

Budget Cut Ideas/Comments submitted via Email  
(updated October 30, 2009)

**COST-SAVING SUGGESTIONS**

**TO MAINTAIN COURT REPORTER POSITIONS  
TEMPORARY SUGGESTIONS FOR FY 2010**

- Percentage cut in pay
- Salary freeze
- Give up holiday pay
- Step increase freeze
- Reduce travel reimbursement
- Reduce reimbursement for transcripts to previous rate
- Open union negotiations to increase the amount of furlough days
- Furloughs for ALL judicial branch employees
- Furloughs: Every Friday p.m. or every other Friday
- Furloughs: 4 10-hour days, every Friday or Monday off or courthouse open every day, only half staffed.
- Furloughs: Float furlough days among reporters to cover judges
- Shortened workweek, 35 or 37 ½ hours
- Employees Contribute to insurance coverage
- Provide own steno paper
- Efile steno notes
- Early retirement options for those within five to ten years of retirement

**LONG-TERM SUGGESTIONS**

- Redefine job description/down time to assist court attendants/judicial assistants, clerk's office & court administration
- Revamp scheduling to reduce court reporter/judge down time when trials do not go
- Use official court reporters to schedule court reporters
- Provide legal research for the judges
- All go paperless
- Compose orders/reports to be used in conjunction with EDMS
- Receive ICIS training to assist in coding cases

**Other suggestions:**

- Have judges and reporters do their own scheduling
- Restrict travel
- Changing court reporter domiciles to that of their judges
- Have court reporters do judicial assistant/court attendant duties where possible
- Reduce state laptop fees – either supplying their own computers or rural reporters could receive their info from their rural judges and urban reporters could get their information off of one desktop located in the courthouse somewhere
- Do not fill judicial vacancies
- Allow judges to cross district lines
- Instead of using court attendants, have one or two “runners” who are either court attendants or someone from the clerk's office go around to courtrooms to pick up

- file-order slips, return files, take the hard-copy orders to the clerk's office, watch juries, etc., and keep the court reporters in the courtroom to take care of the record and the judge's work in preparing and sending out orders, answering the phones, etc., as is done in most counties (especially in district associate courts). Reduce the court attendant/judicial assistant/case scheduler/assistant court administrator staff by attrition rather than layoffs.
- Review jury call-in procedure - develop system where jurors call in later in the day or a way to communicate with jurors so they don't have to come in when cases settle or defendants plea prior to jury selection commencing.
  - If positions need to be reduced, do it by attrition.
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- If pleadings or orders are more than one page, make two-sided copies
  - Delay of filling all judicial position openings, even in districts with more than one position open.
  - Furloughs, even more than the 20 and an across-the-board pay cut (judges excluded). Certainly, the union would rather see their members' pay cut than see some of their members lose their jobs.
  - Cut down on travel expenses of meetings by having out-of-towners participate by conference call.
  - No one in the Judicial Branch should have a State car.
  - With the advent of our VPN and the affordability of Blackberries, the State should stop providing Blackberries. The approximately 80 people in the J.B. that are provided Blackberries by the State should turn them in and that contract cancelled. Those J.B. employees can obtain their own cell phone that the State can sync to for accessibility.

**Received from the Iowa Court Reporters Association:**

Again, I thank you for the opportunity to comment on the current condition of the judicial budget and offer suggestions. I appreciate the very difficult situation that you have been dealt.

I understand the position you stated at our recent meeting regarding layoffs versus furloughs. I would respectfully take a different position and would like to state my suggestions and the reasons therefor.

First of all, ICRA would encourage the use of furloughs over layoffs; suggesting at least two furlough days a month. If furloughs were done on a rolling or alternating fashion among the employees, courthouses and clerk's offices could remain open with little inconvenience to the public.

ICRA feels the retention of jobs is the way to economic recovery, even if that means reduced hours or reduced pay. Political leaders have indicated the key to economic recovery is job creation. In the meantime, it seems only logical that the private AND public sector look at expense reductions which cut across the board and ensure job preservation along the way. It is much easier for individuals to make adjustments to their overall spending than to survive through complete job loss. After all, maintaining their position, even at a reduced pay rate, keeps them contributing to the economic recovery of our state. Therefore, ICRA suggests the State of Iowa look at making cuts without cutting personnel -- pay cuts instead of job losses, furloughs instead of layoffs, cuts in business expense reimbursements or other incidentals, reduction of hours (not staff), etc.

Layoffs of state personnel will only result in a higher demand on governmental services at a time when there are less resources to meet those needs. Keeping people on the payroll – while still making necessary cuts – is the only smart strategy. In so doing, people will still have an income (although perhaps reduced) to meet their obligations and the needs of their families while not placing so much of an increased burden on state resources.

