

# Nebraska Supreme Court Technology Committee Strategic Plan FY 2021-2022

## 1 CONTENTS

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2	Introduction .....	4
2.1	Technology Committee .....	4
2.2	Judicial Branch Structure .....	4
2.2.1	Supreme Court .....	4
2.2.2	Court of Appeals .....	4
2.2.3	Workers’ Compensation Court .....	4
2.2.4	District Courts .....	4
2.2.5	Separate Juvenile Courts.....	5
2.2.6	Problem Solving Courts.....	5
2.2.7	County Courts .....	5
2.2.8	Probation.....	5
2.2.9	Administrative Offices.....	5
2.2.10	Judicial Branch Education .....	5
2.2.11	Attorney Services .....	6
2.2.12	Trial Court Services .....	6
2.2.13	Office of Public Guardian .....	6
2.2.14	Court Improvement Project.....	6
3	Current Environment .....	7
3.1	Software Applications .....	7
3.1.1	Off-the-shelf applications .....	7
3.1.2	Video conferencing .....	7
3.1.3	Software as a Service (SaaS) .....	7
3.1.4	Custom applications.....	8
3.2	Data.....	8
3.2.1	Databases.....	8
3.2.2	Data exchange.....	9
3.3	Imaging.....	9

3.4	Online Services.....	10
3.4.1	Administrative Divisions.....	10
3.4.2	Trial Courts.....	10
3.4.3	Appellate Courts .....	11
3.4.4	Probation.....	11
3.5	Hardware .....	11
3.5.1	Administrative offices .....	11
3.5.2	Appellate courts.....	11
3.5.3	Trial courts .....	11
3.5.4	Probation.....	11
3.6	Networking.....	12
3.6.1	Administrative offices .....	12
3.6.2	Appellate courts.....	12
3.6.3	Trial courts .....	12
3.6.4	Probation.....	12
3.7	Staff.....	12
3.7.1	IT Support.....	12
3.7.2	Contractors .....	12
3.7.3	Business/Applications Analysts.....	13
3.7.4	Data Analysts.....	13
3.7.5	Webmaster.....	13
3.7.6	Security Officer/Network Administrator.....	13
4	Mission Statement .....	13
5	Vision.....	13
6	Judicial Branch Technology Strategic Objectives.....	14
6.1	Identify and integrate where possible, information management systems for data and document storage, in order to facilitate data sharing, statistics and analysis, managerial decision making, quality assurance, data life cycle administration, and open records compliance. ....	14
6.2	Increase the ability of the public and the bar to access court services through technology which fulfills the individualized requirements and expectations of stakeholders’ .....	14
6.3	Enhance court and probation staff’s ability to operate professionally, efficiently and effectively by increasing access to, and competency with, appropriate technology.....	14
7	Initiatives and projects.....	14
7.1	Seamless interfaces for file sharing/transfer .....	14

7.1.1	Bills of exception .....	15
7.1.2	Exhibits .....	15
7.1.3	Records of court proceedings .....	15
7.1.4	Court/Probation systems integration .....	15
7.1.5	Search warrants .....	15
7.2	New approaches to judicial branch interactions .....	15
7.2.1	Video streaming of court proceedings.....	15
7.2.2	Scheduling and calendaring .....	15
7.2.3	Self-Represented Litigants (SRL's).....	15
7.2.4	Court case information .....	16
7.2.5	Probation information .....	16
7.2.6	Criminal justice information .....	16
7.3	Transformative models for court/probation staff and judges.....	16
7.3.1	Tools for case management.....	16
7.3.2	Alternatives for support.....	17

## 2 INTRODUCTION

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Providing access to swift, fair, justice is a primary goal in the Nebraska Judicial Branch strategic agenda. The judicial branch recognizes that “implementing and maintaining modern technology to support the internal work of the courts” and “enhancing technological access for external court users” are key components of realizing that goal.

