

**Trial Court Administrator John A. Bello**  
**Joint Committee on Bonding, Capital Expenditures**  
**and State Assets Hearing Testimony**  
**March 29, 2022**

Good morning, Chair Gregoire, Chair Collins and Members of the Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to testify in support of House Bill 4499. In addition to Chief Justice Budd and Chief Justice Locke, I am here today with Chief Information Officer Steve Duncan who joined us last year from Harvard University bringing with him a wealth of knowledge in Digital Transformation and IT projects implementation.

Today, I will provide a high-level overview of our request and provide you with a perspective of what bond funding will do from the perspective of the court user. CIO Duncan will get into more specifics regarding his approach in preparation for the IT Bond Bill. Before I begin, I want to also thank Judiciary House Chair Representative Mike Day and former Representative Sheila Harrington for their support on this bill and for agreeing to refile it this session.

Shifting an entire system to a virtual platform during the pandemic meant that we were forced to kickstart some information technology initiatives to provide court users with access to the courts. Throughout the pandemic, we continued to expand our eCourts initiative through our eCourts Program Office. We have expanded eFiling for the electronic filing of documents in six of our seven court departments. We have implemented ePay to allow people to pay criminal court fees and fines online. We have also rolled out eDelivery to electronically deliver documents to court users, rather than snail mail.

Additionally, we have launched a comprehensive Digital Case Flow planning process to identify and establish operational changes to achieve end-to-end digital case flow. This will create a roadmap for initiatives contained in the IT Bond Bill and move us towards a paperless system, as described by Chief Justice Locke.

The IT Bond Bill was filed last session but the pandemic intervened which meant refiling the bill. This delay has a silver lining. We actually find ourselves in a better place technologically than we were two years ago which has greatly expanded our options for serving the public.

The pandemic demonstrated, like nothing else has, the significance of technology to an individual's ability to access the justice system – physically or virtually. From the beginning of our planning process, when we looked at the IT needs of the court system, we looked at it from that perspective: what do court users need to access justice?

Before coming to court, court users need the ability to file forms, pay filing fees, find information, and access guidance on the court process from their home. For many court users, coming to court means taking a day off from work or paying for childcare. Not being able to miss work or get childcare could mean a default judgment or even a default warrant.

What if a court user does not have access to the technology to participate in a virtual hearing? They need a viable alternative that would permit them to have their virtual hearing and not have to be in court all day.

When a courthouse visit is necessary, court users need to know where they are going once inside a courthouse. They need to know they are safe in a secure building and that the confidential information they have provided in their case is secure.

If litigants or witnesses speak a language other than English, they need to know their language needs will be met, so they can fully participate in the court process. Once someone has had their court hearing, whether virtual or in person, we also know they need access to information as soon as it is available.

Our IT Bond Bill responds to all these needs. If enacted, this bill will provide:

- A way to virtually access the court system that eliminates the need to physically travel to a courthouse unless necessary, so a litigant isn't forced to make the choice between coming to court and taking care of their child.
- An Access to Justice (A2J) portal to provide the necessary information and process flows to enable self-represented litigants to find the information they need, file the appropriate case material, and have access to online dispute resolution (ORD) and mediation services.
- Increased bandwidth ensuring that virtual hearings take place in a secure virtual space without a stop or stutter.
- A content management system to manage e-filed documents, forms, and evidence so they are immediately available to judges and clerks during court hearings without having to hunt down paper and prolong court processes.
- Real time docketing will ensure that critical information about court events, such as judges' decisions, is immediately accessible to everyone who needs it.

- Wayfinding and digital signage so court users can look at a map of the courthouse, see their case on the docket, and find the right courtroom.
- Video remote interpreting will ensure that no matter what language a court user speaks, interpreter services will be available without requiring a continuance to find the right interpreter.
- Updated security systems with additional cameras, centralized security monitoring, duress systems, in-building communication, and improved communication with law enforcement, creating safer and more secure courthouses.
- A modern Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) Phone System which will improve a litigant's experience when they contact the courts and improve operational efficiency.

We take the needs of court users very seriously and understand that modernizing the court system's IT infrastructure is a true access to justice issue.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I will now hand this over to CIO Steve Duncan to tell you more about the initiatives in House Bill 4499 and I am happy to take any questions.