When considering all factors outlined above, it is clear that eliminating jobs will only prolong the economic slowdown. The budget shortfall can be a current short-term problem if leaders look long range for a solution by NOT eliminating jobs but instead cutting expenses.

As stated, we in no way encourage the displacement of employees; however, should that be an absolute necessity, ICRA would encourage the State to take a look at individuals who are in their positions but not contributing to State success. There are individuals among ALL job classifications that should be let go. This is not a strategy the State has shown success with in the past; however, it is essential now and would be elimination on a case-by-case basis, not an elimination of an entire job classification. In this way, the State can retain productive employees. It would also be beneficial to consider consolidating positions where possible.

Date: 10/25/2009 8:23:55 AM

Comments: Is the state going to offer any early retirement incentives? How many employees are over 65 and still working, plus collecting Ipers? Could they be asked to retire to save younger employees jobs. The state would save alot more money if the older employees, who have been with the state 30 + years would retire.

Date: 10/22/2009 4:46:16 PM

Comments: the court could make some of the money that lawyers make if it had more self help with fees associated. think if the court can collect some of the money paid to lawyers. attorneys have made an industry of divorce and custody. an evil business of secreting children and extorting non custodial parents. the court should cut out the middle man and make it easier for people to do their own filings. lower fees could reduce the need for waiving fees and allowing people to pay what they can is better than waiving an entire fee. give fair deals and people won't be coming back so often and the court can spend its money focusing on bigger cases. have copies of forms for sale. give divorce and custody classes (for the paperwork). cut salaries. reduce utilities. stop spending on new software when the old stuff works. charge for parking. have a place to buy food in the court house. review costs for office supplies.

Date: 10/22/2009 10:57:12 AM

Comments: Eliminate jury trials for simple misdemeanors where the defendant is not subject to the possibility of jail time (i.e. all traffic citations/scheduled fines and any simple misdemeanors where the county attorney has not filed an intent to seek jail time).

Date: 10/22/2009 9:12:42 AM

Comments: Since districts are already sharing a fiscal officer, (I believe it is one fiscal person per two districts) why can't they keep the combination of districts in place as they are and just have one district court administrator between the two. Maybe they could have an assistant, or other person able to supervise the office that the court administrator does not sit in, to help out with daily procedures. That would save the DCA having to travel a lot between the two districts.

Date: 10/21/2009 12:29:12 PM

Comments: I am a state employee and we have had numerous pay freezes in my 20 years of service. And this year just like the other freezes did not include judges and higher paying positions who get increases in the 10-15% range compared to our 2-4 % increase. Our freezes were announced just shortly after the judges already received their increase. Funny how that happens. At least

the governor took a pay decrease which did not happen in Branstad days. I'm tired of taking cuts.

**Date:** 10/19/2009 2:20:38 PM

**Comments:** I disagree with the "idea" that civil cases have the least priority and should be "stayed" so that everyone else can proceed in a more timely fashion. There are some cases which are civil and time is of the essence, or some cases, with injured people, who need a speedy remedy so they don't end up on the streets, starved for cash... A guy who needs his case resolved so he can afford to live seems to take much more priority, to me, than some zoning appeal, or a child support contempt hearing where the payor is insolvent anyway... The idea that Judges shouldn't travel, but instead, litigants and witnesses should, is more costly because it involves more bodies traveling on the road... While, admittedly, those costs would be borne privately, and thus decrease the burden on the system, it would, I think, create an adverse chill the prosecution of meritorious claims by those who are too impoverished to pay their attorney and witnesses to drive. What about their due process? The system shouldn't work only for the already-wealthy. How about incorporating an ICN network, where Judges appear by television, for almost everything except actual trials. Exhibits, if any, could be delivered by fax, email, or mail to the TV Judge well in advance of any hearing dates... The Iowa Association for Justice hosts "webinars" all the time online too, where they use a passcode and the phone to allow all parties to see all documents, and hear all arguments as the presentation is being made. It should be simple to set up a system like this for most litigation...

**Date:** 10/19/2009 8:15:23 AM

**Comments:** 1. There had been discussion of developing and utilizing a "Senior Juvenile Court Officer" status for retired juvenile court officers. Developing job description for such, responsibilities and mechanism to use the expertise to aid the dept as layoffs/furloughs are considered. Such staff could perform certain duties under contractual arrangement saving salary/benefit costs while still allowing the dept to function in a near normal manner.

