

I. Introduction and Overview

The Vermont Judiciary, as a co-equal branch of state government, is an important element in the constitutional balance of power among the Executive, the Legislative, and the Judicial Branches. This balance of power is essential to the vitality of our democracy. The courts provide a forum for resolution of disputes involving the range of human conflict, including cases that address the protection of individual rights, public safety, and business and commercial concerns. The Judiciary is essential to the maintenance of an orderly society.

In 2013, the Judiciary Advisory Council was created by the Vermont Supreme Court for the purpose of advising the Court on matters of Judiciary policy; principally as such policy affects the trial courts. The Council is co-chaired by the Chief Superior Judge and the State Court Administrator. It is comprised of selected judicial officers, Superior Court Clerks, representatives of statewide dockets, and executives from the Court Administrator's Office. The justices of the Supreme Court serve as *ex officio* non-voting members of the Council to facilitate a timely and dynamic exchange of information.

The Council develops information about the Judiciary budget and the state appropriations and budget process; reviews and advises the Supreme Court regarding changes to various court committees; and makes recommendations regarding innovative and flexible ways in which trial courts can respond to increasing demands for services. The Council is also charged with engaging with the Supreme Court in a planning process that builds on planning work already completed by the Judiciary to date and looks to the years between now and 2020.

That planning process has resulted in a new strategic plan for the Vermont Judiciary. The 2015-2020 Strategic Plan for the Vermont Judiciary will provide guidance and direction to judicial officers, court personnel, and administrative staff as they work together to realize the Vision, Mission, and Principles for Administration adopted by the Vermont Supreme Court.

Future work will focus on establishing performance measures to meet the goals and objectives contained in the plan.

II. Mission, Vision, Core Values, and Principles for Administration

The Judiciary's mission is to:

Provide equal access to justice, protect individual rights, resolve legal disputes fairly and timely; treat all individuals with dignity and respect; and provide everyone the opportunity to have their day in court.

The Judiciary's vision is as follows:

The people of Vermont will have trust and confidence in the Vermont state courts as the courts are fair, impartial, accessible, responsive, consistent, free of discrimination, independent, well-managed, and safe.

Core Values

- Accessible
- Consistent
- Fair
- Free of discrimination
- Independent
- Responsive
- Well-Managed
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Principles for Administration

Below are principles for administration of the Vermont Judiciary. Adopted by the Vermont Supreme Court, they serve as guiding principles for administering the Vermont Judiciary in the future.

1. Vermont judicial officers will be people of integrity who are fair, impartial, and competent.
2. The Supreme Court will operate the state court system as a unified system, in accordance with the Vermont Constitution, Ch. II, Sec. 4, which provides that “the judicial power of the State shall be vested in a unified judicial system....”
3. The Vermont Supreme Court will deploy resources in a manner that is cost-efficient for the taxpayer, while providing access to court services that is cost effective to litigants.
4. Court services will be provided through a system that is open, affordable, and understandable and that offers a level of service that is appropriate to the characteristics of the case.
5. Court services will be provided through a system that ensures access to justice and respect for all litigants and members of the bar.
6. Case decisions will be made by appropriately educated and well-trained judicial officers.
7. Trial court judges will be capable of working in any court, hearing any case that needs to be heard on a particular day.
8. Judicial officers will issue timely decisions that do justice for the litigants, establish clear and ascertainable law, and apply the law correctly to the facts.
9. The Judicial Branch will be organized to minimize redundancies in court structure, procedures and personnel and provide an efficient balance of workload among courts.
10. Funding authorities will provide resources that are appropriate to the court structure and provide long-term stability in the budgeting, funding and operations of the Judicial Branch.

Case Management Principles

1. Every case will receive individual attention.
2. Individual attention will be proportional to need.
3. Decisions and process will demonstrate procedural justice.
4. Judicial control will be exercised over the legal process.

III. Trends Analysis

The trends likely to affect the Vermont Judiciary in the coming years are summarized below.

