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State's Financial Crunch to Affect Hours of Local Court Clerk

Due to the local effect of the state court budget deficit, the office of the Clerk of Shawnee County District Court will begin closing to the public at 4 p.m. effective November 2nd. This change is designed to enable employees to use the 4 p.m. 'til 5 p.m. time each day to process and file the paperwork and related business generated by the Court's caseload. While this change will move the closing hour to 4 p.m. the office will remain accessible to the public 8 hours a day, including remaining open to the public during the lunch hour. Fax and electronic filings will not be affected by the change.

Chief Judge Nancy Parrish announced the change today after receiving approval by the State Supreme Court of the local plan to keep up with the burgeoning Third Judicial District caseload amidst the hiring freeze which prevents courts having employment vacancies to fill those vacancies as employees quit or retire.

Recent history shows there to be 43,000 or more cases of various kinds filed in Shawnee County in a year's time resulting in thousands of documents and computer entries all to be processed in connection with them.

Chief Judge Parrish explained that the hiring freeze, which results from the reductions in funding of the state court system budget, has produced a gradual reduction in the staff available to do the work of the Clerk. "That will continue indefinitely. However, we hope the measure we are taking will allow the clerk's office to cope with the continuing strain created by a gradually decreasing workforce having to handle a workload that continues to climb in numbers and complexity."

Employees of the Clerk of the District Court office are all State employees. Under the hiring freeze enacted due to budget cuts employees who retire or leave for other jobs cannot be replaced and not even temporary replacements can be brought in for positions left open for other reasons such as sickness or maternity leave.

It is intended that this change will allow court staff to complete the days' work without interruptions and increase the ability to catch up and process the cases in a timely manner.

"Even though there is this change," Judge Parrish said, "it should be noted that lawyers and the general public will have access to the Clerk's office 8 hours a day since it opens at 8:00 a.m. and is open continuously until 4:00 p.m." She emphasized that this change will not change the work hours for any Clerk's office or other Court employees and the judges' calendaring of cases will continue without change.

This change will require those having business with the Clerk of the District Court to recognize that the business day will end for them at 4:00 p.m. rather than the 5:00 p.m. they may be used to.

A number of other courts around the state have been similarly affected. All told, the Judicial Branch basic maintenance budget Statewide of \$112,878,918 was reduced by 13.8 percent or \$15,900,000 by the Legislature for the fiscal year that began July 1. The \$15.9 million deficit is projected to be offset, in-part, by the Legislature's authorization to implement a \$10 per case filing surcharge, which is expected to generate revenues totaling \$5 million. Other measures such as the hiring freeze, not using retired judges to help with caseloads, and elimination of temporary employee hours will save an estimated \$2.8 million, but still leaving the court system short an estimated \$10.9 million for the budget year that began July 1. The Supreme Court is asking the 2010 Legislature for a supplemental appropriation to offset part of the under funding.

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