


Supreme Court of Vermont
Office of State Court Administrator

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TO: Joint Legislative Justice Oversight Committee
FROM: Gregg Mousley, Chief, Finance and Administration 
DATE: October 17, 2019
RE: State of Judicial Security

Summary

The Judiciary is very concerned with the state of court security. We have several courthouses where the security provided is in transition, understaffed, and/or does not have a workable plan to stabilize security services.

- During the past four budget cycles, the Judiciary has consistently proposed to the Governor's office and to the Legislature that the Judiciary be appropriated additional funds for security
- The Washington County Sheriff is struggling to recruit new deputies, and we have serious staffing shortages that remain unresolved.
- The Orleans County Sheriff has stopped serving the county courthouse and has indicated that he cannot continue serving the state court building at the current pay rate. There is no plan after 11/1/19.
- In Bennington County, we recently reduced public access and security hours to increase the hourly rate paid to the Sheriff.
- The Windsor County Sheriff may give notice, and Windsor is not considered a stable situation.
- Judicial security covers all building tenants, which includes executive branch employees in many courts.

Background

By law, the Court Administrator must “provide appropriate security services for each court in the state.” 4 V.S.A. § 30. In 2014, the Legislature directed the Court Administrator Office (“CAO”) to submit a report on the current operation and costs of providing security in Vermont’s courts. The Legislature asked the CAO to consider possible ways to restructure court operations to achieve financial savings without increasing security risks. The CAO contracted with the National Center for State Courts (“NCSC”) to conduct the security study, and NCSC identified significant unmet security needs in four courthouses in the study sample. The CAO communicated in a letter dated January 14, 2015, that these unmet security needs reflected a general pattern across all Vermont courts.

Pursuant to Act 58 (2015), the senior Assistant Judge of each county convened local stakeholder groups identified in the Act and made recommendations to the Court Administrator related to court security and the court security budget. The Court Administrator then submitted a second report to establish appropriate security standards balancing cost-effectiveness with facility-specific risk for all Vermont courthouses. This internal review found, like the NCSC study, that there were no options for cutting costs that wouldn’t also reduce the security in the courts. This report recommended an operating budget increase of \$1.8M to fund additional officers, and a capital budget increase of \$2.1M for security enhancements, including \$1M for the Barre courthouse.

Since that time, the Judiciary has repeatedly prioritized security funding in our budget requests to the Governor and the Legislature:

- In FY17 Budget, the CAO asked for \$936,000 to partially implement the recommendations of these security studies. The CAO received \$75,000 for a 3% increase in the sheriff’s rates.
- In FY18 Budget, the CAO asked for 5 new security positions and an 8% increase in sheriff’s rates. The CAO received a 4% increase and no new positions.
- In FY19 Budget, The CAO again asked for 5 new positions and an 8% increase. The CAO received a 4% increase and no new positions
- In FY20 Budget, the CAO again repeated our request for 5 new security positions and an 8% increase in sheriff’s rates. The CAO received a 5% increase.

Current Status

Just this week, the hours open to the public at the Bennington Civil and Probate divisions located in the county-owned building were reduced due to the security concerns. The Bennington Sheriff would not agree to the rates provided by Legislative funding. One alternative was to reduce the quantity of hours so that the CAO could afford to increase the hourly rate. The public’s accessible hours are being reduced by 1 hr. and 45 min. each day, saving about 400 hours of security screening annually. This option allowed the CAO and Sheriff to negotiate a contract at a rate acceptable to both sides.

In Washington County, the Sheriff has experienced turnover and has struggled to recruit new deputies. The criminal division in Barre has been required to cancel hearings at the last minute recently due to the lack of security staffing. The Lamoille County Sheriff is covering two positions; the Judiciary has hired a temporary employee to cover a position; and we are currently negotiating with a private security firm to

also provide security. It is believed that this new "hybrid" model of shared security resources will occur more often in other courts. The CAO will overspend its security budget for the Barre Courthouse.

In Orleans County, the CAO and the county sheriff have been unable to negotiate an annual contract and are currently operating on a 4-month contract that expires on 11/1/19 while budget cutting options are explored. In addition, the security services in the county building in Orleans have already been shifted to the Lamoille County Sheriff. There is no contract for security at the Orleans state courthouse after November 1. Due to the transitions and coverage needs, the CAO will overspend its security budget in Orleans county.

