

OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
CITY OF NEW ORLEANS



ED QUATREVAUX
INSPECTOR GENERAL

November 21, 2013

Senator Jean-Paul J. Morrell
6305 Elysian Fields Ave.
Suite 404
New Orleans, LA 70122

Re: Orleans Parish Justice and Rehabilitation Reform Commission

Dear Sen. Morrell:

I would like to thank you again for the opportunity to present information from our reports to the Orleans Parish Justice and Rehabilitation Reform Commission this week. I am following up to clarify a few points and provide suggestions for meaningful reform that can begin to take place in the 2014 legislative session.

Most important, I would like to reiterate that the real cost savings in consolidating Municipal and Traffic court will not be found in the elimination of judges' salaries, rather the ancillary costs that go along with having duplicative staff and services. Based on our calculations for actual employees hired by the eight Municipal and Traffic Court judges, the total cost of their personal staff is over \$2.7 million; however, a consolidated court with five judges would cost almost \$1.9 million annually.

The state statutes authorize each judge to hire minute clerks, criers, stenographers, court reporters, and "other personnel as he deems necessary" and further directs payment of these salaries to be paid by the City of New Orleans. The statutes allow judges to hire a court reporter *and* a stenographer, however, both provide transcription services and are often hired on a contractual basis. Court reporters can reasonably be pooled among judges considering the nature of their work and that eight judges share four courtrooms; therefore, it is reasonable to believe there is no need for more than four court reporters at any given time. This unfunded mandate irresponsibly places an unfair burden on the City taxpayers to pay for an unlimited number of staff for each judge.

Additional immediate savings could be realized by consolidating the Judicial Administrator and Clerk of Courts to serve both courts, rather than each having their own Judicial Administrator, Assistant Judicial Administrator, Clerk of Court and Deputy Clerk of Court with several supporting staff that could possibly be reduced as well. We can attribute a total cost of these four duplicative officers' salaries to be over \$750,000 per year. If these offices were to be consolidated, the taxpayers would save half of that amount in annual salaries.

Finally, the efficiency and overall court effectiveness of consolidating case management systems, information technology, accounting and other professional services would also be significant.

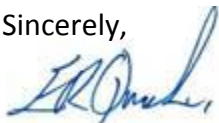
Therefore, I recommend the following action items for consideration in the 2014 Regular Legislative Session to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of New Orleans' City Courts:

1. Amend all statutes in Chapter 8 of Title 13 that allow judges to appoint personnel as they deem necessary, to specify that judges be allowed to hire one minute clerk, one administrative or clerical assistant, and one court crier.
2. Amend La. R.S. 13:2497 to allow the clerk of Municipal and Traffic courts to appoint deputies, assistants, and employees as the local municipality may provide and eliminate the minimum number of staff with associated salaries. These positions are regulated through the Classified Civil Service as required by the Louisiana Constitution and the local budget and hiring process is clearly established without the need for statutory requirements.¹
3. Amend La. R.S. 13:2495(A) to establish one Clerk of Court for Municipal and Traffic Courts and repeal paragraph (B) which authorizes a separate Clerk of Court for Traffic Court.
4. Amend La. R.S. 13:2495.1 to establish one Judicial Administrator for Municipal and Traffic Courts.
5. Amend La. R.S. 13:2501.1 to eliminate the Clerk of Court and judicial administrator for the Traffic Court.

I also strongly urge you to work with the Orleans Parish delegation to reduce the level of statutory involvement in our local and City Court systems. The suite of statutes in Chapter 8 of Title 13 of the Revised Statutes includes over 30 statutes detailing the organization and administration of New Orleans Municipal and Traffic Courts. Chapter 7 of Title 13 establishes City Courts for other jurisdictions with much less detail, allowing local governing bodies to meet their needs.

Thank you again for your efforts to gather all relevant information for the appropriate allocation of limited state and local financial resources.

Sincerely,



E. R. Quatrevaux

¹ La. Const. Art. 10 §2 designates all employees of the clerk of municipal and traffic courts in New Orleans as an exception to "unclassified" civil service status.