### 2.1 TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE

The Technology Committee was created by the Supreme Court in January 2006, to guide the implementation of information technology in the judicial branch. Committee make-up has been specifically designed to be representative of various interest groups and branch divisions. Members include judges, clerks, and administrators, from all parts of the branch. Additionally, probation, administrative offices, attorneys, and educators in the legal community have voting membership. As of January 1, 2016 ‘resource associates’ representing other components of the judicial branch were added to the committee, which can be called upon to add to the discussion of IT initiatives and their impacts.

### 2.2 JUDICIAL BRANCH STRUCTURE

#### 2.2.1 Supreme Court

The Nebraska Supreme Court is the state’s court of last resort. Its decisions are binding on all trial courts, as well as the Court of Appeals. The Supreme Court is composed of a Chief Justice and six Associate Justices representing the six Judicial Districts of the State. The Chief Justice represents the State at large and serves as the executive head of the Nebraska Judicial Branch.

#### 2.2.2 Court of Appeals

The Nebraska Court of Appeals is the state’s intermediate appellate court. There are currently six judges, who sit in panels or divisions of three judges each. The Court of Appeals is generally the first court to hear appeals of judgments and orders in criminal, juvenile, civil, domestic relations and probate matters. In addition, the Court of Appeals has appellate jurisdiction over decisions originating in a number of state administrative boards and agencies. Its determination of an appeal is final unless the Nebraska Supreme Court agrees to hear the matter.

#### 2.2.3 Workers’ Compensation Court

The Nebraska Workers' Compensation Court is the state's court with exclusive authority to administer and enforce all provisions of the Nebraska Workers' Compensation Act. The Court is composed of seven judges who travel to any county in the state where an accident occurred to hear a disputed case.

Appeals from the Nebraska Workers' Compensation Court are directly to the Nebraska Court of Appeals, in accordance with the procedures regulating appeals from the state district courts.

#### 2.2.4 District Courts

The District Courts are the state’s general jurisdiction trial courts. Twelve district court judicial districts serve the state’s ninety-three counties and fifty-six district court judges serve within these judicial districts. Judges are required to preside at trials before the court and sit as the judge and fact finder in bench trials. Judges must hear and rule on pre-trial discovery motions, pre-trial and trial evidentiary

matters, pretrial and trial matters relating to rules on pleadings, practice and procedure before the courts. In matters tried before a jury, a judge must supervise and make rulings on jury selection issues, prepare and deliver proper jury instructions and decide matters that arise during jury deliberations.

#### 2.2.5 Separate Juvenile Courts

There are currently twelve separate juvenile court judges sitting in Nebraska's three largest counties: Douglas, Lancaster and Sarpy. In the remaining counties, juvenile matters are heard in the county courts. Separate Juvenile Courts have the same jurisdiction and employ the same procedures as the county courts acting as juvenile courts, and handle matters involving neglected, dependent, and delinquent children. The Separate Juvenile Courts also have jurisdiction in certain domestic relations cases where the care, support, or custody of minor children is an issue.

#### 2.2.6 Problem Solving Courts

There are 20 specialized courts in Nebraska operating in all 12 judicial districts including 13 Adult Drug Courts, 1 Young Adult Drug Court, 2 Juvenile Drug Courts, 1 Adult DUI Court, and 3 Family Drug Courts. The goals of problem-solving courts in Nebraska are to redirect participants out of the court system, while still holding them accountable, helping them to reduce the incidence of the problems that brought them into the court system and ultimately reduce re-entry into the court system.

#### 2.2.7 County Courts

The County Courts are the state's limited jurisdiction trial courts. There are 58 county judges in 12 county court districts. Jurisdiction of these courts is established by state law, which provides that county courts have exclusive original jurisdiction in estate cases, probate matters, guardianship, and conservatorship cases, actions based on a violation of a city or village ordinance, juvenile court matters in counties without a separate juvenile court, adoptions, and eminent domain proceedings. County courts also have concurrent jurisdiction with district courts in certain civil and criminal cases.

