



**WOODROW W. "WOODY" GOSSOM, JR.
COUNTY JUDGE**

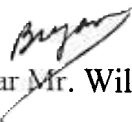
Wichita County Courthouse, 900 7th Street, Room 202
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RECEIVED
MAR 28 2005
OFFICE OF
COURT ADMINISTRATION


March 21, 2005

Mr. Bryan Wilson
Indigent Defense Task Force, OCA
P.O. Box 12066
Austin, TX 78711-2066


Dear Mr. Wilson:

I have attached Mr. Curry's report on the Public Defender's Case Management System. Please advise me if you need additional information.

Sincerely,


Woodrow W. "Woody" Gossom, Jr.
County Judge



OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER

Wichita County Courthouse
900 7th St., Suite 405
Wichita Falls, Texas 76301-2400
(940) 766-8199

March 1, 2005

Honorable Woodrow Gossom
Wichita County Judge
900 7th Street, Rm. 202
Wichita Falls, TX 76301



Re: PD Case Management System

Dear Judge Gossom:

I appreciate the opportunity to update you on the status of the PD Case Management System (CMS) software developed by GSA. As you may recall, GSA had previously provided us with programs that allowed us to keep our cases in a database. We also had a database we developed of witnesses and victims in all our cases to use to check for potential conflicts when we received new appointments. When we examined several commercial case management systems, we found that none of them would be able to import the data we already had into their programs. Given that we had information that went back ten years or more, that didn't seem like the best option.

Fortunately, GSA was in a position to help us. First, the software interface was updated to a browser style that was much easier to use. Second, the staff of the Public Defenders Office sat down and put together a list of things we would like to see in our software package, the vast majority of which GSA was able to implement to one degree or another. Third, GSA has been able to help us make changes and improvements to the software based on our actual experience with it. As a whole, I believe that the PD CMS is a drastic improvement over what the office previously had and will contribute to both the efficient running of the office and to improved information for the commissioners court regarding the office.

Currently, all Public Defender staff members have access to the CMS. This includes six attorneys, two investigators and five support staff personnel. One thing I had wanted to see, in addition to saving the data we had already accumulated, was the ability for everyone in the office to be able to access a case and be able to see whatever information we had on it. Prior to this, if someone wanted to check on the status of a case, the physical file had to be located. Now, the information is available by checking what's in the CMS. While this may seem like a small thing, it adds up when you take into consideration the number of cases we handle in a year.

Also in this vein, and more importantly, the CMS has given us the ability to keep track of all the case activity within the program. While this has not eliminated all the paperwork

associated with a case file, it has reduced it while, at the same time, making it much easier to see what is going on in a particular case. This is true regardless of whether the activity is generated by the attorney, investigator or support staff. Furthermore, my staff and I have the ability to categorize the particular activity (for instance, an office visit) so that, to the extent it is possible, we have a consistent method of keeping track of the vast majority of case activities. Additionally, we have the ability to add or remove categories, depending on their usefulness.

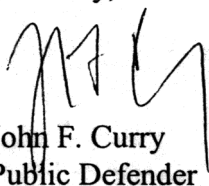
In this regard, the CMS allows for the time spent on a particular activity to be recorded and reported. As you know, one of the requirements of the article 26.044 agreement between the commissioners court and the Public Defenders Office was a caseload limit. While we have implemented the one developed for the agreement (which I will discuss shortly), one of the benefits of the time tracking capability of the CMS is that we will have the ability to see what our actual experience is with regards to the time spent on different kinds of cases, i.e., first degree felonies, etc. With that, we can make adjustments to the caseload limits that accurately reflect the amount of attorney time that is required. This will allow the county to maximize the utility of the Public Defenders Office while maintaining a high quality of representation.

The last area that I believe will be most beneficial to both the Office and the county is how the CMS will give us the ability to see how the Office is meeting various goals. While I believe it is difficult for non-lawyers to determine whether a particular attorney is doing good work, there are standards that are useful in measuring the efficiency of the Office. For instance, the Fair Defense Act requires the Office to contact new jail clients within 24 hours of being appointed. The only practical way for us to do this is by letter. The CMS allows to keep track of when the case is opened in the system as well as generating the letter. We have the ability to see in what percentage of cases we are meeting this goal.

This same ability applies to other areas, whether we are contacting clients within certain time limits, how long it is taking to convey plea offers and letting the prosecutor know the status of the offer, and so forth. This data will be useful as an internal tool for the Office to keep track of how well we are meeting these standards and will provide the county with an objective measure of the Office's efficiency. It is my opinion that this will do a great deal to improve communications between the Office and the county.

In conclusion, I believe the CMS has been a significant improvement over what the Office had previously been using. The ability to work with GSA on the development of the program, along with their willingness to address ongoing issues as we actually used the CMS, has provided us with a tool that is uniquely valuable to us. It is my sincere belief that it will be a significant tool in our continuing efforts to improve the Public Defenders Office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Curry', written over a printed name and title.

John F. Curry
Public Defender