Critical Issues: Planning Priorities for the Wisconsin Court System

2018 - 2020







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Mission of the Wisconsin Court System:

The mission of the Wisconsin Court System is to protect individuals' rights, privileges and liberties, to maintain the rule of law, and to provide a forum for the resolution of disputes that is fair, accessible, independent, and effective.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Planning and Policy Advisory Committee (PPAC) of the Wisconsin Supreme Court develops the biennial Critical Issues Report to identify key matters affecting the court system and set priorities for the court system to focus on during the biennium. The Supreme Court and Director of State Courts use this information to develop budget recommendations, priorities, and other initiatives.

For the 2018-2020 biennium, PPAC recommends that the Supreme Court and Director of State Courts give three critical issues top priority:

- Substance abuse and mental heath;
- Use of technology; and
- Court security.

This report includes recommended action steps that the PPAC Planning subcommittee suggests PPAC consider when determining how to address each critical issue. The action steps are divided into categories to indicate whether they are training objectives, short-term objectives, or longterm objectives.

Finally, this report summarizes activities and initiatives already in progress that address priorities identified both in this report as well as in prior reports. PPAC is responsible for monitoring the progress of each critical issue.

PPAC PLANNING BACKGROUND

The Planning and Policy Advisory Committee (PPAC) was created to advise the Supreme Court and the Director of State Courts, in the Director's capacity as the judicial system's planner and policy advisor (Supreme Court Rule 70.14). PPAC developed the court system's first strategic plan in 1994, entitled Framework for Action.

In order to strengthen the committee's overall planning function, PPAC established the Planning subcommittee. The Planning subcommittee has issued the Critical Issues report every other year since 2002. PPAC and the Director of State Courts have responded to the report's recommendations in a variety of ways, including creating subject matter subcommittees, directing the work of staff in the Office of Court Operations, and developing biennial budget proposals for consideration by the Supreme Court.

REPORT METHODOLOGY

The planning process for the 2018-2020 biennium began by reviewing articles and reports about trends affecting state courts, written by the National Center for State Courts, the State Bar of Wisconsin, and others. In July 2017, an online survey was used to collect information from internal and external stakeholders, including all state judges and justices, circuit court commissioners, clerks of circuit court, registers in probate, juvenile court clerks, district court administrators, director of state courts staff, PPAC members, legislators, elected county officials, district attorneys, public defenders, corporation counsel, State Bar of Wisconsin members, and staff at the Wisconsin Department of Corrections and Department of Justice.

The survey asked respondents to rate the importance of ten different topics:

- Substance abuse
- Court security and facilities
- Juvenile justice and child welfare
- Technology
- Judicial compensation

- Evidence-based decision making
- Mental health
- Racial disparity
- Financial penalties
- Self-represented litigants

Respondents were asked to rate each topic on a scale of 0-10, with 0 indicating that an issue was not at all important and 10 indicating that an issue was of high importance. For each question, respondents were also invited to include comments to clarify their numeric response. In addition to the 10 topics included in the survey, respondents could add up to two additional topics they thought the court system should consider. Six hundred thirty-eight (638) completed survey responses were received.

Survey results were tabulated separately for the 322 court respondents (judges, court commissioners, clerks, district court administrators, clerks of circuit court, and other court staff) and for the 316 non-court respondents (private attorneys, district attorneys, public defenders, elected officials, and others). Despite some differences in the ranking of issues, there was considerable overlap between both court and non-court responses.

The Planning subcommittee reviewed the survey results and selected three critical issues to recommend for emphasis during the 2018-2020 biennium. At the November 2017 Judicial Conference, Planning subcommittee chair Judge Mary Triggiano presented the three selected critical issue areas. Additional questions were asked of conference attendees to further guide the priority planning process (see Appendix A).

In drafting action steps, the Planning subcommittee focused on three types of actions: Short-term objectives, which acknowledge actions that are already taking place in the system and that PPAC

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should support. Long-term objectives are those that require more research or planning in order to move forward. PPAC also recognizes the critical role that training plays in continually improving the quality of service the court system provides, which is why some of the action steps also include a training objective. Judicial Education, the Judicial College, and other conferences and trainings hosted throughout the year, such as the Court Safety and Security Conference, offer quality training opportunities for judges and other court system staff. PPAC will continue to support these training efforts.