#### 2.2.8 Probation

The Probation System is composed of 14 probation districts commensurate with the District Court Judicial Districts. There are 12 Probation Adult District and 2 Juvenile Districts. Each probation district has a principal office, and there are 32 satellite offices that augment the principal offices. Probation personnel consist of line staff probation officers, specialized probation officers, techs, intake officers, support staff, supervisors, coordinators, chief deputies, and a chief probation officer who is responsible for the overall district management.

#### 2.2.9 Administrative Offices

The Nebraska Constitution gives general administrative authority over all courts to the Supreme Court and to the Chief Justice as executive head of the judicial branch. The Administrative Offices of the Courts and Probation provide most services to the court and probation systems including developing plans for improvement of the judicial system, serving as a central source of information, and developing coordination within the branch and with other state agencies. The Administrative Offices also help to support and oversee various specialized divisions within the branch.

#### 2.2.10 Judicial Branch Education

The Office of Judicial Branch Education is designed to provide in-house programming for court staff, probation, and judges with guidance from the Judicial Branch Education Advisory Committee and

project leadership from each employee group within the Judicial Branch. Judicial Branch Education is also tasked with providing education for attorneys in specific areas of the law and for certain individuals who serve the courts in a volunteer capacity or through appointment by the court.

#### **2.2.11 Attorney Services**

The Attorney Services Division oversees attorney licensure in the state of Nebraska. This division of the Court provides services that allow candidates for admission to the Bar to apply for licenses to practice law. This office is also responsible for overseeing compliance by licensed attorneys with requirements for practice, including annual license renewals, filing of mandatory continuing legal education reports and specialized education requirements for some work in the courts. The Attorney Services Division houses the Office of Counsel for Discipline, which investigates complaints against attorneys, and the Commission on Unauthorized Practice of Law that protects the public against persons practicing law without a license.

#### **2.2.12 Trial Court Services**

Operational support for the county and district courts is provided through the Trial Court Services Division of the Administrative Office of the Courts. This division is responsible for communicating Supreme Court administrative policy and standards for court operations, which is accomplished through providing publications and procedural manuals, as well as standard court forms for use in court operations. Trial court services include offices for language access, dispute resolution, and public information.

#### **2.2.13 Office of Public Guardian**

The Office of Public Guardian is designed to serve as the guardian or conservator for an individual when no other alternative is available. In addition to providing the means of last resort as guardians or conservators for those situations where no family member or suitable individual is available, the Office of Public Guardian provides education, training, and support for volunteer and family guardians and conservators, and recruits individuals to serve as guardians and conservators for Nebraska's vulnerable individuals.

#### **2.2.14 Court Improvement Project**

The Nebraska Court Improvement Project is tasked with insuring that the court system is as responsive as possible for children who interact with, or are directly affected by, the courts. This division oversees the Through the Eyes of the Child Initiative, a multidisciplinary network of local teams that work to improve system processes.

## 3 CURRENT ENVIRONMENT

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Outline of the technologies that the different parts of the branch are using.

### 3.1 SOFTWARE APPLICATIONS

#### 3.1.1 Off-the-shelf applications

- 3.1.1.1 Time Matters – The Counsel for Discipline case management system is hosted by the OCIO with application support provided by third party vendor, David Michael.
- 3.1.1.2 Articulate – The Judicial Branch Education Division holds licenses for functionality to create web-based training modules.
- 3.1.1.3 SharePoint – The Court of Appeals and Supreme Court have created sites for internal document sharing and communication.
- 3.1.1.4 Liberty Court Recorder – The county courts and the appellate courts holds licenses to make the audio record of proceedings in the courtroom.

#### 3.1.2 Video conferencing

- 3.1.2.1 Adobe Connect – The Judicial Branch Education Division holds licenses for functionality to host, broadcast and record distance learning sessions.
- 3.1.2.2 WebEx – Appellate court, county courts, district courts, probation and Administrative Offices are using the state’s enterprise version to host virtual meetings, facilitate remote appearances, and provide IT support.
- 3.1.2.3 Zoom – Also being used for remote appearances in the district courts.

