

**VIGO COUNTY PUBLIC DEFENDER
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April 25th, 2024

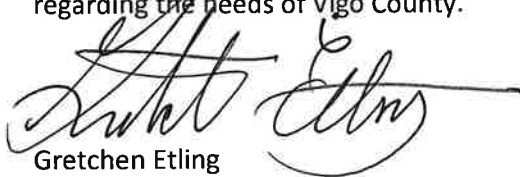
Interim Study Committee on Courts and the Judiciary

Dear Members of the Committee:

I am writing to provide my support for the establishment of an additional Vigo County Superior Court. In Vigo County, there is a definite need for an additional court to assist in both the civil and criminal docket. However, I believe the primary need is to assist with the juvenile caseload. I have been the Chief Public Defender for 24 years. In my position as Chief Public Defender, I have observed the most dramatic increase in the Juvenile Court docket. The Public Defender Office is involved in the majority of the hearings in the Juvenile Court. These cases includes CHINS, TPRs, paternity and juvenile delinquency proceedings. The amount of time spent in court representing the parents and children appointed to our office has more than doubled in the last few years.

The CHINS and TPR caseload consumes the majority of the Juvenile Court time and makes it difficult to set hearings dates to expedite permanency. There have been many efforts to manage the court docket without adding an additional superior court. Both the Circuit and Juvenile Court Judges, DCS staff and Public Defender attorneys met over a three-year span to create solutions. The Public Defender Office obtained funding from the Indiana Public Defender Commission to establish a System Navigator Pilot to provide social workers or case support specialists to assist the parents and attorneys in CHINS cases. The Vigo County Court also obtained funding to hire a facilitator to mediate CHINS and TPR cases. These efforts continue to provide some relief but not enough to manage the increasing number of cases. The addition of a Vigo County Superior Court is the next step in providing a solution to the increasing needs of the Vigo County community.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you regarding the needs of Vigo County.



Gretchen Etling
Chief Public Defender