It should be noted that the executive branch has staff in many courthouses across Vermont. In these situations, the executive branch employees enjoy the safety of the Judiciary's security. We have experienced situations when executive branch agencies use Judiciary attorney rooms for executive branch activities and that non-employees have been in the building after closing hours, requiring overtime to be incurred by the Judiciary because those non-employees have not vacated the building when it closes at 4:30. The sheriffs have consistently reported to the CAO that funding for courthouse security does not cover their costs. In contrast, the executive branch (through AHS and BGS) pays \$42/hr. for sheriffs. It is the CAO's desire to pay one unified rate that is significantly closer to that of the executive branch.

The Judiciary hopes to work collaboratively with the Governor, the Sheriffs and the Legislature to address this critical safety concern in Vermont's courts.

VERMONT JUDICIARY

Office of Court Administrator

January 27, 2016

Report on Security submitted pursuant to Act 58 (2015)

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2016 Security Report

Executive Summary

Pursuant to Act 58 (2015), the Court Administrator submits this plan to establish appropriate statewide security standards balancing cost-effectiveness with facility-specific risk for all Vermont courthouses, including a status report on the implementation of recommendations made by the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) in January 2015.

Pursuant to the statutory requirement, in developing the recommendations set forth below, the senior Assistant Judge for each county submitted an assessment to the Court Administrator's Office (CAO) after consulting with the Security and Safety program manager and the Chief of Finance and Administration at the Vermont Supreme Court, as well as the presiding Superior Judge, Superior Court Clerk, Court Operations Manager(s), State's Attorney, and Sheriff, in the senior Assistant Judge's county.

This report synthesizes these local assessments, which were unanimous concluding court security operations and infrastructure suffer from significant deficiencies and needs across the Branch. The specific findings of the local assessments – in terms of the types of deficiencies and necessary solutions – were consistent with those identified by the NCSC experts during their assessment of four specific courthouses in the fall of 2014.

As directed by the Legislature, this plan also considers:

- issues related to security at county-owned and State-owned courthouses and measures to reduce the cost of court security budgets while maintaining the safety of staff and citizens;
- a proposal regarding whether counties should provide a security function at the entrance to county-owned courthouses that would be offset by restructuring of notary fees retained by the counties; and
- a proposal that reduces the court security budget by at least three percent.

However, as noted above, all of the local assessment teams concluded that more – rather than less – security was needed. The local teams nonetheless directly addressed the legislative challenge regarding savings while identifying the associated challenges. For example, the local teams noted that while billing co-located departments for security costs might reduce the Judiciary's expenses, it does not change the overall costs to the State. The Court Administrator's Office in this report identifies several other hurdles around these cost-reduction issues.

Based on these local assessments and last year's NCSC report, the Judiciary recommends the following funding increases for courthouse security based on the specific needs identified in this report:

- **Operating Budget: Increase in court officer coverage of \$1.8M to fund 35 additional officers, implemented over two years;**
 - **These additional officers would significantly increase front-door screening and courtroom security – however, it would continue to fall below NCSC “best practices” coverage, as discussed herein.**
 - **Provide funding for appropriate rate increases for sheriffs’ current security contracts.**

- **Capital Budget: Provide \$2.1M of capital appropriation for security infrastructure improvements, including \$315,000 in FY 2017 Capital budget adjustment and \$500,000 annually beginning in FY 2018/2019 biennial Capital Bill.**
 - **Such improvements include new installation and/or replacement of obsolete: X-ray machines; Walk-through metal detectors; Surveillance cameras; Duress alarms; Access control (internal) card readers; Courtroom ballistic protection; Screening post ballistic protection; Intrusion alarms; Public transaction counters; (selected) holding cells.**
 - **The Judiciary also requests physical security infrastructure improvements at the Barre courthouse, at a preliminary estimated cost of \$1M.**

Background

By law, the Court Administrator must “provide appropriate security services for each court in the state.” 4 V.S.A. § 30.

In 2014, the Legislature directed the Court Administrator to submit a report on the current operation and costs of providing security in Vermont’s courts. The Legislature asked the Court Administrator to consider possible ways to restructure court operations to achieve financial savings without increasing security risks, including:

- options to reduce costs when courts are not in session; and

- options to reduce costs through shared security arrangements with other co-located state agencies.

The CAO contracted with the National Center for State Courts to conduct the security study, and the NCSC identified significant unmet security needs in the four courthouses in the study sample. As set forth in the January 14, 2015 transmittal letter, the CAO determined that these unmet security needs reflected a general pattern across all Vermont courts.