#### 3.1.3 Software as a Service (SaaS)

- 3.1.3.1 EMS – Estate Management Software (EMS) used by the Office of Public Guardian for case management is hosted and supported by third party vendor SEM Applications.
- 3.1.3.2 Maestro Learning Management System – The division of Judicial Branch Education (JBE) offers education modules through a learning management system using third party software provider SumTotal. The portal has been integrated with single-sign on from the judicial branch intranet.

### 3.1.4 Custom applications

- 3.1.4.1 JUSTICE Case Management System - Judicial User System To Improve Court Efficiency (JUSTICE) is the integrated case and financial management system for trial courts in Nebraska. JUSTICE is currently in operation in 93 county courts, 93 district courts and the 3 separate juvenile courts. JUSTICE is a COBOL program supported by contracted programmers, with the infrastructure hosted and maintained by the OCIO.
- 3.1.4.2 SCCALES Case Management System - Supreme Court and Court of Appeals Legal Entries System (SCCALES) is the appellate courts' case and financial management system. SCCALES is a COBOL program supported by contracted programmers, with the infrastructure hosted and maintained by the OCIO.
- 3.1.4.3 NPACS Case Management System - Nebraska Probation Application for Community Safety (NPACS). NPACS is a universal case management system used by problem-solving courts, Probation administrative and field staff to increase effective supervision of probationers. There is also a component for financial tracking of dollars paid to service providers. Third parties who are approved to provide probationer services can send evaluations and reports to probation officers, as well as submit vouchers for payment. NPACS is a Java-based program supported by some internal, and some contracted programmers, with the infrastructure hosted and maintained by the OCIO.
- 3.1.4.4 MCLE and Attorney Licensure – The Mandatory Continuing Legal Education (MCLE) reporting and annual licensure system was developed for the branch Attorney Services Division. This is a Java-based program supported by contracted programmers, with the infrastructure hosted in an AWS cloud environment.
- 3.1.4.5 Attorney Bar Admissions – The Attorney Services Division bar admissions system facilitates electronic submission and review of applications to the practice of law in Nebraska. This is a Java-based program supported by contracted programmers, with the infrastructure hosted in an AWS cloud environment.

## 3.2 DATA

### 3.2.1 Databases

Application databases are housed and maintained as described above in 3.1.2 Custom applications.

In addition, the judicial branch has created a separate data management system (DMS). This system is hosted by the OCIO and consists of a centralized DB2 BLU database and a framework of IBM InfoSphere and Cognos Business Intelligence servers and software. The JUSTICE case management system as well as the NPACS case management system contribute to this shared database. The DMS gives the judicial branch the ability to bring together disparate data that can then be analyzed and collated into reports. The DMS also acts as a supplement for the case management systems through its capacity to clean data, match records, maintain record update histories, perform calculations, and many other functions necessary for good reporting.

### 3.2.2 Data exchange

Both the NPACS case management system and the JUSTICE system share data in real-time, or on a scheduled basis with entities external to the judicial branch.

JUSTICE case data is shared with the following:

- Department of Health and Human Services (Bureau of Vital Statistics, NFOCUS, CHARTS)
- Department of Motor Vehicles
- State Patrol
- Commission on Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice
- State Treasurer
- State Auditor
- NPACS
- DOTComm (Douglas County IT)
- Nebraska.gov (Nebraska Interactive)

NPACS case data is shared with the following:

- Commission on Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice
- State Patrol
- JUSTICE
- OffenderLink (call in reporting system)

## 3.3 IMAGING

Probation, as well as the trial and appellate courts utilize a central electronic document repository, which allows case related documents to be stored and retrieved electronically with the case file. Because this is a shared repository, it is possible for a single electronic document file to be accessed/viewed across different case management systems within the judicial branch.