CRITICAL ISSUES AND PLANNING PRIORITIES OF THE WISCONSIN COURT SYSTEM

Critical Issue 1: Substance Abuse and Mental Health

Issue

Substance abuse and mental health have been identified as planning priorities in several past critical issues reports. The magnitude of the opioid crisis in Wisconsin and its impact on the court system necessitates renewed focus and energy on these topics, both separately and together. Although mental health and substance abuse issues pose distinct challenges individually, they are combined in this report in order to acknowledge the frequency with which they co-occur and how this impacts the development of meaningful approaches to treatment.

The legislature has responded to this crisis by expanding TAD (Treatment Alternatives and Diversion) program grants through the Wisconsin Department of Justice. In 2018, there will be almost 80 problem-solving court programs across the state, including 53 TAD-funded grants. These programs embrace a number of approaches to address the needs of specific populations, including veterans, juveniles, and OWI offenders as well as programs focused on family drug treatment and mental health issues.

Court system efforts in the 2018-2020 biennium will continue to focus on a number of ongoing efforts to support problemsolving courts, including strengthening data collection, enabling effective program evaluation, and applying treatment court standards developed by the PPAC Effective Justice Strategies subcommittee (EJS).

Action Steps

Short-Term Objectives

Through the Office of Court Operations Special Projects Coordinator, and EJS, encourage counties to examine evidencebased practices in order to identify and divert offenders with mental health and substance abuse issues at an earlier stage in the criminal justice process.

Through the Office of Court Operations Statewide Problem-Solving Court Coordinator, and EJS, encourage and support strategies for addressing the needs of those with mental health challenges, which may include exploration of mental health treatment courts.

Long-Term Objectives

EJS, through collaboration with the Behavioral Change Intervention subcommittee of the State Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, will support efforts to examine minimum standards for treatment providers, identify areas with a lack of adequate treatment services, and explore approaches courts may take in areas that are underserved by treatment providers.

The Office of Court Operations Statewide Problem-Solving Court Coordinator and Special Projects Coordinator will work with EJS to explore creation of a certification program, or peer review system, for treatment courts in Wisconsin.

Critical Issue 2: Courthouse Security

Issue

In order for the justice system to operate effectively, courts must provide an environment in which judges, parties, staff and members of the public feel secure. PPAC and its Court Security subcommittee played a substantial role in creating Supreme Court Rule Chapter 68 in 2012, which encouraged counties and courts to examine their security practices and implement adequate security measures.

While Ch. 68 presents a broad range of recommended guidelines across several areas, two central components include forming local security and facility committees and reporting security threats and incidents to the director of state courts. Action steps in this area support these activities and encourage counties to assess their security needs through training events such as the Court Safety and Security Conference, and to work in partnership with local law enforcement agencies to identify training opportunities that may help prepare judges and court staff in better handling emergency situations.

The PPAC Court Security subcommittee will also review the rule's effectiveness and determine whether changes are needed to strengthen counties' abilities to assess their security needs.

Action Steps

Training Objective

PPAC will continue to encourage development of resources and training to strengthen county-level court security committees in implementing Supreme Court Rule Chapter 68, including attending the annual Court Safety and Security Conference and pursuing training opportunities through local law enforcement partners.

Short-Term Objectives

PPAC, through the Office of Court Operations, will enable online submission of security threat and incident reports to enable the director of state courts to better analyze and assess threats and provide accurate information to PPAC and the Supreme Court and all other interested persons.

PPAC, through its Court Security subcommittee, will work with the clerks of circuit court to examine the feasibility of creating a uniform recommended protocol pertaining to storing and maintaining contraband exhibits.

Long-Term Objective: PPAC, through its Court Security subcommittee, will review Supreme Court Rule Chapter 68 to ensure it is appropriately meeting the needs of judges, court officials and the community.

