

A VIEW FROM THE BENCH

HAVING SERVED AS MUNICIPAL COURT JUDGE for the City of Des Moines for almost seven years, I have come to appreciate the importance that technology plays in the performance of my



duties. Whether serving in a large city or in a small rural town, judges are called upon daily to make difficult decisions that directly impact not only the lives of the people appearing before them, but also the lives of victims, families, and to a certain extent the community at large. In order to effectuate this task, judges are reliant upon information so they may render the best most informed decision possible. This need for information has made technology an essential tool in the arsenal of dispensing justice. Currently, our courts are facing a technological crisis as the statewide Judicial Information System (JIS) which they have relied upon, is being rendered obsolete by the technological advances we have seen over the last few decades. The current system used by our courts was created in 1981 and the language spoken by the system is no longer a standard programming language in the technology industry.

The inability to use some of the newer technology to improve court efficiency has caused some courts, to go “off grid” and create their own case management systems whose information is primarily available at the local level. This has caused frustration with other courts, as information necessary to assist a judge in rendering a decision is hampered by the inability to fully access these local systems.

The State of Washington has recognized the potential impact to public safety because we do not have a statewide case management system which is equally accessible by all courts. To this end, the State has provided funding for the completion of a statewide case management system for the Superior court level, and we are hopeful that funding will likewise be appropriated for a statewide case management system for the district and municipal courts that serve our citizens.

As incoming president of the District and Municipal Court Judges Association, one of my top priorities is to push forward with the creation and implementation of a statewide case management system for our court level. The Association is working with the Administrative Office of the Courts and other stakeholders to ensure we have a product that works for all courts- large and small, urban and rural. This is not an easy task. There are approximately two hundred and seventy two district and municipal courts throughout our state and each has different needs and requirements that are unique to their situation. However, we must recognize that while we may differ philosophically on how to best run our individual courts, we all need as much information as possible in order to perform our function. As we move forward in our efforts to harness technology and its uses to help us become more informed and efficient courts, we must always be cognizant that we serve a justice system not a system for just us.

Judge Veronica Galvan