Responsibilities and Considerations for Courts Implementing Local Case Management Systems

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Introduction

As District and Municipal courts look for ways to make their court processes more efficient, some have acquired or are considering acquiring their own court case management solutions (CMS). This document describes the court's regulatory obligations for data sharing and other business obligations that a court should consider prior to deciding to implement a local case management system.

We have learned from experiences over the past several years that the complexity of implementing local CMS projects and the level of collaboration required between AOC, state, and local entities is very significant and woefully underestimated by the courts.

Jurisdictions considering implementing local case management solutions should plan for a significant investment in both business and technical resources over a long period of time to be successful in the implementation of their local system as well as the required data exchange. It has been challenging for even large court jurisdictions to commit the needed resources to do the work that is required for statewide data sharing.

Background

The Judicial Information System Committee (JISC) directs the operation of the statewide Judicial Information System (JIS).[1] Under its authority, the JISC has established minimum standards for statewide data that courts with independent automated court record systems must share with the JIS.[2] Local courts must satisfy these minimum standards through an electronic data exchange between the local system and the JIS or by duplicate data entry at the local court level.[3]

The JISC adopted these standards to ensure the integrity and availability of statewide data and information for the open, just and timely resolution of all court matters in the state.

Counties or cities that wish to implement their own automated systems must notify the JISC and AOC of the proposed purchase or development at least 90 days prior to commencement and seek their "review and approval."[4]

In early 2015, AOC began building the infrastructure and framework to establish an Enterprise Data Repository (EDR) for sharing the statewide data defined in the JIS Data Standards. Funding was allocated for the Expedited Data Exchange (EDE) Project to accelerate development of the EDR to accommodate case management implementation projects for King County District Court (KCDC) and the King County Clerk's Office (KCCO). AOC has developed the EDR and it is operational with JIS data. However, as of February, 2019, the pilot jurisdiction (KCCO) is continuing to work on critical integration issues with their data exchanges to the EDR. As a result, AOC has not been able to complete the end-to-end testing of the data exchange to validate that

[1] JISC Rule (JISCR) 1; RCW 2.68.010, RCW 2.68.050
[2] JIS Data Standards for Alternative Electronic Court Record Systems, https://inside.courts.wa.gov/utilities/fileVendor.cfm?fileReq=/content/policies/pdf/AlternativeElectronicCourtRecordSystems.pdf
[3] Ibid., p. 8
[4] JISCR 13

the exchange is working correctly. The exchanges between KCDC and KCCO and the EDR are not yet operational.

As explained in more detail below, connecting to the EDR is not a simple "plug and play" exercise. It requires a substantial commitment of business and technical resources at both the state and local level at the outset and over time to sustain the data exchange.

Local CMS Implementation Responsibilities and Considerations

Integrations with the Enterprise Data Repository (EDR)

The primary means of sending data to, or retrieving data from, the EDR is through a set of web services. It is the responsibility of the court implementing its own case management system to do the work necessary to send the required statewide data from its system to the EDR. AOC has adapted the JIS applications to read data from the EDR so that data can be shared statewide.

Technical Requirements

A local court planning to implement its own CMS must plan for the local resources with high technical expertise in order to send the required statewide data from its case management system to the EDR. Those resources must be capable of both developing the web services and providing ongoing support for them.

Data Extraction: Extracting data from a court's independent CMS and sending the data to the EDR requires advanced technical skills at the local court. The method to extract data from the CMS will be dependent on the architecture of the court's case management system, unique business decisions made by that court about its data, and the policies of that court's vendor(s). Once extracted, the data will need to be sent to the EDR through web services. The court should also be aware that due to differences between CMS's, or differences between implementations of the same CMS in different locations, the data integration may require significant logic to transform the data from the court's independent case management system to a form that can be received by the EDR.

Testing: The court integrating to the EDR is responsible for testing their integration to the EDR, with the help of AOC. The testing is to ensure the local court data, as integrated into the EDR, represents the same information as the data presented in the local CMS. The primary method for this testing will involve sending data to the EDR via the court's integration, and then comparing that data in the EDR to the original data and similar data from other case management systems in the EDR.

As part of AOC's Readiness Assessment of the court's data integration:

- AOC provides an EDR Quality Assurance/Integration region where courts can conduct integration testing
- AOC and the court review integrated data with all JIS applications and data exchanges to ensure the data continues to represent the correct business intent.

Initial implementation and ongoing support for the integration between the local CMS and the EDR, as well as support for the court's local CMS, will require high-level technical skills which exceed those for typical desktop and system support staff. Even in jurisdictions that may have IT

staff with such skills, their time may be spread among multiple organizations within the county or city. The county/city should also have one or more additional individuals with high technical skills to back up the primary EDR integrations staff.