Critical Issue 3: Use of Technology

Issue

In 2015, the Committee of Chief Judges presented a rule petition to develop and implement mandatory electronic case filing (eFiling) across the state. The initial phase of eFiling implementation is complete, and additional cases types will be added in the coming year.

While the transition to eFiling has been successful, this effort underscores the need for ongoing training to ensure users are able to realize the benefits of these, and other, new technologies.

In addition to supporting training on eFiling and the Judicial Dashboard, action steps in this area focus on examining the larger role of technology in the courtroom. In order to address the need for court reporters and interpreters across the state, digital audio technology and videoconferencing may offer alternatives that enable cost savings and efficiency while preserving the procedural justice rights of parties.

Modern courtroom technology should include equipment for presenting evidence, including exhibit display systems, video monitors, speakers, and microphones. It may be useful to examine whether recommended standards regarding courtroom technology are needed.

Action Steps

Training Objective:

PPAC will promote and support training for judges, court commissioners, attorneys, and court staff on available technologies, including advanced training on the Judicial Dashboard and eFiling.

Short-Term Objective:

PPAC, through the Court Interpreter Program, will examine opportunities for expanding pilot programs that support development of video remote interpreting between counties in order to reduce interpreter travel expenses.

Long-Term Objectives:

Building upon the work of its Videoconferencing subcommittee, PPAC will explore developing further standards for innovative courtroom technology, such as audio and video, so that parties in every county can effectively present their cases.

PPAC will support the efforts and recommendations of the Making the Record Committee to ensure the ability to make and take the court record is adequately maintained moving forward.

OTHER ISSUES OF IMPORTANCE

In addition to the topics outlined above, the following section highlights ongoing activities associated with topic areas included in previous critical issues reports, but not selected in the 2018-2020 cycle. These include juvenile justice and child welfare, evidence-based decision making, racial disparity, self-represented litigants, and financial penalties. In addition, although not identified as critical issues in past cycles, racial disparity, and financial penalties are briefly explored. Each of these areas plays a role in the courts' ability to operate effectively and efficiently.

Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare

Child welfare and juvenile justice have long been considered one of the most important issues facing the courts. The Children's Court Improvement Program (CCIP) has been active in developing training opportunities to support judges in their application of trauma-informed practices. CCIP also worked in partnership with the Office of Court Operations' STOP (Services, Training, Officer and Prosecutors) Violence Against Women Act grant to provide training on addressing the needs of victims of human trafficking. In the coming biennium, CCIP will continue collaborating with the Department of Children and Families (DCF) on a joint, datadriven project to improve time to filing and permanence in termination of parental rights (TPR) cases. CCIP will also continue to focus on ongoing projects related to Wisconsin Indian Child Welfare Act (WICWA) training and continuous quality improvement, child safety decision making and judicial engagement and training on these topics.

At the state level, efforts to introduce legislation to return 17-year-old offenders to the juvenile court system were made during the previous legislative session. Although these proposals were not successful, it is anticipated that similar measures will be considered by the legislature. In the absence of legislative changes at the state level, counties have developed local programs to divert some 17-year-old offenders from adult criminal prosecution. Initial results of a young adult offender referral program in Outagamie County have been positive, with the majority of program participants completing the program without further recidivism.

Evidence-Based Decision Making

Wisconsin continues to be a leader in the field of Evidence-Based Decision Making (EBDM). In 2017, the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) EBDM Initiative moved beyond its initial planning phase to begin implementing EBDM practices. Members of the PPAC Effective Justice Strategies subcommittee (EJS) participate in the statewide EBDM effort and also serve on subject-area subcommittees, which meet monthly. The primary focus of this effort moving forward will be to support incorporating proven strategies for building collaboration, implementing change, and reducing recidivism across the criminal justice continuum, beginning

at arrest and continuing through discharge from a sentence. Wisconsin was selected by NIC as the only state to continue receiving full technical assistance and support for this initiative. The state team, in partnership with eight county-level teams (Chippewa, Eau Claire, La Crosse, Marathon, Milwaukee, Outagamie, Rock and Waukesha), is implementing action plans related to justice system reform change targets developed by each county site.