With respect to the specific questions posed by the Legislature, the NCSC considered but could not identify any opportunities to reduce costs when courts are not in session. It did not recommend closing screening stations when courts are not in session, emphasizing that weapons

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Patricia Gabel, State Court Administrator – January 29, 2016

screening stations are an essential element of courthouse security and provide the “first line of defense” for those who work in or visit a courthouse. The NCSC indicated that there might be options to share security costs with state agencies that are co-tenants within the same courthouse, but this would not reduce the overall cost of the security measures. Additionally, while there were possible efficiencies to be gained by improved coordination and management of security resources, there was unlikely to be any net reduction in costs for security measures as a result.

The NCSC proposed numerous recommendations to address security concerns at Vermont’s courts, including the following:

- Create courthouse security committees;
- Develop and implement security policies and procedures, and perform regular drills;
- Establish clear lines of authority within each courthouse, and identify which type of officer should be assigned to which duties;
- Establish command centers within each courthouse;
- Enhance weapons-screening stations by using appropriate equipment, increasing the number of security officers operating screening stations, and creating documented procedures to govern the proper operation of each station;
- Increase the number of security officers present in courtrooms during hearings and patrolling courthouses;
- Install a sufficient number of CCTV cameras and place them in all recommended areas;
- Ensure that public transaction centers have a protective barrier on top of the counter, a CCTV camera at back of counter, and one or more duress alarms within easy reach;
- Provide adequate exterior lighting around courthouses;
- Provide window coverings to remedy line-of-sight issues; and
- Create an in-custody detention center at the Barre courthouse.

The NCSC recognized that the implementation of these recommendations would likely require a significant addition in the net cost of security in these courthouses, but concluded that taking meaningful steps toward achieving these goals was imperative to minimize existing risks. As emphasized by the CAO in its January 2015 transmittal letter, the Vermont justice system must be protected from threat and intimidation, and modern and effective court security is critical to achieving this goal.

The number of threats and incidents of violence in and around our courthouses continues to increase. Most recently, DCF social worker Lara Sobel was tragically shot and killed in the immediate vicinity of the Barre courthouse. There was an alleged sexual assault in the Costello courthouse. Other violent incidents include two stabbings within a courthouse, and an individual

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who broke a courthouse plate glass window with a brick during business hours. There have been numerous arrests made within courthouses, and judicial officers have received threats and other inappropriate communications. Individuals have tried to enter courthouses with loaded firearms and other weapons, with one arrest at the screening post in Burlington for violating 13 V.S.A. § 4016 by attempting to bring a firearm into court.

For example, in calendar 2015, the Chittenden Superior Court, Criminal/Family/Environmental Divisions (Costello) – the Judiciary's largest courthouse – processed 100,835 visitors, detected 11 firearms (includes stun guns, toy guns and ammunition), 2,318 knives or sharp edged weapons, 41 cases of finding drugs or paraphernalia, 127 cans of oleoresin capsicum or mace, 3,803 miscellaneous prohibited items, and 26 handcuff keys. There were 174 reported court security operational incidents in Vermont courts during calendar year 2015. These included in addition to the two stabbings mentioned previously, 5 assaults, 5 bomb threats, 21 disorderly conduct complaints, and 2 escapes. The number of threats against Judicial Officers, court staff and stakeholders continues to increase.

Status of Current Implementation of Security Enhancements

The NCSC's recommendations, and associated cost implications, can be grouped into four broad categories:

1. Organizational, operational, and procedural changes (can be implemented at relatively low cost);
2. One-time operating equipment and other purchases (one-time operating costs);
3. Ongoing security operational enhancements (significant increase in Judiciary operating budget costs);
4. Security infrastructure improvements (capital costs).

This section addresses each category of recommendations, and the current status of implementation.

1. Organizational, Operational, and Procedural changes:

The Judiciary has taken several steps in implementing the NCSC recommendations at relatively low cost:

Court Security Committees: In 2015, the Supreme Court authorized the creation of Court Security and Emergency Planning Committees (CSEPCs) in all Court Units. The Committees collected information, assessed current security needs, and proposed recommendations pursuant to Act 58, as reflected herein. The Committees will continue to meet periodically on an ongoing basis as a means to continuously assess security and emergency planning in all courts, as recommended by the NCSC as a "best business practice." The CSEPC policy is included in this report as **Attachment A**.