A. Social/Demographic Trends

Social trends describe the changes in the composition, order, and structure of interactions among individuals within society. In large part, they define the size and nature of the justice system client population. A few of the most significant social trends likely to impact the Vermont Judiciary in the future are as follows.

➤ Population Growth

- Vermont's population increased 37% between 1970 and 2000 (from 444,330 in 1970 to 608,827 in 2000).
- From 2000 to 2014, Vermont's population growth was 3% (from 608,827 in 2000 to an estimated 626,562 in 2014).
- The fastest growing counties between 2000 and 2010 were Franklin, Chittenden, Lamoille and Caledonia, all of which experienced population growth between 5 - 15%.
- Counties that experienced a slight decrease in population between 2000 and 2010 were Essex, Rutland, and Windsor.
- Vermont's population is projected to grow 14% in the next two decades (from 625,792 in 2010 to 711,867 in 2030). Part of the reason for a slower growth rate is due to the state's birth rate, which is one of the lowest in the U.S., although similar to other states with

comparable ethnic and educational profiles (per the Vermont Round Table's "Pulse of Vermont – Quality of Life Study 2010").

➤ Racial/Ethnic Composition

- 95% of Vermont's population is white (down from 97% in 2000).
- In 2013, 2% of Vermont's population was Hispanic, 1% was Asian, 1% was Black/African American. 2% of the population identified as being two or more races.

➤ Age of Population

- 64% of people living in Vermont are between the ages of 18 and 65. 20% of people are under age 18 and 16% are over age 65.
- According to the 2010 census, Vermont's median age is 41.5, compared with the national average of 37.2.¹ Vermont ranks among the oldest states in the U.S.

B. Economic Trends

Economic trends describe changes in the relationships among individual well-being, the nature and composition of work and the work force, and societal prosperity. Economic trends directly affect the composition of caseloads, shape the basic resource foundations of the courts and justice system, and shape basic societal conditions. Below are a few of the most significant economic trends likely to impact the Vermont Judiciary in the upcoming years.

➤ Median Household Income

- The median household income in Vermont increased 4% from 2008 – 2013 (\$52,111 in 2008 to \$54,267 in 2013).²
- For the U.S., the median household income increased 2% during the same time period (\$52,029 to \$53,046).
- The counties of Chittenden and Grand Isle had the highest median household incomes in 2013: \$63,989 and \$59,509 respectively.

¹ Median represents the center – the midpoint – value where one half of the population is above this point and the other half is below.

² Median represents the center – the midpoint – value where one half of the income is above this point and the other half is below.

- The counties of Essex and Orleans had the lowest median household income in 2013: \$35,916 and \$41,953 respectively.
 - One third of a recent study sample (by the Vermont Round Table’s “Pulse of Vermont – Quality of Life Study – 2010”) reported that they or a family member had lost a job, or had their wages or work hours reduced in the past two years.
- Unemployment
- Vermont’s unemployment rate has been considerably lower than the unemployment rate for the U.S. over the past 3 decades.
 - Vermont’s unemployment rate dropped from 7% in 2009 to 4% in 2013. The unemployment rate for the U.S. was 9% in 2009, with a drop to 7% in 2013; according to the *Vermont Department of Labor Local Area Unemployment Statistics, Annual Summary* dated May, 2014 and the US Bureau of Labor Statistics.
 - In 2009, the counties of Orleans and Essex had the highest unemployment rate in the state: 9.4% and 9.2% respectively. In 2013 Orleans dropped to 6.2% and Essex to 5.8% but they remained the counties with the highest unemployment rates.
 - Windsor and Addison had the lowest unemployment rate in the state in 2009: 6.1% and 6.4% respectively. In 2013 those numbers dropped to 4.0% and 4.1% respectively. In 2013 Chittenden (3.5%) and Windsor (4.0%) reported the lowest unemployment in the state.
- Individuals Living Below the Poverty Level
- In 2008, 10.5% of individuals in Vermont were living below the poverty level. In 2013 that number increased to 12.3%, compared to 14.5% nationwide.
 - Counties with the highest percentage of individuals living below the poverty level in 2008 were: Orleans at 16%, Essex at 14% and Caledonia at 12%. In 2013 Orleans was at 15.8%, Essex at 16.4, and Caledonia at 14.4%. They remained the three counties with the highest percentage of individuals living below the poverty level.
 - Grand Isle had the lowest percentage of individuals living below the poverty level in 2008 (7.5%). In 2013 that percentage was 8.9%. Grand Isle remained the county with the lowest percentage of individuals living below the poverty level, followed closely by Washington County with 9.5%.

