

**VIGO COUNTY PUBLIC DEFENDER  
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September 30, 2022

Interim Study Committee on Courts and the Judiciary  
Representative Jerry Torr, Chair  
Senator Liz Brown, Vice Chair

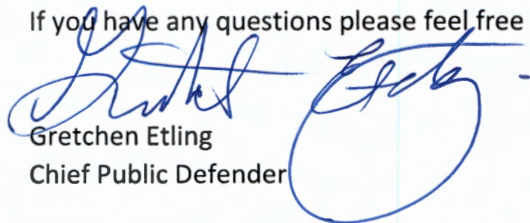
Dear Members of the Committee:

I am writing to express my full support for the establishment of an additional Vigo County Superior Court. There is no doubt that a need exists for an additional court to assist in both the civil and criminal cases. However, I believe the primary need is to assist with the juvenile caseload. In the twenty-two years, I have been Chief Public Defender I have seen the most dramatic increase in the Juvenile Court docket. The Public Defender's Office is involved in the majority of the hearings in the Juvenile Court which includes CHINS, TPRs, paternity and juvenile delinquency proceedings.

The most pressing need that my office has experienced is with regards to the CHINS/TPR caseload. 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's Office staff met over a two year span to create solutions. The Public Defender's Office obtained funding and is now participating in a state funded System Navigator Pilot to provide either social workers or case support specialists to assist the attorneys. Another solution was to utilize a Senior Judge to hear periodic reviews. The Court also obtained funding to hire a facilitator to mediate CHINS and TPR cases. There were also numerous meetings with various parties involved to create solutions. These efforts continue to provide some relief but not enough. The requirement of these hearings necessitate an additional court.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you regarding the needs of Vigo County.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me.

  
Gretchen Etling  
Chief Public Defender