



JAMES W. EDMING

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 87TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 470 & Senate Bill 458

Joint Committee on Finance

Wednesday, October 2, 2019

Co-chairs Nygren and Darling and committee members, thank you for holding this public hearing today and giving me the opportunity to share my support for this important legislation. I would like to thank my fellow co-authors for their work in bringing this bill forward.

For some time, caseloads have been rising in counties around the state. A big driver of this increased caseload is the drug epidemic that has hit our state hard. In some counties the caseload has hit the point where additional circuit court branches are necessary. This bill helps meet this need by creating a total of 12 new circuit court branches around the state that will be phased in over the next three years. This gradual implementation will help spread out the start-up costs for the state and provide planning time for counties that need to build the additional courtroom space to accommodate the new judge.

I became interested in this issue a couple of years ago, when I spoke with Sawyer County Judge John Yackel. Judge Yackel shared his concerns about the increasing caseload in Sawyer County and that it was reaching a point where it was not possible for one judge to handle all of the cases alone. About a year ago, I had the opportunity to sit on the bench for the day with Judge Yackel and it became clear to me that he needs help. Last year, Sawyer County had over 400 felony complaints filed in a one judge county. In comparison, nearby Barron County had 452 felony complaints filed in 2018 that were split between that county's three judges. While this bill does not guarantee new circuit court branches to any specific counties, it does provide counties like Sawyer with the opportunity to come up with a plan for the necessary facilities for an additional circuit court branch and to present these plans to the director of state courts for consideration.

Co-chairs and members, I ask for your support of this legislation and thank you again for the opportunity to share my support with you today.