➤ Workforce Occupations

According to the Vermont Department of Labor *Vermont Economic and Demographic Profile Series – 2014*, ECONOMIC TRENDS

- Between 2010 and 2012 the Vermont economy gained 6,444 jobs (+2%).
 - Over this two-year period, six counties experienced net job loss: Caledonia (-0.9%), Essex (-13.5%), Franklin (-0.8%), Grand Isle (-1.6%), Rutland (-0.02%) and Windham (-0.1%) counties.
 - The remaining eight counties all reported net job gains between 2010 and 2012. The range of job gains was between a 0.1% increase in Windsor to a 6.2% increase in Orleans.
- According to 2012 data, Vermont had a net gain in manufacturing employment by 3% compared to the prior year.
- Construction continues to be an important part of the Vermont economy. This industry was hit hard during the recession and only recently has started showing signs of recovery. Between 2011 and 2012, construction employment increased by 110 (0.8%) to the statewide level of 14,195.
- The state's forest industry decreased total production between 2011 and 2010 – with both hardwood and softwood harvests reporting declines during this time period. Windham, Rutland and Windsor Counties produced the most hardwood in Vermont in 2011 (in that order). Essex and Orleans produced the most softwood.

➤ Foreclosures

The Department of Financial Regulation reports that foreclosures decreased from 1638 in 2010 to 1153 in 2014, nearly 30%. It is remarkable to note that the foreclosure number at the close of 2013 was 1578 so there was a decrease of 37% from 2013 to 2014.

➤ Economic Anxiety

The median household income in Vermont has increased, unemployment and foreclosure rates have decreased, and the Vermont economy gained 6,444 jobs between 2010 and 2012, all signs of a stronger economic future for Vermont. There are counties still experiencing net job losses and high percentages of individuals living below the poverty level, but overall the state's economy is getting stronger.

That said, according to the 2014 Town Meeting survey conducted by Senator Doyle, 60% of those polled do NOT believe Vermont is an affordable place to live.³

C. Technological and Scientific Trends

Technological and scientific trends describe changes in the composition, application, and broader social effects of tools and scientific developments and breakthroughs. Technological trends shape the types of demands confronting service organizations and hold the potential for dramatically altering the way organizations do their work or serve customers. Scientific trends shape new litigation areas and the need for specialized expertise. A few of the most significant technological and scientific trends that will impact the Vermont Judiciary in the future are listed next.

- According to an article written by leading Court Metrics and Technology experts at the National Center for State Courts, *The new world of "big data" has been called a management revolution. It will require a new breed of court leaders, managers, and data scientists with the talent, tools, and mindset to make the best use of the data coming at them in ever greater volume, velocity, and variety.*
- Adapting court materials and information flow to be compatible to the increasing use of mobile devices by court users.
- Greater expectations and demands for access to information and ability to do business with all types of organizations from remote locations (e.g., e-filing, pay fines and fees, access to case information, video arraignments).

³ The response to the 2014 Doyle Poll was 13,000 Vermonters in 155 communities.

- Expansion of wireless technologies.
- Continued rapidly developing telecommunications and information technology.
- Increasing using of the Internet (e.g., Connect Vermont).
- Greater demands for service 24/7 (e.g., retail shopping, banking, government services).
- Increase in distance learning (e.g., online courses, webinars) and virtual meetings.
- Continued need for and progress in networking and sharing of information (information exchange standards).
- Continued scientific breakthroughs in nanotechnology, human genetics, etc.

