

2020 REGULAR SESSION

HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS & REVENUE

BUDGET REVIEW SUBCOMMITTEE ON JUSTICE, PUBLIC SAFETY, &
JUDICIARY

2nd Meeting

February 11, 2020

The Budget Review Subcommittee on Justice, Public Safety, & Judiciary of the House Standing Committee on Appropriations & Revenue held its 2nd meeting of the 2020 Regular Session on February 11, 2020, at 12:00 PM, in Room 154 of the Capitol Annex. The Chair called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Members Present: Representative Jason Nemes, Chair; Representatives Daniel Elliott, Nima Kulkarni, Angie Hatton, and Jason Petrie.

Guests: John D. Minton, Chief Justice, Kentucky Court of Justice; Carole Henderson, Budget Director, Administrative Office of the Courts; Laurie Dudgeon, Director, Administrative Office of the Courts; Jasmine Heiss, Campaign Director, In Our Back Yards, Vera Institute of Justice; Jennifer Hancock, President/CEO, Volunteers of America Mid-States; Libby Mills, Senior Director, Volunteers of America Restorative Justice, Representative John Blanton.

LRC Staff: Zach Ireland, Savannah Wiley, Ben Thompson, and Jim Thornton.

Vera Institute of Justice

Jasmine Heiss discussed the needs and issues concerning pre-trial reform and release. She stated that data on the issue often does not include mental health flags and that Kentucky can look at alternative approaches. She also stated that this approach would apply to drug and/or property offenses considered low or moderate risk of flight.

In response to questions from Chairman Nemes, Ms. Heiss stated that an ideal system would capitalize on available resources, flag for mental health issues, and find treatment modalities which could be considered alternatives. She said that an individualized approach is needed.

In response to a question from Representative Petrie, Ms. Heiss said the goal is to make the justice system obsolete as the first line response to substance abuse and mental health issues.

Judicial Branch

Chief Justice Minton gave a presentation on the budgetary needs of the Judicial Branch. The presentation covered compensation, pension issues, vacant positions, capital projects and needs, and the difference between the Chief Justice's budget recommendations and \$20.7 million set-aside in the Governor's budget for each year of the biennium FY 2021 and FY 2022.

In response to questions from the Chairman Nemes, Chief Justice Minton answered that the loss of \$5.4 million in restricted funds from issuing driver's licenses would have a significant impact on the ability of deputy circuit clerks to fulfill their constitutional and statutory duties. The loss could possibly lead to some job reductions. Ms. Henderson said the pay of judicial judges is 50th in the nation and a cost-of-living (COL) adjustment would move the ranking up.

In response to questions from Representative Petrie, Ms. Henderson said the average salary of judicial judges is \$130,900. Ms. Henderson further stated the set-aside is not a mistake and the budget did not include the \$7.5 million lapse. Ms. Dudgeon stated that there are no current circumstances that will allow the Judicial Branch to meet needs with the current budget and that vacancy credits are the only mechanism they have.

In response to an additional question from Chairman Nemes, Ms. Henderson said that the only way to accommodate the cuts would be by abolishing vacant positions. She also said that few open positions are long term, though those in IT are harder to fill. Open IT positions are usually filled by contractors.

In response to a question from Representative Blanton, Chief Justice Minton said any cuts would be statewide and would require prioritizing constitutional versus statutory duties.

In response to a question from Representative Petrie, Ms. Henderson said there are funds to carry forward as a reserve. Ms. Dudgeon said the carry forward should be at least 5% of budget.

Volunteers of America

President Hancock and Director Mills covered the impact of the merger of the Jefferson County, KY chapters of Volunteers of America and Restorative Justice and the synergy which has resulted from this merger. The presentations noted the voluntary component of the program, its emphasis on case management, and the positive impact upon recidivism. They also emphasized the reduced costs of this approach compared to the traditional juvenile justice system.

There being no further business to come before the subcommittee, the meeting was adjourned at 1:10 p.m.