

**Hon. Randy R. Koschnick
Director of State Courts
Director's Address
2022 Judicial Conference
Elkhart Lake, Wisconsin
November 2, 2022**

Thank you, Chief Justice Ziegler. Good afternoon everyone. It's great to see you all.

One of my favorite things about the Annual Meeting of the Judicial Conference is that it brings all of our judges together in one place. It's not only a chance to learn and connect with each other but also an opportunity to gain perspective on the state Judiciary as a whole.

This is a big group!

Individually, judges play a crucial role ensuring that the law has meaning and that justice is upheld on a case-by-case basis. Together, we work as a branch of government, and this is our business meeting.

It's also a chance for me to update you all on the administrative side of things and to let you know what we are working on under the direction of the Chief Justice and Supreme Court.

The court system's mission – and your job as judges – is to protect individuals' rights, privileges and liberties, maintain the rule of law, and to provide a forum for the resolution of disputes that is fair, accessible, independent and effective.

That's an awesome responsibility.

One of my roles as Director of State Courts is to make sure you have all the tools you need to do your jobs well. As we've learned during the last two-and-a-half years, we have to be flexible and capable of adjusting to rapidly changing business conditions.

There's no instruction booklet for some of the challenges we've faced, but we've been creative and persistent in finding solutions.

We have a very talented and dedicated staff, including deputy directors Diane Fremgen and Caitlin Frederick; Chief Information Officer Tom Flitter; their staffs; District Court Administrators and many others.

Together, these folks provide the support you need in the areas of court operations, management services, and technology. They keep us on track and find solutions to sometimes complex problems, so you can focus on judicial work.

I'm also fortunate to be able to rely on the Committee of Chief Judges – an experienced and knowledgeable group that provides guidance on a range of issues.

Courtrooms don't seem that complicated in a way – at least that's how it looks on all the TV shows that feature staged courtroom dramas. But there are a lot of moving parts and people behind the scenes who are vital to the process.

Like a car, a problem with one critical part can bring everything to a halt.

We are working to keep up with preventative maintenance and making cost-effective upgrades whenever possible. Like a high-end auto shop, we are also taking advantage of more sophisticated tools to diagnose and fix things.

Remember the old days? -- When you used to get your car fixed at the garage that was connected to the gas station. You'd be in the garage with the guy looking under the car as he explained what went wrong. Now you go to some of these car places, and you don't even know where your car goes. They have a waiting room with TV, WiFi, free snacks and soda. They make you so comfortable you hardly know that you're spending money.

[CCAP]

The court system is highly reliant on technology. Our statewide case-management system is all electronic. All filings in the circuit courts and Court of Appeals are done electronically. The court record is kept electronically. And much of our communication is done through e-mail. CCAP does an amazing job, creating custom solutions and keeping all of this functioning properly. It requires nearly constant maintenance and frequent updates. And it means there's a vital need to protect our system from vulnerabilities.

IT security is a very high priority for us and we are seeking adequate funding to develop and maintain a reliable, robust IT security program for CCAP. Also, I want to thank you all for cooperating with our IT security training efforts.

I understand that it can be inconvenient but research tells us that regular security training is one of the most effective tools available to keep a system with as many users as we have safe and secure.

One of our newest technology tools is CCAP 3. This major upgrade to our electronic case management system and interface moves us away from older programming language and gives clerks and judges a more efficient work environment.

CCAP has deployed CCAP 3, county-by-county, throughout the state. We've gathered feedback through Court Operations and made improvements along the way.

Like any major upgrade, this has required some fine tuning.

We'll make the adjustments, and in the end, CCAP3 will be a better and more responsive case management system than we've ever had.

[Making the Record]

We are also using technology as part of a multi-faceted effort to address an ongoing shortage of court reporters.

Before I highlight some of the progress we've made in this area, I want to emphasize that I greatly appreciate and value all of our court reporters including both stenographers and digital court reporters.

And, we recognize that stenographic court reporting is a highly valued skill that results in the most efficient process for timely producing transcripts when needed.

Digital Audio Recording, or DAR, is also a valuable skill which has proven to be critically important in allowing us to take and make the record.