The court's new CMS and its integration to the EDR (data exchange) will become mission critical services for local IT. Service interruptions and errors from local CMS implementations and data exchange will affect the local court's operation and jeopardize the accuracy and availability of the court's data that is used for decision making throughout the state. Courts sometimes struggle to get their technical support needs met when in competition for limited IT resources with other parts of the county or city government. If technical staff are not dedicated solely to the court's needs, the court should have a clearly established protocol for prioritizing the court's needs for technical services to support their local CMS as well as the EDR integrations.

Capacity and Performance

The JIS Data Standards establish the minimum acceptable timeframes for sending data to the EDR. Courts must be able to extract data from their system, process the data, and then send it to the EDR within the mandatory timeframes. Extracting data at a time with high usage will negatively impact the performance of the entire system. In addition, AOC has established windows when key processes are executed. Any court sending data must have their data upload completed before the scheduled time for the execution of these processes. Finally, courts must carefully design their integration so that it is robust enough to handle their average volume as well as peak volumes which can easily be many times the average daily volume.

Data Conversion

Data conversion is the responsibility of the local court implementing its own CMS. It involves significant court-centric business analysis and business-based decisions. Successful integration to the EDR is based on two things:

1. Mapping court business data elements from the court's new CMS to the elements in the Data Standards (a local responsibility);
2. Mapping the business data elements from the Data Standards to the EDR (AOC has accomplished this through the EDR web services).

Reference data, which is unique to each local CMS implementation, must be established in the new system. Each court integrating from their local system to the EDR must map their reference data in their system, also called Source Reference data, to the Standard Reference Data used in the EDR. This allows all the applications that are consuming data from the EDR to understand the reference data provided by multiple CMS's in a unified format with a standard meaning. For example, the local case management system's source reference data may represent an eye color of blue as "BL" and it would be mapped to the standard JIS reference data of "BLU" contained in the EDR. This prevents the potential for data consumers to misinterpret the data sent from the local CMS.

The mapping of both the JIS Data Standards and reference data should occur concurrently with the development and configuration of the court's new CMS, as this activity can be a lengthy process requiring in-depth knowledge of JIS data, data structures in the court's CMS, and the structure of data in the EDR.

Integrations with Other Agencies

AOC has numerous integrations with partner agencies, including the Washington State Patrol, the Department of Licensing (DOL), the Secretary of State, and the Department of Social and Health Services, in order to comply with statutes and court rules requiring data sharing.[5] A court with its own CMS will have to send the required information through its integration with the EDR. Partner agencies will not accept this data directly from local courts.

DOL Driver's Data Services

DOL offers three data services providing data about driver's licenses and driving records to AOC: License Search, Driver Status, and Abstract of Driver's Record. AOC has integrated these services into several JIS applications. For courts not using JIS applications, AOC makes these services available to the courts to integrate with their own case management systems via web services. The court would need to integrate with these web services to have access to this data outside the JIS applications. DOL will not provide these services directly to a local court.

Post Production and On-Going Support Considerations

Technical integration with JIS applications, considered as an on-going maintenance operation, is the responsibility of the court. Any update to the court's local case management system by its vendor, change in configuration by the court, changes to the Data Standards, or legislatively mandated changes could result in changes to the data integration processes.

Law Changes

AOC reasonably expects that every legislative session will necessitate changes to one or more of the following items: local case management systems, the EDR, the Data Standards, Standard Reference Data, or data mappings. Changes to court rules or case law will often require similar changes. AOC will communicate to the courts any changes it is making to the EDR, Data Standards, or Standard Reference Data from legislation. Each local jurisdiction is responsible for making corresponding changes to its own local system.

Each court integrated with the EDR must be capable of understanding how law changes affect its local court case management system and then updating its system and its EDR integration within the timelines established by law. This can often be an extremely short timeframe, with implementation deadlines of 90 days being common. The staff responsible for integration at each court should be part of the court's team that analyzes the impact of proposed and passed legislation on the court's CMS and the court's EDR integration.

Even though a court may contract with the same case management system vendor used in another court, each court will have unique implementations, configurations, vendor contract terms, local information technology expertise or capacity. Court processes will differ among jurisdictions, and judges in one court may choose to interpret the law in a different way than those in another court using the same product. Courts may be on different versions of the same product because they implemented at different times or due to cost or other priorities they may not have upgraded to a more recent version. As a result, each court that chooses to implement a local

[5] Including, but not limited to: IRLJ 4.1, CrRLJ 8.12, RCW 46.63.070, RCW 46.64.025, RCW 46.20.270, RCW 9.41.040, RCW 9.41.047, RC W 43.20B.080, RCW 10.97.050, RCW 10.98.090, RCW 10.98.100, RCW 43.43.540, RCW 43.43.700, RCW 43.43.735, RCW 43.43.740, RCW 43.43.760, RCW 43.43.770, RCW 43.43.815, RCW 43.43.830-845

court case management system will be responsible for analyzing the impact of legislation on that court and on that court's integration with the EDR.