The creation of the CSEPCs is only the first step in local involvement. The Judiciary will create and deploy an "all hazards" training program for Judiciary staff and building tenants in all

courthouses. Each facility will establish an occupant emergency plan, conduct training, orientate new employees, and conduct regular drills. Local safety teams will be established in each facility to execute the plans during an emergency, with membership on a voluntary basis. The scope of hazards for this initiative will include fire and evacuations; bomb threats; shelter-in-place; weapons of mass destruction; natural event emergencies; and active shooter.

Security Operational Process Improvements: The following security operational process improvements were established during 2015:

- Automated Incident Reporting System;
- Intelligence Alert Sharing;
- Judiciary Emergency Notification System (JENS) in partnership with VT-Alert;
- Court Security Intranet Web Page; and,
- Automated Daily Activity Reports.

Training: The Judiciary has engaged in a variety of security and safety training activities during 2015, including:

- Court Officer security seminars (2 training sessions covering 83 personnel);
- Court Security Manager: ALICE (Active Shooter), certified trainer;
- Individualized courthouse security training;
 - Burlington, Woodstock, Rutland
 - Security Training provided to judicial officers at Judicial College
 - The Judiciary is currently negotiating with a security consulting firm to provide courthouse security training across all counties.
- CPR and Automated External Defibrillator (AED) Training (Bennington);
- Security training as part of new Superior Judge orientation.

2. One-time Operating Equipment and Other Purchases:

In the past year, the Judiciary has utilized available one-time funds and grant funds to purchase equipment that will enhance courthouse safety, including:

- **Court Officer radio enhancement:** Provided interoperable mutual aid law enforcement radios to 16 State-employed court officers who previously had no communication with first responders. The \$16,000 cost was funded by a federal Homeland Security Grant. (Completed 7/2015)
- **“Go Kit” equipment for emergency events:** In the next several months, each courthouse will be provided with the necessary equipment for evacuations and emergencies, including portable megaphones, ID vests for safety team members, flashlights and administrative supplies. This equipment is critical because no courthouse currently has a voice evacuation system.

3. Ongoing Security Operational Enhancements:

The NCSC report noted the significant discrepancies between its “best practices” regarding security operations and the Vermont Judiciary’s practices. The most prominent discrepancy relates to coverage levels of security officers at screening posts, in courtrooms, and throughout courthouses generally, and can be summarized as follows:

- **Current staffing:** Current general practice is one screening officer at the door and one court officer in each courtroom during hearings. Not all Civil Division-only courthouses attain even that coverage level. There is limited or no “rover” coverage. **Current staffing levels, including deputy sheriffs, contracted private security, and Judiciary permanent employee court officers: 64 Full-Time Equivalent positions.**
- **NCSC “Best Practices” staffing:** Three armed screening officers. Two armed court officers in each courtroom. Command centers for larger courthouses. **Estimated staffing requirement to achieve NCSC best practices: 155 Full-Time Equivalent positions.**

The Judiciary agrees with the NCSC that security officer coverage is a critical issue. However, the Judiciary lacks funding in its base budget to support any additional security officer coverage. Thus, no coverage expansion has occurred since the NCSC report.

Moreover, the Judiciary has repeatedly expressed concerns about the budget process regarding security officer costs. Last year, the Judiciary requested additional funds for hourly rate increases for service contracts with the sheriffs, but neither the Governor nor ultimately the Legislature provided these funds. The Judiciary is concerned that a similar pattern will occur this year. The sheriffs – who provide the vast majority of the Judiciary’s security services – experience the same cost increases as other employers. At the rates currently provided by the Judiciary, several sheriffs have indicated that they “lose money” on these services and may decline to participate in the future. If the Judiciary is not provided resources to fund reasonable cost increases, it may jeopardize the Judiciary’s ability to procure its current level of coverage, let alone seek the additional coverage that is needed.

In the “Conclusions and Requested Funding” section of this report, the Judiciary identifies a path to improve court security coverage and the associated fiscal impact.

4. Security Infrastructure (Capital) Improvements:

In the fall of 2014, in conjunction with the NCSC findings, the Judiciary developed an inventory of security-related capital needs. Those needs addressed deficiencies in the following areas – where the items below were inadequate, outdated, or non-existent:

- X-ray machines;
- Walk-through metal detectors;

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- Surveillance cameras;
- Duress alarms;
- Internal access control card readers;
- Ballistic protection of courtrooms;
- Ballistic protection of screening posts;
- Intrusion alarms;
- Strengthening protection at public transaction counters;
- Holding cells.

