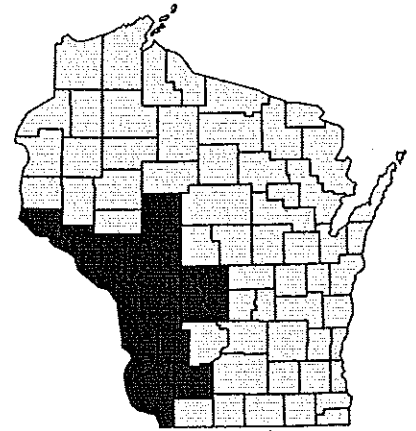


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September 15, 2020

via email

Honorable Rian W. Radtke
Circuit Court Judge
Trempealeau County Courthouse
PO Box 67
Whitehall, WI 54733-0067

RE: Facilities Needs

Judge Radtke,

I understand that Trempealeau County is in the pivotal stage of determining whether to build a new court facility. As part of that effort, you asked me to draw from my more than three decades of court administration experience to forecast Trempealeau County's judicial and space needs for the next 30 years. While I can't make such a forecast with certainty, I can advise that it is highly likely that Trempealeau County will have a need for at least two judges and a family court commissioner within that timeframe. As such, the facilities needed to minimally support those court officials include two jury courtrooms, a third non-jury hearing room, chambers, and office space for additional court. The remainder of this letter will detail my rationale for this forecast.

My observation is that our Legislature and Governor have previously approved a judgeship bill to increase the number of judges approximately every ten years. The most recent bill passed in March, 2020, adds four judges per year to the judiciary over the next three years as determined by the Director of State Courts. The counties in line for those judgeships are vetted on criteria including: amount of judicial workload, local support, and suitable facilities. Counties seeking an additional judgeship without meeting those criteria are rarely successful.

As you know, Wisconsin uses a judicial weighted caseload as an objective measure for determining judge need. The judicial workload in Trempealeau County has been trending up for the past few years. Based on 2018 case filings, Trempealeau County has an overall workload of 1.57 judicial officers. When the court commissioner work is factored in, the workload per judge is 1.27. Draft workload data for 2019 filings suggests that the overall

judicial workload per judge in Trempealeau County will increase slightly to 1.28. Please be aware that judicial need stands on its own regardless of who sits as judge or how hard they work. What this means is Trempealeau County has more work than 1 judge can reasonably handle. If that trend continues, Trempealeau County would most certainly be in the conversation for a second branch of circuit court in the next judgeship bill initiative.

Assuming that the future judicial workload indicates a need for a second judgeship in Trempealeau County and that there will be local support from the county at that time, the only remaining criteria is suitable facilities to support the additional circuit court branch. The current courthouse facilities are not adequate to support the addition of a second judgeship and the necessary support staff. Trempealeau County should seriously begin planning for courthouse expansion to address the future space needs of the courts to provide swift access to justice for its citizens.

There is no guarantee that if Trempealeau expands its courthouse it will be awarded a second circuit court branch in the next judgeship bill. However, it is extremely unlikely that the county will be considered for a second judgeship without suitable facilities in place. In the interim, the extra courtroom space will help with any chief judge effort to provide judicial workload assistance to the county. It will also make scheduling in out-of-county judges more efficient for the timely resolution of cases.

Finally, Supreme Court Rule (SCR) 68.03 requires circuit court judges to notify the chief judge of the judicial district in writing of the county's intent to remodel, construct, or relocate any court facility. It also requires the chief judge to review every new, remodeled, or relocated court facility and grant or deny approval for its use. To that end, I serve as the chief judge's "boots on the ground" and will make myself available to assist with the planning, construction, and approval process. This is a process with which I am very familiar.

I look forward to working with you and the leaders of Trempealeau County on this initiative. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Patrick G. Brummond
District Court Administrator
Seventh Judicial District

PGB/kem

cc: Hon. Robert P. VanDeHey, Chief Judge Seventh Judicial District (via email)