

Columbia County Circuit Court
P O Box 587
Portage WI 53901

January 2, 2018

RE: Rule Petition 18-01, Judicial Administrative Districts

To The Justices of the Wisconsin Supreme Court:

For the past few months, we have heard discussion and comments, both positive and negative, about the possible dissolution of the sixth judicial administrative district, now submitted for your consideration as Rule Petition 18-01. Those comments have come from district judges, reserve judges, fellow clerks of court, county board supervisors, and court staff. In our last meeting of the clerks of the sixth judicial district, some of our conversation related to this topic, and I have continued to wrestle with this proposed change. As a group, we had similar comments among ourselves, and decided that we would share them with you for your consideration, rather than simply stand mute. **I am submitting these comments on behalf of the clerks of circuit court of the sixth judicial district listed at the end.**

It is surprising that such a significant change, particularly for eleven counties in the state, would be discussed to such a degree without any input from the counties themselves. In the current trend of business and technology, it seems that number crunching and decision making by a select few is the process, rather than active verbal communication with the actual participants at the very beginning. Instead, the final input requested at the very end is interpreted as a defensive or controversial approach, rather than open conversation. We struggle with our county boards, at times, playing by these rules, and it is disappointing that our own court system seems to be doing the same.

As we have been told and the petition recites, the reasons for this change have been primarily, cost effectiveness, efficiency/productivity, and opportune timing. While it may be true that state administrative costs may be reduced, was there any information gathered to determine if the same would be true at the county level? Will court budgets at the county level be impacted, positively or negatively? Will the case management functions of the judicial and clerk of court staff result in the same high level of productivity and efficiency, or will increased time and/or money be necessary to accomplish these responsibilities? Will the judges and staff in these counties be devoting more time to district assignments than in the past, thereby short-changing their own county? Are the issues in the larger urban counties similar to those in the smaller rural counties? Are the resources in the counties in the newly aligned districts comparable, so that the judiciary can make determinations that are feasible and fair? Or is this another example of making a change without understanding how it truly affects the people and the process operating under that change?

From what we have heard, our sixth judicial district is unique, in that it has become a basic resource for problem solving, concept sharing, consistency, information, and re-enforcement for our judges, clerks of court, deputy clerks, and court staff. The judges and clerks each meet quarterly to discuss state

issues and legislation, but most importantly, to share the positives and negatives of our daily work life. The clerks set a quarterly topic, such as jury or criminal case management, and bring a deputy clerk with them specializing in that area, so they can ask questions and discuss problems with clerks doing similar work. Our counties are relatively similar in many aspects, and we share many of the same court situations and clientele. When we discuss cases, it is often that even without speaking the name, multiple clerks are aware of the individual, attorney, or company, and can relate to the problem, offering suggestions and/or solutions. This alone is invaluable or “priceless”, and looking ahead at some of the suggested re-alignments, some counties feel that ability will be lost, due to the size or make-up of the district.

It may be that after a determination of the final goals in this endeavor, the gathering and sharing of information from a cross section of those affected, and a look at the big picture, the dissolution of the sixth district may be the best long term solution, if a change is needed. Nothing was ever explained or proposed concerning other suggestions for state-wide changes to improve efficiency/productivity or to save tax dollars. If this proposal was an agreed upon solution, then the participants in this change would have time to reasonably prepare for such a re-alignment. We would adapt and establish new procedures, if necessary, as we have done in the past, but we could do so knowing we had some voice in the process. Thank you for taking the time to consider the “worker bees” thoughts on this proposal.

Respectfully,

Ms. Kathleen Dye
Adams County Clerk of Court

Ms. Patty Schluter
Juneau County Clerk of Court

Ms. Heather Bravener
Clark County Clerk of Court

Ms. Shari Rudolph
Marquette County Clerk of Court

Ms. Susan Raimer
Columbia County Clerk of Court

Ms. Carrie Wastlick
Sauk County Clerk of Court

Ms. Lynn Hron
Dodge County Clerk of Court

Ms. Melissa Zamzow
Waushara County Clerk of Court

Ms. Amy Thoma
Green Lake County Clerk of Court

Ms. Cindy Joosten
Wood County Clerk of Court

CC: Judge Randy K. Koschnick
Director of State Courts

Diane Fremgen
Deputy Director of Court Operations