D. Policy and Political Trends

Policy and political trends describe the structure, receptiveness, responsiveness, priorities, and effectiveness of forums for collective, public decision-making and resource distribution. They also describe preferred responses to societal problems and the appropriate roles of individuals in developing, implementing, monitoring, and modifying actions to group responses. Below are some of the policy and political trends that will likely impact the Vermont Judiciary in the upcoming years.

- Increasing scrutiny on how public tax dollars are spent.
- Ongoing tension between increasing expectations for government solutions (e.g., public expects that courts will solve many of society's problems) and the call for less government involvement in personal lives.
- Increased security protocols statewide.
- Ongoing debate over health care reform, gender identity and same-sex marriage.
- Increasing politicization of the judiciary and/or attacks on judicial independence.
- Increase in legislation for specific crimes and unfunded mandates.
- Continued pressure to help organizations suffering from economic downturn (e.g. airlines, banks/financial institutions, automobile companies).

E. National Judicial Branch Trends

Below are a few of the most significant trends impacting courts across the country.

- Nationally courts will see an increased focus on juvenile and elder issues. In Vermont we have already seen significant increases in abuse/neglect caseloads.
- Courts are under increasing pressure to provide broader interpreter services.
- Increase in self-represented litigants.
- Increasing and changing caseloads/workloads (e.g., increase in some types of cases, increasing demand for greater customer service and assistance, more complex cases, more fee waiver requests, more inability to pay/defaults).
- Declining budgets/funding at both the state and local levels, increasing the need to depend on grant funding to provide operational necessities.
- Increasing number of litigants with mental health and/or addiction problems.
- Continued use of alternative dispute resolution in some cases, and an increase in the use of alternative dispute resolution in other cases (e.g. mediation, arbitration).
- Increasing need/demand for the use of technology to enhance access and allow for doing business remotely/electronically (e.g., e-filing, online payments, video arraignments/hearings, access to case information, access to information via the Internet/website).
- Declining court infrastructure (e.g., facilities, technology, equipment, security).
- Increasing public scrutiny and criticism of the judicial branch generally.

F. Vermont Judiciary Trends

- Meeting future technology challenges
 - Increase in E-filing capabilities
 - Enable the ability of video-conferencing
 - Creation of centralized small claims case filing and management
 - Server change over to State of Vermont Cloud
 - Increased use of SharePoint for court team communications
 - New case management system
- Meeting future customer service needs
 - Creation of centralized service center
 - Increased awareness of the needs of SRL and providing resources to meet those needs
 - Redesign of the Vermont Judiciary website
- Enhancing state-wide standardization
 - Oversight Committees
 - Division Teams
 - Increased Judiciary Advisory Council and sub-committee activity to drive Judiciary forward in a synchronized fashion
- Other
 - Increased focus on facilities management and security

IV. Summary of Statewide Analysis: Vermont Judiciary Caseload Trends

This summary highlights trends in the five divisions of the Vermont Judiciary and in the Supreme Court with respect to the filing and disposition of cases. In addition to providing data on the number of cases added and disposed, this report also measures performance with respect to timeliness using the three performance measurements that are part of the National Center for State Courts' CourtTools. The three measures are:

A. Clearance Rate

The clearance rate measures the number of disposed cases as a percentage of the number of incoming cases. The purpose is to measure whether the court is keeping up with its incoming caseload. If the Clearance rate is 100%, the court is basically staying even. A clearance rate above 100% indicates that the Court is disposing more cases than it is adding and should reflect a decrease in backlogged cases. A clearance rate below 100% indicates that the Court has added more cases than it has disposed which means that the backlog of cases is increasing.

B. Age of Active Pending Caseload

This is a point in time measurement usually done on the last day of the fiscal year. The age of the active pending cases is measured against the time standard or disposition goal for that particular case type set by the Supreme Court to determine how many of the active unresolved cases are within the goal and how many have exceeded the goal.