I was extremely fortunate during my 18 years on the bench to have had a stenographic realtime court reporter. And I know this is a skill widely appreciated by judges. But we no longer have the luxury of simply choosing between stenography and DAR.

There simply aren't enough stenography candidates available to meet our needs statewide.

When we post court reporter job openings, we often don't have any applicants in some parts of the state.

To address this problem more broadly, I have reconvened the Making the Record Committee for the second time since I became director five years ago.

I have asked this group to build on previous work and to recommend possible statutory and rule changes.

We need to take the steps we can to address our ability to take and make the record now, and in the future, when stenographic skills are likely to be far less common.

In the meantime, we are finding solutions. The recently formed statewide digital court reporter pool now has more than 20 digital court reporters who are able to take the record remotely in a separate court facility using DAR equipment, and in conjunction with Zoom. This program is referred to affectionately in my office as RAMDAR for Remote Monitored Digital Audio Recording.

Position authority for the statewide pool was, in effect, created by judges who agreed to forgo their personal appointment authority and rely on a digital court reporter from the statewide pool.

This has been a lifesaver.

For example, in District 8, three judges are using digital court reporters from the state-wide pool on a daily basis. Before that, there was much uncertainty and difficulty in providing consistent court reporter coverage. This has been a boon to courts in those rural areas, where the nearest stenographer may be more than 100 miles away.

At the beginning of this year, District 4 became the first “hub” for the Statewide Digital Court Reporter pool.

Working out of a district court facility in Menasha, these reporters have proved instrumental in keeping the courts across the state “on the record.” These reporters serve judges who have relinquished position authority in several judicial districts.

This program has proved so successful that construction is currently underway to add additional offices to our Menasha location, and another “hub” has recently opened in Waukesha.

I want to thank those judges who have relinquished their appointment authority because that also helps us address the problem on a system-wide basis. And, I want to recognize District Court Administrator Jon Bellows and other DCAs who have worked on this project, as well as Digital Court Reporter Pool manager Connie Hansen.

We also need to thank court operations and our management services staff for structuring this system and recruiting court reporters.

This is mission critical work.

And, of course, I want to thank all of our court reporters, everywhere in the state. We depend on you!

[Data Warehouse]

We also now have a new, more sophisticated diagnostic tool for the court system.

The “data warehouse” has been a long time coming, but is going to take administrators to a new level of understanding in what is happening in terms of case processing.

We have long had a very reliable electronic case management system to track court activity and docket information for all of the cases moving through the circuit courts. However, we also learned over time that it was not designed for easily extracting and compiling court data and evaluating it in meaningful ways.

This was a weakness in a data-driven world, and we needed better information to help guide our administrative decision-making.

About two years ago, a workgroup of Office of Court Operations staff and District Court Administrators began collaborating on a new, updated array of statistical reports and analysis tools.

With the support of the workgroup and several additional staff consultants from other court system offices, including CCAP, we have now transitioned to a new data storage and analytics platform that serves as the data warehouse.

In the past, if we wanted to get statistics on some of these metrics, such as the number of jury trials as of a particular date, for example, a CCAP programmer would have had to write code to make that happen.

At the end of each year, after a time-consuming, labor-intensive process, we would compile and post annual statistics on our website.

District Court Administrators can now monitor cases as they move through the system to identify bottlenecks that may need attention. We will also be better able to identify and analyze trends. This will help with long-term planning and decision-making on funding, staffing, equipment and administrative policy. In other words, we will have better business intelligence.

Another benefit is that we will be able to share expanded and more consistent data with the National Center for State Courts and more readily compare our data to that of other state court systems.

I want to give a special shout out to the DCAs and court operations staff who made this project work, including Tyler Brandt, Steve Rosenblum, “Shelly” Barjatya, Theresa Owens, Holly Szablewski, Tom Schappa and Chris Channing, as well as legal advisors in Court Operations at times.

During the last year, I think we’ve made a lot of progress, not only using the tools we have, but also in creating new tools to help keep us running smoothly in the future.

Thanks for all the work you do, and let’s have a great conference.