Probation staff and officers have the required technology for creating and uploading electronic versions of pre-sentence investigation reports in all local offices statewide. Scanning of paper documents is encouraged in all court offices, for all filings received over-the-counter that become a part of a case file. Any document that is electronically filed by an attorney or a judge is automatically added to the courts' image repository and attached to the case. The JUSTICE and SCCALES case management programs also generate images of documents in PDF format that are added to the electronic case file.

Courts have the ability to generate electronic transcripts of a full or partial case file that can be transmitted to another court as part of the transfer or appeal process.

## 3.4 ONLINE SERVICES

### 3.4.1 Administrative Divisions

- 3.4.1.1 Attorney Admissions – Offered by Attorney Services, allows attorneys to apply for admission to the Nebraska Bar.
- 3.4.1.2 Attorney CLE and Annual License Renewals – Offered by Attorney Services, allows attorneys to submit continuing education credit hours, and pay annual mandatory dues.
- 3.4.1.3 Guardian Ad Litem Training – Offered by Attorney Services, allows attorneys to receive web-based training on acting as guardian ad litem.
- 3.4.1.4 Guardian/Conservator Registration/ Training – Offered by Office of Public Guardian, allows members of the public to register and attend online or in person training sessions on acting as guardian/conservator.
- 3.4.1.5 Parenting Act Mediator Portal – Offered by the Office of Dispute Resolution, allows certified Parenting Act mediators to submit continuing education credit hours, and annual reports.

### 3.4.2 Trial Courts

- 3.4.2.1 JUSTICE Case Searches – By subscription through Nebraska.gov, or available as a ‘one-time’ credit card payment option, the public can search trial court records and view detailed case history and documents.
- 3.4.2.2 Payments for waivable citations and court judgments – The public may submit electronic check or credit card payments to the trial courts to plead guilty by waiver to a citation, or to fulfill a financial obligation under a case judgment.
- 3.4.2.3 Court Calendar Search – The public can search case hearing time and location information for trial courts, by party name, or by date.
- 3.4.2.4 eFiling – Members of the Nebraska Bar, by subscription through Nebraska.gov, may submit legal documents to the courts in civil, criminal, probate, juvenile, or appellate cases. Filing fees are electronically transferred to the courts where required.

### 3.4.3 Appellate Courts

- 3.4.3.1 SCCALES Case Searches – With a subscription through Nebraska.gov the public can search appellate court records and view detailed case history and documents.
- 3.4.3.2 Opinions Library - The Nebraska Appellate Courts Online Library is the repository of the official published judicial opinions of the Nebraska Supreme Court and Nebraska Court of Appeals. The public can search and browse through all published opinions from 1871 to present.

### 3.4.4 Probation

- 3.4.4.1 NPACS Mobile App – Available for both Android and Apple, the native mobile application is used by officers in the field to access information on their clients, as well as input data on client interactions.
- 3.4.4.2 NPACS Service Provider Portal – Contractors approved to provide probationer services can send evaluations and reports to probation officers, as well as submit vouchers for payment.

## 3.5 HARDWARE

### 3.5.1 Administrative offices

Primary computing equipment used by the administrative offices of courts and probation include laptops, PC's, and some laptop/tablet hybrids. These devices are used to access court and probation case management systems, to run specialized division software (see Section 6.1) and Microsoft Office applications.

### 3.5.2 Appellate courts

Computing equipment used by the appellate courts includes laptops, PC's, and some laptop/tablet hybrids used in the offices of the court clerk, judges and staff, as well as law clerks to access the SCCALES program and run Microsoft Office applications. Computers in the courtroom are used for digital recording, and a mobile cart system is available for multi-media display.

### 3.5.3 Trial courts

Computing equipment used by the trial courts includes laptops and PC's used in the offices of the court clerk to access the JUSTICE program, as well as run Microsoft Office applications. Computers in the courtroom are used for digital recording, accessing the JUSTICE program and video conferencing. Some courtrooms have been upgraded to use codec systems, and/or to have full multi-media display capabilities including multiple large format monitors.