C. Time to Disposition

This measure looks at all cases disposed during the fiscal year and measures the percentage that were resolved within the disposition time standard or goal for that case type and the percentage that exceeded the goal. It is important to note that it would be very rare indeed for every case to be decided within the disposition goal. Typically, if the percentage decided within the disposition time standard is around 80% to 85%, it probably means that the court is doing fairly well provided that the cases that exceeded the goal did so within a reasonable margin.

D. Disposition Time Standards

The Vermont Supreme Court has adopted by Administrative Directive disposition time standards or goals for many, but not all, case types in the Superior Court. Where time standards have not yet been adopted, it is obviously difficult to use either the second or third NCSC measurement described above. We have noted in this report case types which do not yet have time standards. Where the Court has adopted time standards, it has recognized that in every case type, there are standard cases and then there are complex cases and the complex cases need longer time frames. The Court has therefore adopted a differentiated case management system which sets a time frame as a goal for standard cases and a somewhat longer goal for complex cases. Unfortunately, we lack the capacity in our current case management system to easily identify the complex cases. Therefore, for the most part, our measurement with respect to timely disposition are based on an assumption that all cases are standard, an assumption that we recognize is not accurate.

V. Highlights:

Family

- The number of CHINS petitions on the grounds of abuse or neglect of child has increased by 62% since 2010. This represents the largest case filing increase in the Superior Court. For the first time in a decade or more, CHINS filings now outnumber delinquency petitions.
- In every year in the past five years, the Superior Court has disposed of fewer CHINS cases than the number of cases filed. The clearance rate of CHINS cases in FY14 was 74.6%, which represents the lowest clearance rate for any case type in the Superior Court. The backlog of CHINS cases continues to grow with the steepest growth occurring in FY14.
- Delinquency petitions have steadily declined over the past five years. This trend mirrors the decline in misdemeanor criminal filings and is consistent with national trends.
- Termination of parental rights petitions in juvenile cases have increased by 21% in the last five years.

- There has been a 10% decline in divorce filings over the past five years, the first decline of any significance in decades.
- Petitions for protective orders for relief from abuse have also declined in the past five years by about 10%.
- The fastest growing case type in the Mental Health docket is involuntary medication applications. Filings doubled in FY14 over filings in FY13.

Trends

While the number of delinquency cases has declined over the past five years, the number of CHINS cases has significantly increased, especially in FY14. From a workload perspective, CHINS cases rank as one of the most labor intensive case types not only in the family division, but in any division of the Vermont Judiciary. The dramatic rise in CHINS cases over the past five years has put a significant strain on the resources of the trial courts and has also resulted in an increase in the number of TPR petitions filed. Given the significant increase in CHINS cases in the past year, the increase in TPR filings is likely to continue for the next few years.

The Divorce/Dissolution docket includes newly filed divorce and civil union dissolution cases. Divorce/dissolution filings have declined by about 10% in the last five years while parentage filings have remained relatively stable. In divorce or dissolution cases, there are often multiple issues that the parties or the court must resolve in addition to ending the divorce or civil union. Issues can include property division and spousal support, as well as issues of parental rights and responsibilities (custody), parent child contact (visitation) and child support if the case involves children. In 2014, about 43% of divorce/dissolution filings involved children under the age of 18. Parentage cases are cases where either a parent or the State is seeking to establish parentage for children whose parents were not married when the child was born. These cases also involve the resolution of issues related to parental rights and responsibilities, parent child contact and child support.

The fastest growing case type in the mental health docket is involuntary medication. While the numbers of cases still remain small in comparison to applications for involuntary treatment or continued treatment, they almost doubled in FY14 as compared to FY13. From a workload perspective medication cases require a significant amount of judge time since they are almost always contested. They also place a significant burden on the family division units where a designated hospital is located, currently Windham, Washington and Rutland.

Criminal

- Felony filings were down slightly in FY14 as compared to FY13, but still 4% higher than they were in 2010. The major increases in felony filings over the past 5 years are in domestic violence felonies which are up 30% and felony drug filings which are up 25%.
- As a result of the decriminalization of marijuana in 2013, misdemeanor drug charges declined by 71% in FY14 as compared to the previous year.
- The number of criminal jury trials has decreased by 25% over the last five years.