It was also noted that the Barre courthouse lacks a secure “sallyport” for individuals in custody to enter and exit, and has other security infrastructure deficiencies.

At that time, the Judiciary estimated the total security infrastructure capital needs at \$2.9M, of which approximately \$1.0M was associated with the Barre sallyport. The Judiciary requested \$590,000 as part of the FY 2016-2017 biennial capital budget, identifying those items of highest priority and recognizing that the scope of the needed improvements could not be addressed in a single biennium. The Governor included \$100,000 in his recommendation. The Legislature increased that amount to \$275,000 over two years (\$150,000 in FY16 and \$125,000 in FY17).

The Judiciary has recently been advised that the Governor’s recommendation for the FY 2017 Capital Adjustment Act includes \$315,000 for Judiciary security improvements, which would bring the biennial total back up to the level of the Judiciary’s original request.

The status of the Judiciary’s capital appropriation is as follows:

- Completed:
 - Purchase of 5 new Walk-Through Metal Detectors - \$15,000
 - **Addison; Caledonia; Franklin (Civil); Orange; Rutland (Civil)**
 - Supreme Court Clerk Public Transaction Counter - \$7,000
- In Progress:
 - **Brattleboro and Middlebury** courthouse cellblock expansion and safety – architectural and engineering planning drawings in progress – estimated \$125,000
 - **Barre:** Cameras, Duress Alarm, Access Control, Ballistic Protection of Screening Post – planning underway as part of new tenant build-out: \$59,825
- Planned for FY 2017:
 - **Newport:** Cameras, Duress Alarm, Access Control, Screening Post Ballistic Protection – \$59,825
 - **Burlington (Costello):** Ballistic Protection of Screening Post – \$8,350

Prior to enactment of the Capital Bill appropriation, the Judiciary utilized FY 2015 one-time operating funds to enhance security infrastructure in a few instances where critical needs were identified. For example, at the Burlington (Costello) courthouse, at a cost of \$40,693, the Judiciary acquired: a new X-ray machine; walk-through metal detector; and handheld metal detector – replacing 15-year-old equipment. The Judiciary also contributed \$43,144 of one-time

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FY 2015 funds toward the Windsor County courthouse renovation, to install a camera surveillance system, duress alarms and access control. This is the first time that Internet Protocol (IP) cameras and digital networked recorders have been used in Vermont courts. As a result, the Judiciary can now remotely access camera images from Woodstock. Finally, the Judiciary spent \$34,000 to acquire federal surplus X-ray machines and walk-through metal detectors, which were installed in high-volume courthouses where existing equipment was older. In turn, this older equipment was circulated to other locations in the branch where the equipment was nonexistent, nonfunctional, or obsolete. As a result, the Judiciary was able to leverage a small expenditure on federal surplus equipment to address numerous pressing needs.

It should be noted that the Judiciary's capacity to fund security infrastructure projects is limited. The Judiciary's operating budget is extremely constrained, and is not intended or constructed to fund capital projects.

Also during 2015, the Legislature funded the expansion and renovation of the Lamoille County courthouse in Hyde Park. The Capital Bill appropriation for this project includes a new camera surveillance system, duress alarms, access control and ballistic protection for the perimeter screening post. Many of these components are transportable and have been installed in the temporary courthouse in Morrisville. They will be moved back to the Hyde Park courthouse when the work there is complete. This installation is now the second courthouse – after Woodstock – where courtroom camera images can be accessed remotely.

In the "Conclusions and Requested Funding" section, the Judiciary identifies those capital infrastructure needs that have not yet been addressed, and the associated fiscal impact.

Summary of Local Assessments

As indicated above, the Assistant Judges in each county submitted reports to the CAO outlining security issues within county-owned and state-owned courthouses, and proposing measures to reduce the cost of court security budgets while maintaining the safety of staff and citizens. The Assistant Judges were also asked to address:

- whether their counties should provide a security function at the entrance to county-owned courthouses that would be offset by restructuring of notary fees retained by the counties; and
- ways to reduce the court security budget in each assistant judge's county by at least three percent.

Each county voiced concern about the safety of judges, staff, and the public within their courthouses, and many common themes emerged.