EJS will continue to support counties in implementing EBDM, including proactively engaging community stakeholders and implementing additional action plans. Work in this area will focus on encouraging the use of risk assessments, supporting bail reform, and providing criminal justice system stakeholders with additional evidence-based resources and approaches.

Self-Represented Litigants

PPAC identified access to justice and self-represented litigants in several recent critical issues reports. PPAC supported rule petitions in 2013 and 2016 proposed by the PPAC Limited Scope Representation subcommittee to implement changes in rules to support of attorneys working with self-represented litigants. This included clarifying language to enable broader use of limited scope representation and allowing lawyer-mediators to draft settlement agreements in family cases. While efforts have been made to assist self-represented litigants, challenges for parties without representation persist.

Joint Legislative Council Study Committee

In 2016, the Joint Legislative Council Study Committee on Access to Civil Legal Services convened to explore the factors that contribute to having a large number of unrepresented parties in civil and family cases. The committee heard presentations from a number of organizations that serve the legal needs of low-income populations as well as presentations from judges about the challenges of working with self-represented parties. Two legislative proposals that resulted from the work of the committee were presented in early 2017. Assembly bills 115 and 116, which have been introduced to the legislature, would encourage state agencies to direct a portion of eligible federal block grant funds toward civil legal aid for the poor, and a coordinating council would be established with representatives from the affected agencies to oversee these efforts.

Resources for Self-Represented Litigants

The Office of Court Operations maintains a directory of self-help legal resources in each of the state's counties. However, not all people qualify for services or are accepted as clients. As a result, many parties in the state, particularly in family and small claims cases, proceed without representation. In 2016 and 2017, the *Pro se* family forms subcommittee of the records management committee convened to enhance a number of family court forms by adding additional instructions and definitions. As a result, litigants without representation are more likely to understand the forms and complete them properly. In addition, services such as Wisconsin Free Legal Answers Online, which allows eligible parties to submit a question and

have it answered by a volunteer attorney through the State Bar of Wisconsin, have arisen to address the legal needs of residents across the state.

Financial Penalties

The Office of Court Operations is currently engaged in a study of legal financial obligations (LFO), in partnership with the National Center for State Courts. The study, which is supported by a State Justice Institute Technical Assistance Grant, aims to answer a range of questions regarding the use of LFOs in criminal and forfeiture cases, including how practices vary across states, how the amount of LFOs impacts payment, and what practices can improve payment of LFOs. The study is also anticipated to improve the ability to estimate the fiscal impact of proposed changes to LFOs. Results of this study are expected to be available in 2018.

Racial Disparity

Although racial disparity has not been identified as a critical issue in past reports, training and information to raise awareness of implicit bias has been a focus of the court system for several years. In addition to a presentation on implicit bias at the 2015 Judicial Conference, the PPAC Effective Justice Strategies subcommittee has sought to increase awareness of this concept among attorneys and judicial officers. One outcome of these efforts has been county-level training sessions on the impact of race in the criminal justice system. Day-long seminars were held in Dane and Milwaukee Counties in 2017, and additional sessions are being planned in other areas of the state.

Procedural Fairness

Issues around procedural fairness and procedural justice focus on how communication in a courtroom or courthouse can impact litigants' perceptions of fairness. When litigants feel they have been treated fairly in court, this can positively impact their acceptance of a decision, and reduce recidivism, even if a decision was not in their favor. Many aspects of improving procedural justice are cost-neutral and center on demonstrating respect for people and their rights, offering them an opportunity to tell their story, offering a neutral and transparent decisionmaking model, and promoting understanding to ensure that people are fully aware of what took place during a court proceeding. Milwaukee County has implemented several changes to increase procedural fairness by improving wayfinding signage in the courthouse and by encouraging judges to adopt practices that improve communication. The Office of Court Operations will examine this issue during the biennium and share recommended practices.