Most county court equipment and some district court equipment is supplied by the state Administrative Office through leasing agreements with either the Office of the CIO's Intergovernmental Data Services program, or local county IT departments. All other equipment is supplied by the county.

### 3.5.4 Probation

Computing equipment used by the probation district offices and reporting centers includes laptops and PC's used to access the NPACS program, as well as run Microsoft Office applications. All equipment is

procured and managed at the local level, either privately, or through the county. All probation reporting centers have video conferencing capabilities, either PC based, or through codec systems.

## 3.6 NETWORKING

### 3.6.1 Administrative offices

The offices of administration for courts and probation operate on the Supreme Court network, which is maintained by the Supreme Court's Network Administrator. The Supreme Court's domain resides within the state of Nebraska's network on its own separate subnets.

### 3.6.2 Appellate courts

Offices for judges, staff and clerks of the Supreme Court and Court of Appeals operate on the Supreme Court network. Remote office locations are either directly connected to the state network or they utilize a VPN to access state resources.

### 3.6.3 Trial courts

County court offices operate on the state of Nebraska's network, district courts and separate juvenile courts operate on local county networks. Courtrooms, when used for county court are networked to the state. District courtrooms may connect to local county and/or state networks.

### 3.6.4 Probation

Networking for probation district offices and reporting centers is provided by local county or contract IT resources. Not all locations use an office network. Internet connectivity is provided via a county government network, or a local internet service provider.

## 3.7 STAFF

*The staff listed below are dedicated resources for the judicial branch. Additional technical systems support is provided by the OCIO for AOC technology infrastructure hosted at the state data center, as well as help desk services for trial courts on the state network. Local county IT departments offer support for some trial courts and probation offices on county networks.*

See also organizational chart structures in Appendix A.

### 3.7.1 IT Support

The branch employs four Information Systems Support Specialists. The responsibilities of these individuals are to provide day-to-day business equipment and software systems troubleshooting and assistance. The support group is managed by the Help Desk Supervisor who also assists with implementation of new IT projects and training.

### 3.7.2 Contractors

The branch contracts for case management system programming and online services for both the courts and probation. Contractors supply skilled professionals in COBOL and Java programming, as well as web application development and project management expertise.

### 3.7.3 Business/Applications Analysts

The branch employs specialized court and probation business and applications analysts. This staff is responsible for fielding questions from statewide offices regarding data entry into the case management systems, as well as managing NPACS, JUSTICE, SCCALES, and other related development projects.

### 3.7.4 Data Analysts

The branch employs a five member team of data analysts. These individuals are responsible for creating statistical and analytic reports examining data from the court and probation case management systems. They also assist with data quality initiatives and training.

### 3.7.5 Webmaster

The position of Web Communications and Design Coordinator is responsible for coordinating the planning, development, maintenance, and accessibility of judicial branch website content. This individual is also responsible for graphic design, helping to maintain branding consistency across the branch, and supporting internal working groups/committees utilizing SharePoint websites.

### 3.7.6 Security Officer/Network Administrator

The branch employs an individual who supervises all IT support for the AOCP, appellate courts, and statewide trial courts in addition to serving as technical security officer for the judicial branch. This position is responsible for maintaining the Supreme Court network.

## 4 MISSION STATEMENT

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To proactively represent the computing, communications, and information technology concerns of the judicial branch and legal community in visioning, policy setting and strategic planning.

To provide timely input, advice, and feedback to the Supreme Court on policy, proposals, implementation projects and other information technology related issues.

To be a catalyst within the judicial branch in adapting technology to meet the mission of the judiciary and the needs of the people of the State of Nebraska.

## 5 VISION

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The judicial branch will have an integrated, appropriate, responsive, and well-supported technology structure. Systems and software will be chosen to best facilitate information and work sharing horizontally and vertically across the branch and with other stakeholders; and will meet expectations for current technology while providing relevant and equal access to services and information. Necessary resources will be identified and supplied to ensure successful implementation of technology in both court and probation processes.

