

Wyoming Judicial Branch Technologies Assessment – Report Brief

January 2020

Justice Management Institute conducted a thorough assessment of Wyoming court technologies in the last quarter of 2019, and reached the following conclusions:

- ❖ The Wyoming judicial branch is aligned with and sometimes ahead of peer states, such as Colorado, Montana, South Dakota, and Utah, in achieving “digital courts” for the benefit of all stakeholders in the courts.
- ❖ The WJB has made this progress with significantly fewer resources (funding and staff) than comparable states.
- ❖ Sustained funding and increased staffing are critical to achieving digital courts as planned in the next six years.

Digital Court

A digital court increases access to justice and is a court system that fully leverages technology and networks to engage citizens, businesses, attorneys, litigants, other government agencies, and judges and staff in the justice system. Digital court systems build the following technologies:

1. Digital or electronic cases, as the official court record;
2. Online dockets and court calendars for the public;
3. Online access to case information for the public;
4. Electronic filing of cases and documents to the court by attorneys and *pro se* litigants.
5. Electronic notices and orders sent by the court to electronic filers;
6. Multiple reports and dashboards for judges and clerks to manage their dockets and cases;
7. Attorney and litigant portals to manage their cases online;
8. Online dispute resolution, especially for family and small claims cases; and
9. Courtroom technologies that enable cases to be presented electronically.

What’s been accomplished to date

Effective and sustainable digital courts require a solid foundation; thus the WJB has built an infrastructure and is rolling out applications that can fully support a digital court. Built technologies include a robust case management system, e-citations, e-filing at the Supreme Court, electronic payment of fines and fees, integrated court calendars, and hearings by video conference. As important, over the last two years, the WJB has built a new technology infrastructure that is far more secure and adaptable.

The presentation on October 30, 2019 of the technology plan by the Chief Justice to the Joint Appropriations Committee of the Wyoming Legislature provides a straightforward description of IT initiatives since 2006, including a focus on statewide case management and e-filing and the establishment of a new Chancery Court, in response to the very high priority placed on both initiatives by the Legislature. Other initiatives include training of attorneys statewide, online public and attorney access to cases and dockets, and ongoing updates of courtroom technologies and sound systems. In addition, funding is

requested for technology and clerk training statewide and support for the complex infrastructure that must be secure in the face of widespread ransomware attacks.

What's envisioned for the near future

Over the next five years WJB plans to rollout statewide case management and e-filing at the Chancery and District Courts, and public and attorney access to hearings and cases across all trial courts. These important steps to reach a bold vision of a digital court reflects a strategic direction aligned with and sometimes ahead of peer states, such as Colorado, Montana, South Dakota, and Utah.

The 2019 and 2020 technology plans are appropriately ambitious and designed to achieve a digital court in the next six years. To reach that goal the WJB requires sustained funding and additional IT staffing. The 2021-2022 proposed budget requests are critical to reach that goal with approximately eight additional IT staffing needed in subsequent budgets. The full assessment report identifies in greater detail the needed IT staffing and their roles. The pace of change and investment in technology is critical in order to maintain Wyoming's competitiveness, to achieve legislative goals for business investment in Wyoming, and to allow the Wyoming judiciary to continue to serve its essential service to the State.

The full JMI assessment includes analysis of statewide technology governance, applications, new rollouts, human resources, and budgets. The report provides more detailed discussion of the findings and recommendations informed by them. The assessment recognizes the foundation that has been built over the past five years and how that work can and needs to be leveraged in the coming years. The Wyoming Judicial Branch must continue to maintain the pace of change with the funding needed to achieve its vision of a fully digital court across the state of Wyoming.