officers to conduct normal family functions such as grocery shopping or going out to eat without seeing offenders on the caseload. This type of interaction potentially places children and spouses of CSOs at increased risk.

Working in a more rural area has benefits when it comes to interagency relationship-building. Because the staff numbers are lower, we are able to foster close relationships with prosecutors' offices, judges, and many defense attorneys. For the most part, everybody knows everybody throughout the district. I would contend that these close relationships are possible also due in no small part to the fact that CSOs in the 4th district are highly respected. This respect has been earned over the years by CSOs providing an excellent work product and by conducting themselves professionally in all they do to include: office dress, communications with offenders, attorneys, judges, court clerks, counselors, etc. CSOs in rural districts are a flexible lot in general as we often times work with different prosecution philosophies between counties. It is important that we work closely and productively with prosecutors and their staff. I am confident in saying the CSOs in the 4th district do an outstanding job in this area. We also collaborate productively with our local community corrections office, juvenile services staff, adult detention facilities, and parole offices. These relationships are mutually beneficial to all agencies and to the clients we serve.

All of the staff in our district are state employees of the Kansas Judicial Branch. The average length of state employment for the staff in my office is over 10 years. We enjoy the work we do with its inherent challenges and rewards, we enjoy working in a rural area that is not far removed from urban amenities, and we are grateful for the privilege of working for the citizens of Kansas.

Respectfully,

Kelly Johnson
Chief Court Services Officer
4th Judicial District