A team of lawyers and subject matter experts at AOC analyzes legislation for potential impact to the JIS systems. The volume can be staggering. In just the first two weeks of the 2019 session, AOC reviewed over 1700 bills and began actively monitoring nearly 500 of them.

AOC also prepares Judicial Impact Notes ("fiscal notes") for the legislature each session that estimate the impact of proposed legislation on the JIS applications. In the first two weeks of the 2019 legislative session, AOC submitted 111 judicial impact notes. Generally those estimates must be produced within 72 hours. Estimates for JIS system impact can range from trivial to millions of dollars.

AOC will not have the knowledge of local court case management systems to be able to analyze the impact of law changes on local systems. Each court with a local case management system will have its own support and maintenance arrangement with a product vendor which may impact cost and the timeliness of the vendor response. AOC is sometimes able to explain that a particular approach is not feasible and suggest changes that could mitigate the JIS impact. AOC will not know whether a change it suggests to mitigate an impact in JIS might have the opposite effect on a local court case management system.

Links to bills that AOC is tracking and Judicial Impact Notes are available on Inside Courts. AOC does not have the staffing capacity or knowledge of local case management systems and implementations to assist local courts with analyzing impacts to their systems. For the same reasons, Judicial Impact Notes will not estimate the impact of changes to local case management systems.

When law changes become effective, AOC's legal, court business, training, and technical staff begin implementation activities, including charge table or configuration changes, new product development projects, code changes, documentation, and training materials. Several weeks after the conclusion of each legislative session, AOC also provides a high-level summary of legislation and *eService* answers that describe how legislation will be implemented in the JIS systems. Although these summaries may be helpful for courts that have chosen to implement local court case management systems, they will be focused on impacts to the JIS applications, and they may arrive too late for a local court to begin analysis or implementation activities for its own system.

Each court will also be responsible for revising its documentation and training materials to reflect changes to the local court case management system.

Infrastructure

Information Security: AOC employs full-time IT security experts and follows a comprehensive JIS Information Technology Security Policy.[6] Each county/city implementing a local CMS will be responsible for maintaining system security, data integrity and privacy by preventing unauthorized access to court data and preventing misuse of, damage to, or loss of court data.

[6] https://inside.courts.wa.gov/index.cfm?fa=controller.showPage&folder=policies&file=Security

Disaster Recovery: Disaster recovery and business resumption planning are critical to ensure the court can save data, hardware, software and facilities so that it can recover from an interruption or service outage. AOC operates a rigorous disaster recovery/business resumption plan including annual testing and certification under the direction of the JISC.[7] Cities and counties should follow similar standards to ensure continuity of local court operations.

For JIS systems, AOC provides these services, along with scheduled backups, programs patches, bug fixes, security alerts and testing. Courts planning local CMS implementations should plan to allocate resources locally for these critical roles and responsibilities.

Business Functions

Court users will require continual education and training to support refresher courses and court personnel in transition to new or added responsibilities. Courts considering a local CMS need to consider providing these services for their local user community. Vendor-supplied training and documentation is often generic and may not adequately describe local product configuration. Creation and continuous maintenance of local training and support materials should be included in the implementation and support plan.

In addition, call centers that track problem tickets from inception to resolution with carefully scripted escalation pathways and clearly defined roles and responsibilities should be added to the on-going local support organization.

AOC training and customer service support is available for statewide systems but will not be available for jurisdictions choosing to implement their own local systems.

Summary

The members of the CLJ-CMS Steering Committee strongly encourage courts to carefully study the long-term impacts on the local court and local technical resources before deciding not to use the statewide JIS systems. Implementing a local CMS is a long term commitment to perform at the local level and at local expense many business and technical services that AOC provides without cost through support of the statewide JIS systems.

The lifecycle for a case management system has many significant impacts beyond simply implementing a local CMS. As has been presented throughout this document, there are many other factors that must be considered before making a long-term commitment of this nature. If you have further questions or would like to discuss any of these topics in more detail, we encourage you to contact any of the CLJ-CMS Steering Committee members. Our goal is to ensure that courts that are considering implementation of a local CMS have all the facts necessary to make a fully informed decision.

[7] https://inside.courts.wa.gov/index.cfm?fa=controller.showPage&folder=policies&file=Disaster