## 6 JUDICIAL BRANCH TECHNOLOGY STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

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- 6.1 IDENTIFY AND INTEGRATE WHERE POSSIBLE, INFORMATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS FOR DATA AND DOCUMENT STORAGE, IN ORDER TO FACILITATE DATA SHARING, STATISTICS AND ANALYSIS, MANAGERIAL DECISION MAKING, QUALITY ASSURANCE, DATA LIFE CYCLE ADMINISTRATION, AND OPEN RECORDS COMPLIANCE.
- 6.2 INCREASE THE ABILITY OF THE PUBLIC AND THE BAR TO ACCESS COURT SERVICES THROUGH TECHNOLOGY WHICH FULFILLS THE INDIVIDUALIZED REQUIREMENTS AND EXPECTATIONS OF STAKEHOLDERS’.
- 6.3 ENHANCE COURT AND PROBATION STAFF’S ABILITY TO OPERATE PROFESSIONALLY, EFFICIENTLY AND EFFECTIVELY BY INCREASING ACCESS TO, AND COMPETENCY WITH, APPROPRIATE TECHNOLOGY.

## 7 INITIATIVES AND PROJECTS

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It is the responsibility of the judicial branch to provide 21<sup>st</sup> century tools for the administration of justice. Keeping up with technology is important to the long-term sustainability of court and probation case management; as is the advancement of the knowledge, skills and abilities of all those who work for the branch.

In addition, technology has an important role to play in determining new ways in which the judicial branch can deliver on the principles of open courts, community safety and equal access.

All initiatives identified below will not only serve to advance the judicial branch’s Technology Strategic Plan objectives, but also to support the mission of the branch as a whole.

### 7.1 SEAMLESS INTERFACES FOR FILE SHARING/TRANSFER

It is a central goal of the judicial branch to leverage technology in order to continue to replace paper processes with online or system-to-system processes. Not only have court stakeholders come to expect to be able to use technology for their interactions, alternatives to paper are important tools for emergency preparedness.

### 7.1.1 Bills of exceptions

An important step in enhancing paperless courts is to create a method to submit bills of exceptions electronically to the trial courts. Once in the document is in the judicial branch image repository, these files can be accessed by appellate systems and shared internally and externally as appropriate.

### 7.1.2 Exhibits

The next phase following electronic bills of exceptions would logically be to develop a system of submission, storage and file sharing for electronic exhibits.

### 7.1.3 Records of court proceedings

Making and preserving the court record is of extreme importance. Centralized storage of digital audio as well as court reporter stenographic notes and dictionaries would enhance the ability of the branch to guarantee consistency in retention. Additionally, other measures such as increased training for courtroom clerks and creation of standards for audio/steno recording will help with consistency in capturing the record.

### 7.1.4 Court/Probation systems integration

Efforts towards more tightly integrating the court and probation case management systems should continue. As more connections are made between the systems, this will allow for electronic PSI's to be made available at the appellate level, for probation officers to have immediate access to court case information and orders as soon as they are issued, and for judges to receive information on probationers in a more streamlined manner, among many other benefits.

### 7.1.5 Search warrants

Currently the process for law enforcement to get search warrants to judges for signature and for submitting to the court is varied across jurisdictions. An exploration of how a statewide system could be implemented could open up opportunities for streamlining processes.

## 7.2 NEW APPROACHES TO JUDICIAL BRANCH INTERACTIONS

Existing groundwork that has been laid in case management modernization as well as emerging technologies mean new opportunities for the judicial branch to become better at transparency and ease of access.

### 7.2.1 Video streaming of court proceedings

Replicating the experience of sitting in a courtroom through the use of cameras and online streaming could allow for more transparency into court proceedings.

### 7.2.2 Scheduling and calendaring

The current processes of trial court scheduling should be examined to determine how to facilitate more options for attorneys, parties, judges and court staff to access calendars and set times for hearings and other court proceedings.

