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WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 53

Chairwoman Warren and members of the committee, my name is Grant Bannister. I am the Chief District Court Judge of the 21st Judicial District (Riley and Clay Counties) and a member of the Kansas District Court Judges Association executive committee.

County law libraries are funded by two sources. First, from annual attorney fees. Second, from a small fraction of court filing fees. The current statute states that fees collected from the first source can be used “for the purpose of facilitating and enhancing functions of the district court of the county.” The amendment would simply allow the second source to be used for this purpose as well.

Absent this amendment, the result is this second source of funds becomes a stranded asset. When in reality, there are many related needs that can be served by these funds to enhance access to justice and serve both the public and the bar. A predominant example would be supporting a self-help legal center on both the county’s websites and a designated location within the courthouse providing access to legal research and basic forms that self-represented litigants could navigate. Additionally, the fund could supplement certain technology that would allow greater access to justice and legal research. A few examples include providing wifi access to the public at the courthouse and checking out devices (mini-iPad) that would allow zoom court appearances in certain non-evidentiary circumstances. This would

allow litigants to minimize disruptions in terms of work obligations, childcare and eliminate the barriers of travel for impoverished litigants.

Some counties no longer maintain the numerous volumes of traditional hard bound law libraries. Due to a shift in demand for online services, access beyond hours that the courthouse is open and limited space in the traditional limestone, space confined courthouse, Riley County houses its law library at the public library. This includes computer terminals with access to paid Westlaw subscriptions. Everyone, but particularly the public and younger attorneys, can readily conduct legal research in this manner. This fits their needs better than endless dusty hardbound volumes of the American Law Reporter (ALR). This can be one tool to address the lack of attorneys in certain regions by making additional resources available for a self-represented litigant.

We are asking the committee to approve this minor amendment that would enhance access to justice for the public and the quality of legal research available to small businesses and members of the local bar which is to everybody's benefit.

Grant Bannister
District Court Judge
Twenty-First Judicial
District