



NORTH CAROLINA
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE
of the COURTS

Strategic Plan for Implementation of eCourts [Section 18A.21 of S.L. 2015-241]

February 1, 2016



INTRODUCTION

The North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts (NCAOC) is required to report quarterly beginning November 1, 2015, to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Justice and Public Safety and the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Information Technology on the strategic plan for implementing the eCourts initiative. The eCourts initiative, when fully implemented, will provide for the automation of all court processes, including the electronic filing, retrieval, and processing of documents.

Section 18A.21 of Session Law 2015-241 specifically provides as follows:

E-COURTS INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY INITIATIVE/STRATEGIC PLAN/ADVISORY COMMITTEE/PILOT PROGRAM FOR ONLINE COLLECTION OF COURT COSTS

SECTION 18A.21.(a) The Administrative Office of the Courts shall establish a strategic plan for the design and implementation of its e-Courts information technology initiative by February 1, 2016. The e-Courts initiative, when fully implemented, will provide for the automation of all court processes, including the electronic filing, retrieval, and processing of documents. The strategic plan shall:

- (1) Clearly articulate the requirements for the e-Courts system, including well-defined milestones, costs parameters, and performance measures.
- (2) Prioritize the funding needs for implementation of the various elements of the system, after consultation with the e-Courts advisory committee established by subsection (c) of this section.
- (3) Identify any potential issues that may arise in the development of the system and plans for mitigating those issues.
- (4) Address the potential for incorporating any currently existing resources into the e-Courts system.

SECTION 18A.21.(b) The Administrative Office of the Courts shall report quarterly beginning November 1, 2015, to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Justice and Public Safety and the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Information Technology on the development, implementation, and specific costs of the strategic plan required by subsection (a) of this section and on any changes in the projected costs for implementing the e-Courts system or the schedule for implementation. The report shall also provide an accounting of the use of funds appropriated in this act for development of the e-Courts initiative.

SECTION 18A.21.(c) The Administrative Office of the Courts shall establish an e-Courts advisory committee consisting of clerks of superior court, judges, district attorneys, public defenders, and representatives of the State Bar in order to ensure that, in the development and implementation of the strategic plan required by subsection (a) of this section, it has the input and advice of those stakeholders in the e-Courts system and the benefit of the various stakeholders' expertise on the information technology needs of the courts. The advisory committee shall be guided by an executive steering committee.

SECTION 18A.21.(d) Upon completion of the strategic plan required by subsection (a) of this section, the Administrative Office of the Courts shall issue a Request for Information (RFI) for a contractor to provide the e-Courts system as outlined in the strategic plan. The Administrative



Office of the Courts shall evaluate the responses to the RFI before issuing a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the e-Courts system.

SECTION 18A.21.(e) As a precursor to the implementation of its e-Courts initiative, the Administrative Office of the Courts shall establish a pilot program in New Hanover County for the online collection and payment of court costs, fines, and related fees, with the potential of expanding the program statewide at the conclusion of a successful pilot. The costs incurred by the programs established pursuant to this section shall be borne by vendors selected by the Administrative Office of the Courts. The Administrative Office of the Courts shall report by March 1, 2016, to the chairs of the Joint Legislative Committee on Justice and Public Safety and the chairs of the House of Representatives and Senate Appropriations Committees on Justice and Public Safety on the pilot program established pursuant to this section and its plans to expand the program statewide.

NCAOC respectfully submits this report in compliance with the statutory mandate.

ANALYSIS

Advisory Committee

As an integral component of Chief Justice Mark Martin's initiative to strengthen North Carolina courts, the Chief Justice convened the North Carolina Commission on the Administration of Law and Justice (NCCALJ). At the Commission's inaugural meeting on September 30, 2015, the Chief Justice charged NCCALJ with the task of reviewing the court system with an eye toward creating a judicial system that is both innovative and flexible enough to meet the demands of North Carolina's diverse population and to deliver justice in a fair, balanced, and efficient manner.

NCCALJ comprises five committees to study the areas of civil justice, criminal investigation and adjudication, legal professionalism, public trust and confidence, and technology. The NCCALJ Technology Committee, chaired by Supreme Court Justice Barbara Jackson, held its first meeting on October 16, 2015 and accepted responsibility for overseeing the development of the eCourts strategic plan. The members of the NCCALJ Technology Committee therefore will serve as the base of the advisory committee required by 18A.21(c), and NCAOC has added additional ex-officio members to represent the stakeholder groups not already included on the NCCALJ Technology Committee. The initial members of the executive steering committee required by 18A.21(c) include the NCAOC director, chief information officer, and senior deputy director, and additional members may be appointed as warranted.

Development of Strategic Plan

The advisory committee recommended that NCAOC hire an external consultant to facilitate the discussion about new processes, new ideas, and how technology can be used to achieve the goals of the Chief Justice and the Commission. Pursuant to the recommendation, NCAOC developed a Request for Proposals (RFP) to find a consultant to assist in the development of the eCourts strategic plan. The RFP was posted on October 29, 2015 and responses were received by December 16, 2015.

NCAOC has established a review team to review the RFP submissions. The review team, which comprises members of the NCCALJ Technology Committee and NCAOC staff, met on January 14, 2016 and reviewed the RFP submissions. The team is in the process of selecting the most qualified vendors and scheduling vendor presentations. After thorough consideration of the vendor presentations and proposals, NCAOC expects to select a vendor by March 1, 2016.

Development of the strategic plan will begin in earnest after the vendor is selected. The strategic planning process will take approximately six to eight months to complete, and NCAOC expects to have a strategic plan by January 1, 2017. The strategic planning process will encompass an evaluation of the “as-is” technology environment, participation from all judicial branch stakeholder groups, a “to-be” vision, and a roadmap for transition.

Appropriated Funds

The 2015 General Assembly appropriated \$1.8 million for planning and implementation of the eCourts initiative. As of January 30, 2016, NCAOC had used none of the appropriated funds related to the eCourts initiative, but expects to use some of the funds once a vendor is selected. NCAOC will be able to provide more specific detail about estimated costs for development and implementation of the strategic plan after final selection of the vendor.

SUMMARY

NCAOC has taken significant action toward implementing the requirements of Section 18A.21, and will continue to work with the advisory committee on development and implementation of a strategic plan for eCourts. A vendor will be selected within the next few weeks, and NCAOC expects to work with the vendor to develop a strategic plan by January 1, 2017. In the meantime, NCAOC will continue to provide quarterly reports detailing the progress on the eCourts project, including projected timelines and costs.