Conclusion

Through this report, the Planning and Policy Advisory Committee of the Wisconsin Supreme Court intends to highlight issues of importance for the court system to focus on during the coming biennium. The Supreme Court and Director of State Courts will continue to monitor these topics in order to address the highest-priority needs among the state's judiciary.

Appendix A: 2017 Judicial Conference PPAC Session Feedback

	Substance Abuse				
1.	Does your county have a treatment court program?				_
	A. Yes		Number	%	
	B. No	A	127	92%	
		В	11	8%	
		Total	138		
2.	Do you feel that you understand what makes an				,
	effective treatment court program?		Number	%	
	A. Yes	A	108	72%	
	B. No	В	42	28%	
		Total	150		
3.	Does information on high- and low-criminogenic		NT 1	0/	1
	needs help you shape an appropriate sentence?		Number	%	
	A. Yes	A	124	80%	
	B. No	В	31	20%	
		Total	155		
	**				
	Use of Technolo	gy			
4.	Do you feel that eFiling and the Judicial		Numban	0/	1
	Dashboard have increased your efficiency as a	A	Number	% 450/	
	judge?	A	84	45%	
	A. Yes	В	40	21%	
	B. Somewhat	С	34	18%	
	C. I'm not sure	D	30	16%	
	D. Absolutely not	Total	188		
5	Does a lack of updated technology (audio, video,				
٥.	display, WIFI, etc.) impede the presentation of		Number	%	
	evidence in your courtroom?	A	52	34%	
	A. Yes	В	10	7%	1
	B. Often	C	55	36%	1
	C. Sometimes	D	19	13%	1
	D. Hardly ever	E	16	11%	1
	E. Never	Total	152	11/0	
	2. 2.0.01	10.01	132		J
6.	Do you feel that the move to an eFiling system has				
	been beneficial to the court system, overall?		Number	%]
	A. Yes	A	114	82%	1
	B. No	В	25	18%	1
		Total	139		1
					_

Courthouse Secu	ırity				
7. Approximately how many county courthouses in					
Wisconsin have point-of-entry security screening?			Number	%	
A. 19%		A	55	30%	
В. 23%		В	42	23%	
C. 36%*		С	47	26%	
D. 42%		D	19	10%	
E. 49%		Е	21	11%	
		Total	184		
		<u>'</u>			
8. Does your county have an active court security and					
facilities committee?			Number	%	
A. Yes		A	124	79%	
B. No		В	12	8%	
C. I don't know		С	21	13%	
		Total	157		
9. Do you know approximately how many reportable					
courthouse security incidents take place in your			Number	%	
courthouse each year?		A	33	20%	
A. 0-2		В	47	28%	
B. 3-5**		С	27	16%	
C. 6-10		D	9	5%	
D. 10-15		Е	53	31%	
E. More than 15		Total	169		
		1		<u>'</u>	

^{*}In 2017, approximately 36% of Wisconsin's counties indicated that they have security screening at their courthouse entry.

^{**}As of November 2017, 122 security incidents have been reported from 32 counties. The average is 3.8 incidents among counties that reported an incident.

Other Areas of Importance

- 10. Would you support the return of most 17-year-olds to juvenile court?
 - A. Yes, this system worked well in the past and research supports such a change
 - B. No, the present cutoff is appropriate
 - C. Only with additional resources for county services
 - D. Not sure I would need to see the details

	Number	%
A	94	56%
В	32	19%
С	23	14%
D	19	11%
Total	168	

- 11. Would you like more training on how to incorporate trauma-informed practices into your courtroom?
 - A. No, I have already done this
 - B. No, I don't see how this would be useful to me
 - C. Yes, I would like more training on how to apply it

	Number	%
A	39	22%
В	22	13%
С	115	65%
Total	176	

- 12. How important is understanding about implicit bias for a judge?
 - A. Extremely important
 - B. Important
 - C. Somewhat important
 - D. Not very important- I'm not sure how it applies
 - E. Not at all important- I don't see this as a problem

	Number	%
A	60	38%
В	41	26%
С	35	22%
D	7	4%
Е	16	10%
Total	159	