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STATE OF IOWA  
LEGISLATIVE FISCAL BUREAU

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Fiscal Committee  
From: Jennifer Dean  
Date: November 18, 2002  
Re: Update on Judicial Branch Re-organization

The configuration and number of judicial districts and judicial election districts are set by the General Assembly according to Article 5, Section 10 of the Iowa Constitution and codified in the Code of Iowa. Section 602.6107, Code of Iowa, contains the configuration of the eight judicial districts. Section 602.6109, Code of Iowa, contains the configuration of the judicial election districts. The General Assembly has not reorganized the judicial districts since 1972 when it reduced the number of districts from 18 to eight.

**Previous Proposal**

In November 2001, the Judicial Branch released a restructuring proposal based on the recommendations from the Iowa Judicial Council. The previous restructuring plan called for the creation of 28 Court Service Areas within the State. Each service area would have supported a minimum population of approximately 50,000. The previous proposal also reduced the number of judicial districts from eight to five. The plan was tabled in December 2001.

The FY 2003 General Fund reduction to the Judicial Branch operating budget was \$2.2 million (2.0%) compared to the Actual FY 2002 appropriation. Despite the reduction to the Judicial Branch's operating budget, the Judicial Branch did not have to furlough any employees. The Judicial Branch did implement the following cost saving measures:

- 117 employees were laid off.
- 67 employees had their hours reduced.
- 79 supervisors were downgraded to line staff.
- Juvenile programs were eliminated.
- The Court Appointed Special Advocate Program was moved to the Department of Inspections and Appeals.
- Education and training programs were eliminated.
- Implemented a hiring freeze.

## **Current Proposal**

A 25-member citizen committee is in the process of developing proposals for reducing the number of judicial districts and realigning judicial election districts. The Committee held several public meetings at 16 locations around Iowa in mid-November to gather public comment on the Committee's proposals. Attached to this memo are the five proposed maps that reallocate judicial resources across that State in two, three, four, and five judicial districts. (See **Attachment I** in the Fiscal Committee packet.)

The primary reason for considering redistricting was the result of the National Center for State Court's workload study. The results show Iowa had enough judicial officers to handle the workload but that some districts had too few judges while other districts had more than enough. Also, attached to this document is a summary table entitled, "Comparing Supply of FTE Judicial Officers and Weighted Caseload Demand for FTE Judicial Officers in Current and Proposed New Judicial Districts." The first table on the document shows the current distribution of judicial resources based upon the National Court study findings. The following tables on the document show the distribution of judicial resources across the five proposed maps. (See **Attachment J** in the Fiscal Committee packet.)

The Committee plans to submit a report to the Iowa Supreme Court in December. The Court will consider whether to recommend a plan for new judicial districts and judicial election districts to the General Assembly. The General Assembly has the exclusive authority to change the number and boundaries of the judicial districts and the judicial election districts.