

Question: Will Statewide Judicial Branch technology initiatives reduce space problems experienced by the District Court in Polk County?

Answer: A slight to modest reduction in clerical staff in the Clerk's Office will likely be occasioned as more case information is digitized and workflow is electronically streamlined. Public traffic in the courthouse to perform routine functions (filing papers, pay fines, look at paper documents, etc.) will be reduced.

Background: All county courts in Iowa use the Iowa Court Information System (ICIS) for case management. This application was developed by the Iowa Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) and deployed throughout the state in the early to middle 1990s. ICIS addresses all case types and has evolved over time. Currently, ICIS is web-enabled and all data is stored centrally. AOC maintains and operates the application.

AOC is in the process of developing and deploying a system that will integrate with ICIS to dramatically decrease the courts' reliance on paper documents and increase the efficiency of court and court clerk operations. The Electronic Document Management System (EDMS) will allow lawyers and citizens to electronically file court documents with the Judicial Branch using personal computers on the Internet. The EDMS will enable public access via the Internet to the court docket and court documents 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In addition, court notices will be emailed to lawyers, litigants, and officials. Specifically, the EDMS project will provide courts several important functions and features, including:

- **Electronic Case Filing.** Case filings for all case types will be accepted electronically. Attorneys and pro se litigants will be able to electronically submit case filings and documents to the court. At some point in the future, electronic filing will be mandatory for all case types. Every county courthouse will provide wireless connectivity and kiosks for pro se filers to use. The clerk's office will scan paper documents for pro se filers.
- **Document Management.** Case-related documents that are not already available electronically will be scanned, indexed, and attached to a case file(s). This will provide for document security and integrity and allow multiple individuals access to a document or case file at the same time.
- **Workflow.** Electronic case documents will be routed and processed according to business rules established by the court. With structured workflow the Court can be assured the high priority work is finished first throughout the workday.
- **Electronic Court Files.** Paper case files will not be established or maintained for new cases. All new case files will be completely electronic.
- **Electronic Notices.** Parties and other case participants will be notified via e-mail according to business rules established by the court.
- **On-Line Court File Access.** Dockets will be posted to a web site for public access. Case files will be posted to the same web site for access by attorneys and parties.

Plymouth and Story Counties, as well as the Supreme Court and Court of Appeals, will serve as pilot test sites for EDMS beginning in early 2010. Once the pilot projects are completed, two counties will be brought on-line every month. Polk County is currently scheduled for EDMS deployment in late 2011. Once a county is implemented, it will move forward with electronic case management (i.e., only new cases will be processed entirely electronically and existing case files will not be scanned).

Analysis: Once EDMS is implemented in Polk County, it will make the courts run more smoothly, reduce courthouse traffic, and have numerous positive effects on judges, attorneys, administrators, parties, and other court participants. Most significantly, EDMS will have meaningful effects on the clerk's office:

- The clerk's data entry requirements will be greatly reduced, as the clerk will eventually cease entering citations and all other case filings. Case filings will simply need to be reviewed for accuracy before they are accepted for processing. As a result, clerk staff could potentially be reduced.
- The physical location of court clerk staff will become less important. Some clerk staff could be housed outside the courthouse and could, potentially, telecommute and/or work flexible hours. Clerk staff who interface directly with the public (e.g., to receive payments or assist with pro se filings) or participate in court proceedings would need to be located in the courthouse during operating hours.
- The need for additional physical file space will eventually be eliminated as all files become electronic. Over the very long term, as paper files are destroyed the space required to house case files will be reduced. This may not save significant room in the Polk County courthouse, though, as many historical files are already stored in another location.
- Clerk staff will spend much less time notifying parties once electronic notification is implemented. Also, the court will save money on postage.
- Clerk staff will spend less time responding to information requests as more information is available on-line.
- Clerk staff will no longer need to deliver paper files to courtrooms prior to court proceedings.

Advice: Iowa AOC is very progressive in providing effective information technology. Polk County should continue to participate in statewide court technology initiatives and encourage AOC to move Polk County up in the EDMS implementation schedule. As Polk County considers alternatives for saving space, it should plan for a small reduction in clerk staff once EDMS and new business processes are in place. Also, it will not be necessary for all clerk staff to be co-located with courtrooms.