

## **Court Services Survey – Final Report**

### Introduction:

In the early spring of 2023, Director of Court Services Mark Jaeger, announced his retirement. When we have turnover in leadership positions it is incumbent upon us to review structures to ensure the needs of stakeholders and clients are best served. Specifically, the HR department explored adopting a model employed by Carver County in which Court Services reports to Health and Human Services.

### **Interviews Conducted:**

#### Carver County:

- Dave Hemze –Administrator
- Heather Goodwin- Carver County HHS Director
- Eric Johnson – Carver County, Court Services Director

#### First Judicial District:

- Brian Jones, District Court Administrator
- Judge Douglas Bayley

#### Goodhue County leadership & staff:

- Health & Human Services department
- County Attorney's Office
- Sheriff's Office
- Court Services department

### **Specific observations from the comments:**

In the course of our conversations, the feedback was consistent. We heard “if it’s not broke, don’t fix it” or “don’t make change for change’s sake” or “don’t force an answer just to have one” in nearly every conversation. There were no compelling arguments that juvenile or adult clients would be served better by a reorganization of the Court Services department within Health & Human Services. The overall overlap of services between Court Services and HHS, is very minimal thus there is limited opportunity for greater workplace efficiency. Furthermore, we did not find evidence of significant cost savings by implementing such a change.

While both Court Services and Health & Human Services provide essential services for Goodhue County residents, their goals do not always align.

Some differences between the two departments were pointed out. Adults go to HHS voluntarily for services whereas the court services assistance is provided to individuals who are there against their will. Another key point is the difference in backgrounds of employees which is a criminal justice background for court services verses a social worker background for HHS. Jurisdiction for court services is over the individual not the family. Also, public safety comes first not child protection. Court services is working for corrections and are an arm of the court and have the power to take someone’s freedom away.

Health & Human Services are willing to explore a model where Court Services resides within their organization structure. HHS and Court Services enjoy collaborative working relationships in the very

limited overlaps that exist in their caseloads. While there is always room for improvement, the general belief is that efficiencies could be achieved with or without a reorganization.

Health & Human Services is in the process of two major initiatives: 1.) evaluating ongoing Minnesota Merit System membership and 2.) a comprehensive compensation study. These efforts require significant staff time, coordination and communication. Integrating Court Services into the Health & Human Services department would be a massive undertaking as well. A thoughtful, comprehensive review of internal processes would be essential to ensure appropriate treatment of internal relationships, communications and data privacy. While our staff are capable of performing this critical work successfully, the justification to make the change has not been demonstrated and the timing may not be optimal given these other important priorities.

Carver County representatives said that the prior structure worked and had no weaknesses. While the new structure works, it unionized positions not previously covered by collective bargaining agreements, has not recognized any cost savings, and isn't providing any different or improved services to their residents. The Carver County judges did not notice much of a change and were "not jumping up and down either way."

**Recommendation:**

Based on our survey of stakeholders we do not find sufficient justification to recommend a restructure at this time. We remain open to exploring alternative organization structures when merited or necessary. At this time, we recommend backfilling the Director for Court Services position and maintaining the current model.