Security Issues

With respect to security issues, most counties identified the following needs:

Security Personnel:

- Additional officers are needed to screen individuals entering courthouses and to provide backup for one another.
- Additional officers are needed to monitor cameras and to serve as “rovers” to properly ensure interior and exterior building security.
- Additional courtroom officers are needed to ensure courtroom safety. Some counties do not have any officers inside courtrooms during civil or probate hearings.

Screening Stations:

- There is a need for upgraded X-ray machines and similar equipment. Some courthouses have no screening officers. Others do not have any screening equipment other than handheld metal detectors.

Cameras:

- Upgraded camera systems are needed, including additional interior and exterior cameras, and cameras that record. As indicated above, there needs to be an officer assigned to monitor camera feeds.

Duress Alarms:

- Additional and better placed panic buttons are required.

Physical Infrastructure Changes:

- Several counties have recently upgraded courthouses, but many do not, and these counties express concerns about inadequate locks, unsecure exterior and interior glass doors, and workspaces that are easily accessed by members of the public. Almost all counties expressed concern about the lack of polycarbonate barriers at service counters.

Lighting/Parking:

- Additional exterior lighting is needed, as well as more secure parking for judges and staff.

Planning and Drills:

- Almost all counties requested additional emergency planning, dissemination of emergency plans, and more drills, including coordinated drills, to ensure that staff, members of the public, and law enforcement can quickly respond in an emergency.

Bennington courthouse to reduce hours because of security funding concerns



By [Ellie French](#)

[Sep 25 2019](#)

The doors of the civil courthouse in Bennington County will be locked almost two hours more a day after negotiations between the sheriff's department and the state on increased funding for security.

The court will now open 45 minutes later, and close an hour earlier than it once did, although officials say the reduced time will mostly affect the clerk's window, not the court's caseload.

The change was mandated at the state level, following negotiations with the county sheriff's office, which provides security for the court, and balked at continuing at the current rate of compensation.

“Well, the sheriff in Bennington County was saying he could not continue contracting at the existing hourly rate we were offering,” said Greg Mosely, chief of finance for the Vermont Judiciary. “So we negotiated with him, and landed on a dollar amount, and then we needed to figure out how to afford it.”

Mosely said the money that the state pays the department goes toward equipment, training and other types of expenses, not just salaries for the people working. He said the state used to pay about \$26.50 an hour, and will now be paying \$28 — but they needed to find a way to come up with the money.

“So we started discussing change of hours,” Mosely said. “And trimming down the quantity of hours purchased to improve the hourly rate.”

Mosely said with the exception of days that run unexpectedly late, the change from 8:00 to 4:30 to 8:45 to 3:30 shouldn't negatively impact the cases being processed. He said those are the same times that cases were already being seen by judges.

“We arranged these hours to not conflict with ongoing hearing schedules,” Mosely said. “We're not changing the hearing schedule at all.”

However, not everyone is too happy with the change.

“As far as I'm concerned, this is regrettable,” Probate Judge D. Justine Scallon [told the Bennington Banner](#) last week.

Other court employees will continue to work the same schedule. Clerks will use a dropbox outside the building to process paperwork dropped off before or after the court's official hours.

“We do not feel like this is inhibiting access to justice,” Mosely said.

Since each county sheriff independently bargains with the state when it comes to providing security for the courts, the changes in hours happening in Bennington County are unique — at least so far. But Mosely said contracts with Orleans, Washington, Lamoille and Windsor Counties have yet to be signed.

Mosely said in Bennington, reducing hours was really the only way they looked at to solve their funding problem. But as far as other counties go, he said, there's a lot of uncertainty about what the funding structure might look like going forward. He noted that current hourly rates range between \$26 and \$32, depending on the county.

"It's a bit of a house of cards, because it's so severely underfunded," Mosely said.

He said they've gone to the Legislature every year for the past four or five years asking for more money to afford higher hourly rates and for extra positions in courts where they're needed. He said it feels like the Legislature is hearing their complaints, but the funding hasn't necessarily reflected that.

Mosely said what he can say for sure is that as long as the underfunding continues, even a reduction in hours won't totally solve the problem. He said that creates a real public safety risk for the state's court system.

"We have far less security than what is suggested by best practice for court systems," he said. "I have a high level of concern for what I see happening and the direction we seem to be heading in."

Bennington County Sheriff Chad Schmidt did not respond to request for comment Wednesday.

