

Subject:

FW: Supreme Court Rules Committee:

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The necessity and efficiency of paperless or paper-on-demand courts.

In June of 2010, Dallas County experienced a flood in the basement of the county building in which our probate and mental illness courts are housed. As a result of the flood and the lack of power to the building, it was necessary to relocate all county operations to other buildings.

In an effort to continue court operations, my staff and I literally moved computers, printers, scanners and copiers to another building. Additionally, because of the number of probate and mental illness files my office maintains (125,000) it was impossible to move them. We had to arrange to have staff enter the building (limited to 15 minutes due to the high temperature of the building) in order to pull the daily dockets of the courts.

Had we at that time digitized our court records, we would have only needed to use laptop computers to access our court records online as we do today. Since that time, we have digitized all of our pending cases and they are available online.

It was a difficult transition only because of the resistance of some judges who insisted on maintaining a paper file. However, once they were trained in how to access records online, most of them have embraced the easy access of records.

From a disaster recovery standpoint, maintaining digital records provides permanent protection of records. During the flood of 2010, Dallas County paid in excess of \$250,000 to preserve and restore paper records that were damaged during the flood.

By using modern day technology, digitizing court records creates efficiencies which: (1) reduces errors in filing documents in the wrong file, (2) lost or misfiled court jackets. Because of the volume of documents we receive this sometimes occurs, (3)

the reduction of cost associated with toner, paper, maintenance cost for copiers and printers and (4) cost to purchase file jackets. Since we have moved to a paperless environment, we have reduced cost to the county by approximately \$350,000 annually.

The migration to a paperless, or paper-on-demand (allows the judges the ability to print any document that may wish to use), allows us to implement best practices and efficiencies in court operations.

However, if we are required to maintain paper records it will require additional staff which would be an increased cost to the Dallas County.

All clerks are willing to assist the courts in the event they need a printed version of a particular document, but we must not be "required" to maintain paper files. Additionally, it is standard practice for attorneys to provide courtesy copies to the Court as requested or needed.

With the eFiling mandate issued by the Supreme Court, both clerks in Dallas County will gain additional efficiencies in our business processes. However, if we are required to produce and maintain paper files, it will require additional staffing to upload and print documents which would have normally been provided by the litigants. This process would cost Dallas County approximately \$850,000 in salaries for additional personnel.

We thank the Supreme Court for its vision and leadership, but if we are required to reproduce paper files, this attempt to implement best practices would be to no avail.

Thank you for your consideration.

John F. Warren
Dallas County Clerk

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