Trends

Felonies

A crime is considered a felony offense in Vermont if the maximum sentence that can be imposed is more than 2 years. While felony filings were down somewhat in FY14, they were still 4% higher than five years ago in FY10. The decline in FY14 over FY13 is primarily due to a decline in “public order” felonies. There was no decline in domestic violence felony filings which have risen by 30% over the five years. Felony drug filings in FY14 declined slightly over FY13, but are still about 25% higher than they were in 2011.

Misdemeanors

A crime is considered a misdemeanor in Vermont if the maximum sentence that can be imposed is 2 years or less. The 9% decrease in misdemeanor filings between FY13 and FY14 was primarily due to a sharp decrease in misdemeanor drug filings as a result of the decriminalization of marijuana. Misdemeanor drug filings dropped by 71% in FY14 over FY13. The impact of this

decrease on the courts was minimal since the majority of misdemeanor marijuana possession cases typically resolve at arraignment with a fine.

A significant downward trend (20%) in the number of DUI/DWI misdemeanor filings over the last six years is also worthy of note. Misdemeanor DUI/DWI offenses in Vermont include both first and second offenses.

Civil

- Filings in major civil cases declined by 11% in FY15 over FY14, primarily as a result of a decline in foreclosure filings. Foreclosure filings are beginning to recede back towards pre-recession levels, but are still high compared to FY05 and FY06.
- The decline in small claims cases which began in FY11 has continued and, although filings in FY14 were up slightly over FY13, they are still 30% below FY10.
- Final orders were granted in only 23% of the civil complaints that were filed seeking an order against stalking or sexual assault.

Trends

Filing trends over the last ten years indicate that the nature of the filings in the civil division is changing. While there has been significant growth in the number of foreclosure, collection and landlord-tenant cases filed over the past decade, the number of tort or personal injury cases and contract cases has declined. It is difficult to predict the degree to which these trends will continue in the future.

Environmental

- Cases in the environmental division declined by 25% between FY10 and FY13. FY14 brought a sharp increase in filings primarily as a result of the implementation of environmental enforcement tickets.

Trends

Filings in the environmental division in FY14 were slightly higher than they were five years ago and almost 20% higher than they were in FY13. The increase in FY14 is primarily the result of the addition of environmental civil complaints known as E-tickets for low level enforcement cases. While dispositions did not quite match the number of cases added, they were up 17% from the year before.

Probate

Trends

Adoption data includes cases involving the adoption of adults as well as the adoption of minors, although adoption of minors is by far the larger of the two categories. There were 8% fewer adoption petitions filed in FY14 as compared to the filings five years ago in 2010, but filing numbers have increased since FY12 when they hit a record low. 9,367 adoption petitions were filed in FY14 which is close to the average number filed annually over the course of the last 10 years.

As was true of adoptions, the number of minor and adult guardianship petitions declined over the past five years hitting their lowest point in FY12. Since FY12, the numbers have increased, but are still 12 to 13% lower than they were in FY10. The adult guardianship figures in FY10 were the highest that they have been in the past decade. By contrast, minor guardianship filings even in 2010 were almost 20% lower than in 2002.

The number of estate cases filed in Vermont ranges between 2100 and 2500 per year.

Dispositions fell off slightly in FY14, but given the fact that estate cases often take more than a year to reach final resolution, this may be the result of a lower than average number of filings in 2012 and 2013.

With the passage of the Uniform Trust Code (14A V.S.A. §101 et seq.), it was predicted that the number of trust filings in Vermont would grow. This has not turned out to be the case as indicated by the filing figures since that time. A surge in filings in 2011 has been followed by three years of filings that are well below the average number of annual filings prior to FY10. There has, however, been an increase in the percentage of hearings that are contested. In FY10, only 17% of the hearings on trust cases were contested. In FY14, almost 30% of the hearings were contested.

In FY14, 512 petitions for a change of name were filed in the probate division.

