From:	Gabel, Patricia
Sent:	Thursday, March 17, 2016 11:30 AM
To:	'Mary Hooper'; 'mjohnson@leg.state.vt.us'; Maxine Grad; 'wjewett@leg.state.vt.us'
Subject:	Assessments by two trial court judges

Dear Mary –

I know how busy all Committees are this week. I remain willing to come up to meet with you and other Committee members to provide information about the need for the additional judge. Recognizing that you may have trouble carving out the time for that, however, I thought you might find it helpful to hear these two completely unsolicited cries from the trenches.

Judge Carroll, the Presiding Judge in Windham County, sent an unsolicited message at the end of last week to the Chief that included the following description of the situation in the trial courts:

"We are really in crisis mode in the courts. I have had two staff members come to me in tears in the last three weeks. They cannot manage to keep up with the juvenile docket and others. We do mental health hearings here all day on Friday and this is another docket with too many cases and not enough time. Because of the juvenile and mental health dockets, we have stopped scheduling contested divorces where children are not involved. There is a list of these to be scheduled. Luckily, with Michael Kainen now on board, he is going to do some of those.

Prior to this year, I probably did 4 contested TPR hearings in the last 15+ years. I have done 6 since October and had to take a day a week to just use for findings to keep up with the writing; this, in turn affects what we can schedule in the domestic docket. I am also working most weekends which I haven't had to do before to keep up. I have more than 10 TPR's that are currently scheduled or waiting to be scheduled. *** This isn't about me. I continue to plug along, but the staff is suffering greatly. I fear we are going to lose some good people – as it seems to be happening with some of the clerks. I cannot stress enough the feeling of lack of resources and support that the trial courts are feeling. This used to be more a staff thing. I am how hearing the same thing from all of my judicial colleagues. It is a common discussion. (I think the retirements by many judges recently attests to this.)"

Judge Mello, the Presiding Judge in Windham County, sent an unsolicited message at the end of the day today to Judge Grearson. In that message, he said, in part, as follows:

"Unfortunately, the situation with our juvenile docket here in Franklin County has gone from bad to worse over the last two months. When I wrote to you on January 26th, we had 130 CHINS cases pending, we were resolving only 7-10 CHINS cases a month, and we were making no headway on the backlog. Today (latest data as of 2/29/16) we have 143 CHINS cases pending and our disposition rate has deteriorated; over the past two months 25 new CHINS cases came in (7 in January and 18 in February), but we disposed of only 12 (6 in January and 6 in February).

During my first six months here, Franklin County along with the rest of the judiciary was shorthanded in terms of available judges. In addition, we had too few juvenile attorneys. These shortages made it difficult and often impossible for staff to schedule needed hearings on a timely basis. The problem with having too few judges is about to be resolved, thankfully…. However, the problem with having too few attorneys has not only continued but has worsened, and we are now also experiencing a serious shortage of GAL's (guardians ad litem.) These shortages go a long way towards explaining why our disposition rate has deteriorated since January."

The message goes on to request additional resources including more judge time, more courtroom space, two more juvenile attorneys who do NOT have contracts in other counties, a prosecutor in the state's attorney's office dedicated

solely to juvenile cases, more guardians ad litem, and additional court staff, including court officers to support the other resources in the courtroom.

Please work with Deb so that I can visit with you and others to provide the additional information you need.

Thanks.
Pat