### 7.2.3 Self-Represented Litigants (SRL's)

The judicial branch is now positioned to begin to offer electronic filing and other services for unrepresented parties in court cases. In addition to simple electronic court form submission systems,

other areas that should be explored include online dispute resolution, or other fast-track options for low conflict cases.

#### 7.2.4 Court case information

While trial court information has been available via remote access for over 10 years, it is time to take another look at what the needs are of both internal and external consumers. The existing online searches as well as portals for attorneys, court staff, judges, et al should be leveraged to create new views of case level, or party level information customized to individualized needs. Looking for new and more efficient ways to share information with the public, attorneys and government partners will also include examining potential for mobile applications, court document searches, centralized legal notifications and public access to any new types of court-related media, such as audio files, transcripts, or exhibits.

#### 7.2.5 Probation information

There are currently no public interfaces for online access to probation information. Although the majority of what is held within the NPACS system is confidential, there are areas where public access is desirable. Allowing users to perform a search on a probation client name, and find the appropriate contact information for that individual's officer or office would create a much easier method than what exists today for members of the public seeking that information.

#### 7.2.6 Criminal justice information

Because JUSTICE is a key piece of the overall criminal justice and criminal history collection process, modernization, as well as planning for long-term stability and improvements are shared goals. By working together with all the state's criminal justice partners to move attorney, court, judge and law enforcement data collection pieces online, and to re-examine how and when data is shared, all stakeholders will benefit by improved access to information, de-duplication of effort, and better data quality.

### 7.3 TRANSFORMATIVE MODELS FOR COURT/PROBATION STAFF AND JUDGES

#### 7.3.1 Tools for case management

The Judicial Branch needs to ensure the long-term sustainability. Over time, JUSTICE has become a cornerstone of data integration with other Nebraska state criminal justice and non-criminal justice entities, including the Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Motor Vehicles, State Patrol, Commission on Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice and the State Auditor's Office. It is, and will be, increasingly difficult to find skilled COBOL programmers, especially those familiar with the iSeries environment. In the next 5-10 years, JUSTICE needs to be streamlined so that available COBOL programming resources are able to be allocated to maintaining web services and any other necessary program components; with the majority of user screens transitioned to web-based portals and any high maintenance system processes being retired.

More development of online portals needs to be completed in order to integrate with current JUSTICE functions and reduce the work that needs to be done in the COBOL screen environment. Judges and

court staff use a mixture of both, and the more that is shifted to the web-based environment, the more accessible these functions become across platforms, and it reduces the long-term risk of retaining qualified COBOL programmers.

The probation case management system relies heavily on client assessments in case planning. Over time, behavioral science, as well as policy changes require modifications, so that the NPACS system has the most up-to-date models for officers to use. Additionally, probation officers should have more software based tools that help to guide actions and decision making in order to better meet the needs of clients and improve outcomes.

The statewide probation case management system, NPACS, has evolved over time to be capable of capturing a large amount of data related to cases, clients, and events. However, the organization of information and access to functions and features is not meeting the standards of probation today, as it does not put emphasis on facilitating evidence-based, behavioral management. The software interfaces require updating, to meet the needs of officers in the field, enabling them to easily evaluate the status of individuals under their supervision, as well as their caseload as a whole. Additionally, the software should help officers to prioritize their time and guide them in their engagements with clients through prompts and structured work flows.

### 7.3.2 Alternatives for support

As costs for hardware, software and networking keep increasing, it is in the best interests of the branch to explore alternatives that can mitigate or eliminate some expenses. Additionally, as more technology is adopted and put into everyday use across the branch, it becomes more of a challenge to keep up with user support. Along with increased training to create confidence and self-sufficiency, any opportunity to streamline processes, or simplify systems, or provide a cross-branch centralized service should be explored in order to maintain balance and a strong support system.

## 8 APPENDIX A – IT ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

In 2019, the judicial branch consolidated all information technology teams into one division. Probation and court application development, as well as security, networking, and IT support are all under the direction of the Deputy Administration for Information Technology. Data reporting and website management have been moved under the Administrative Office of Courts and Probation Operations Division.

