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Courts have antiquated statewide computer systems

MARY FAIRHURST | Special to The Olympian • Published April 16, 2013

If you can remember 1978, that was the year that gasoline was 63 cents a gallon, the television show “Happy Days” was popular, and the first successful dot matrix printer was introduced for personal computers. It was not until seven years later in 1985, that Intel introduced its 80386 computer.

Also, in 1978, the superior courts’ mainframe computer system, known as SCOMIS, came on line. The Intel 80386 has gone the way of the dinosaurs, yet the judicial branch — a co-equal branch of government — continues to use its antiquated systems.

In order to avoid a devastating breakdown in court computer systems that manage more than two million court cases a year and collect more than \$300 million a year in state and local revenue and an additional \$300 million in trust money, the judicial branch has undertaken a 6-year-project to upgrade the 35-year-old SCOMIS system first.

Over two years’ extensive work has already been done on scoping and evaluating a system. Negotiations are underway with a vendor to purchase a system.

This progressive move forward will be stopped in its tracks and the work already done will be lost if the Legislature goes forward with the Senate’s proposed budget that sweeps \$20 million from the JIS Account, the funding source for this and planned future technological upgrades. That means that similar plans underway to upgrade the appellate courts’ ACORDS system and the district and municipal courts’ DISCIS system also would be stopped in their tracks. The JIS Account is dedicated to the technology needs of the courts and is funded from a portion of traffic infraction revenue. The \$20 million sweep in the Senate budget is more than 100 percent of the total annual amount collected and greater than the anticipated beginning fund balance for the next biennium.

This is inexcusable. The funds in the JIS account should be preserved for the courts’ technology needs. The Legislature should fund the judicial branch’s planned upgrades. The courts need to move from antiquated — and fragile — statewide computer systems that are long past their useful life to ones that meet the needs of Washington’s courts to serve the public in the 21st century.

If these computer systems fail, the public faces loss of court case data and the state and local governments face a significant loss of revenue.

Justice Mary E. Fairhurst has served on the Washington State Supreme Court since 2002. She is chair of the Judicial Information System Committee.

Read more here: <http://www.theolympian.com/2013/04/16/2507798/courts-have-antiquated-statewide.html#storylink=cpy>