

REVISED SCOPE STATEMENT

Judicial Districts in Kansas: Determining Whether Boundaries Could Be Redrawn To Increase Efficiency and Reduce Costs

During the 1970s, court unification significantly altered the structure of the Kansas Court System. At that time, a new Court of Appeals was added and the remaining courts, except the municipal courts, were consolidated into district courts. All of the courts were put under the management and jurisdiction of the Supreme Court. Under the unified system, the State provides funding for salary costs, and counties provide funding for other costs the courts incur.

A 1979 performance audit conducted of the court system shortly after it was unified found, among other things, that unification had little effect on the time it took to process cases, and that caseloads were not evenly distributed. It also found there were wide variations in cases per non-judicial employee and in the number of employees per judge.

A second audit, conducted in 1997, found that statutory constraints prevented the Supreme Court from permanently reallocating existing judgeships to equalize workloads, and because of that, the wide variance in judicial caseloads had changed little since unification. The audit found that judges in some districts had caseloads of less than 400 cases, while judges in other districts had caseloads as high as 2,300 cases.

Currently, Kansas has 31 judicial districts, compared to only eight districts in Utah—a state with a nearly identical population and number of square miles. The state of Iowa, although somewhat smaller in land area, also has only eight judicial districts. Kansas has seven single-county districts that are primarily urban: Johnson, Wyandotte, Douglas, Shawnee, Cowley, Sedgwick and Reno. The remaining 24 districts are multi-county districts.

Recently, legislators have raised questions about whether the boundaries of judicial districts in the State should be redrawn to potentially reduce costs and even-out caseload discrepancies.

A performance audit of this topic would answer the following question.

- 1. What savings could be achieved by re-drawing judicial districts in Kansas to better align resources with caseloads?** To answer this question, we would talk to officials in the Judicial Branch to determine what factors have resulted in boundaries being drawn the way they are, and what factors may need to be considered if boundaries were changed. We would review previous redistricting studies that have been conducted by the Judicial Council to determine issues they identified and what methodologies they used. We would look at the number and size of judicial districts in a sample of other states, and review the literature to determine whether any states recently have redrawn boundaries or reduced the number of judicial districts. We would contact officials from any states that may have changed boundaries to identify any problems they encountered and to find out what benefits or cost savings they might have achieved. We would review available information about the number of judges, non-judicial employees, and the number of cases handled in each Kansas judicial district. Using that information, we would determine where disparities in caseloads exist, and we would look for ways to reconfigure the districts to better match caseloads and resources. We would consider information about travel times and distances when looking at possible district configurations. We would likely come up with one or more scenarios for how the districts could be reconfigured and estimate cost savings that might be achieved by each scenario. In addition, we would look at what the State and the counties are contributing to funding the court system, and the potential implications for changing that system. We would conduct other work as needed.

Estimated time to complete: 15-18 weeks