VI. Implications of the Trends on the Vermont Judiciary

The aforementioned trends will affect the Vermont Judiciary in many ways in the upcoming years. The most significant consequences of these trends are listed below.

- A. **Composition, Needs, and Expectations of Court Users:** The composition of court users will continue to change in the future. For example, in the future court users will likely be older, more diverse and multi-cultural, and self-represented. They also may have more complex, mental health and substance abuse issues.

Thus, the needs of court users also will continue to change and evolve in the years ahead. To be responsive to these changing needs, the Court will need to add new, expand existing, and alter the current services provided. For example, the Court will need to remove barriers to accessing the Court, use plain English, provide appropriate assistance and information, and add appropriate, special services to achieve positive case outcomes.

The expectations of court users and the public also are changing. The Court must manage, re-shape, and respond appropriately to changing expectations. For example, the Court must balance and manage changing expectations regarding self-help services; it is important to provide self-help services but also acknowledge that legal representation is needed and preferred. Finally, adding new or modifying existing services and programs, increasing the ability to do court business remotely, and providing easy-to-understand information and resources are needed in the future.

- B. Technology: The Vermont Judiciary must continue to expand the use of existing and emerging technologies. As this happens, jobs also must be changed, work processes must be updated, and staff must be trained and re-trained. New technologies also must be well-tested prior to implementation. As the Court uses technology in the future, however, it must avoid perpetuating access barriers for those who do not use or have access to technology.
- C. Monitor and Adapt to Changing Caseloads and Workloads. The Court must continue to monitor and adapt to changing caseloads and workloads. As necessary, the Court must be able to shift resources and manage cases and workloads effectively, ultimately resolving legal matters in a fair and timely manner.
- D. Flexible Use of Resources. Resources will likely need to be shifted in the future to respond to changing case volumes, backlogs, workloads, and population. Increasingly there is a need for more flexibility in the use of judicial officers, staff, equipment, and other court resources. Shifting resources, however, might increase competition for limited resources among units.
- E. Efficiency and Effectiveness of the Court: Funding sources, the public, and other court leaders will continue to expect and challenge the Court to be more efficient and effective in the future. To fulfill the Court's mission and achieve its vision, the Court will need to continue to implement innovative court programs, services, and practices; streamline work processes and operations; and consolidate services, to name a few.
- F. Facilities, Space, and Security: Better and more expansive facilities and space may be needed in some counties. Fewer or consolidated facilities may (or may not) be prudent in other counties. There also will be an increasing need to provide adequate security to ensure that court facilities are safe for all who use and work in the Courts. Finally, adequate and functional space for all who work in the Court also will provide greater staffing flexibility to cover all divisions of the Court.
- G. Collaboration with Partners. More collaboration with justice system partners and stakeholders is needed in the future. More and better communication, cooperation, collaboration, and education among partners will help

VII. STRATEGIC FOCUS AREAS AND GOALS

Below are the strategic focus areas and goals for the Vermont Judiciary:

1. Equal Access to Justice
2. Fair and Timely Resolution of Disputes
3. Safe and Secure Administration of Justice
4. Educated, Skilled and Professional Judiciary Personnel

Strategic Area #1: Equal Access to Justice

Goal 1: Court facilities and court services are accessible, ADA compliant and promote public trust and confidence.

Goal 2: The Judiciary's programs and services are responsive to the existing and emerging needs of its customers.

Strategic Area #2: Fair and Timely Resolution of Disputes

Goal 1: Cases are resolved in a fair, timely and just manner pursuant to law and judiciary time standards.

Goal 2: Court Management is Efficient, Effective, and Consistent.

Goal 3: Resources advance the Judiciary's Strategic Plan.

Strategic Area 3: Safe and Secure Administration of Justice

Goal 1: The Judiciary infrastructure is safe and secure for people and information.

Strategic Area 4: Educated, Skilled and Professional Judiciary Personnel

Goal 1: Personnel are knowledgeable and competent in all aspects of their jobs.

Goal 2: Personnel are engaged, productive and provide the highest quality of service.