2. Consideration of legislative changes:

a. Reducing age of majority to 17 to allow prosecution of 17 year olds as adults, rather than requiring waiver processing. Service alternatives available to juvenile court for that age clients are minimal and frequent waivers occur. This would not ease Judicial obligations but might save time/funds utilized by JCS.

b. Since services to juveniles committing misdemeanors which have jurisdiction in the juvenile court are less available due to budget constraints, consideration of moving jurisdiction of simple misdemeanors to Magistrate Court could be considered. Rather than juveniles having no sanctions for violations other than Held Open, Advised and Warned, etc...the Magistrate could impose fines/community service for law violations. Judicial time/expense would not be greatly reduced but fiscal return in fines and requiring sanctions for violations would result.

**Date:** 10/18/2009 2:49 pm.

**Comments:** IF YOU WOULD START AT THE "TOP" AND TAKE A 10% SALARY CUT FROM EVERYONE YOU WOULD HAVE MORE MONEY THAN YOU NEEDED TO BALANCE THE BUDGET LONG BEFORE YOU GOT TO THE PEOPLE THAT TOOK THE WHOLE LOAD LAST TIME.

**Date:** 10/17/2009 8:21:41 AM

**Comments:** Mandate that judges must take furlough days. Eliminate senior judge program.

**Date:** 10/16/2009 6:39:59 PM

**Comments:** Is anyone discussing axing or at least delaying EDMS? We continue to spend money now on equipment and technology for something that isn't proposed to go live for a few years, and the equipment and technology may not even be current if/when EDMS ever happens. The money set aside for EDMS should be spent to protect employees and the public

from the delays that will occur when personnel is cut. In these tough economic times, axing problem child programs such as this should be the JB's first consideration when determining where money can be saved.

**Date:** 10/16/2009 5:18:15 PM

**Comments:** In Linn County our courts have been granting defendants the ability to pay for all amounts due with community service work. I know that this is a good alternative for some of our defendants. But I am certain that this has reduce the amount of revenue we are receiving significantly. The orders granting community service work in lieu of amout owed almosts always includes everything the defendant owes, sometimes going back ten to fifteen years. I believe a compromise might be to allow them to do community service work for a percentage of the total owed to the court (ie: 10, 20%), or to limit the type of cases it is granted for (such as misdemeanors only), or limit the number of cases or years allowed.

I also suggest that we implement a rule that requires attorneys who have requested a jury trial to declare their intention to plead guilty or to continue to trial two days before the jury pool is pulled. Much money is spent on pulling jurors, only to let them go because the defendant has decided to plead guilty after the jury pool has been pulled.

I do hope we can continue with the same staffing we now have. If that is not possibe, I would prefer having all staff hours reduced. If that is not enough, in Linn county at least, I would suggest we reduce our magistrate staff to two, and reduce our senior judge staff to two.

**Date:** 10/15/2009 9:19:17 AM

**Comments:** 4 day work weeks, 7 to 4:30, with Fridays off. That would be a 2 day per month per employee savings. It would also not disrupt the work flow too much.

**Date:** 10/15/2009 9:19:17 AM

**Comments:** 1. There are perhaps others like me who have aging parents who live quite a distance away. In the interest of providing more assistance to my mother and relief for my siblings (who are closer and bear a larger burden), I would be interested in and am willing to take some unpaid leave (a couple of weeks) without pay if it were permitted.

2. Consider the bigger picture. A. Urge the county to support the courthouse project so that the local workforce can be put back to work (lessons from the depression that we seem to be ignoring on a local level), and B. Make decisions that keep the most people employed so that we (the judiciary) do not contribute to the downward cycle of less people employed which creates problems "down the road"

3. To that end - Furloughs instead of layoffs; retirements instead of lay-offs

4. Elimination of as many supplies as possible - e.g. post-its, etc.

5. Have a copier with capacity to do two sided copying in juvenile courtrooms since we make 50-100 copies of orders a day. Use of a copier that can do double sided copying could reduce paper use in high volume courtrooms like juvenile by at least one-third.

6. Look for efficiencies in the clerk's office. Sometimes clerks do not have work (it seems especially true in the criminal division). Perhaps some of the data entry work could be shifted to court attendants or court reporters who have some down time, but yet have unique responsibilities that are essential and so cannot be reduced significantly. Perhaps reducing the ration and number of clerk supervisors per workers.

7. Prepare for "going electronic" by having the court attendants in Polk enter onto the system (particularly in juvenile)...they know better how to succinctly summarize a hearing which makes looking at the electronic record of a case more meaningful;

8. Shortened work weeks for court reporters and/or court attendants. Not often are they needed on Friday -mid to late p.m.

9. Offer retirement plans to clerks, court attendants, and court reporters who are near retirement and keep their positions open for a while.

10. Have 2-3 day trials start on Tuesday to lessen need for jurors who end up waiting...use Monday a.m. as final opportunity for resolving case
11. Distribute work of court more evenly through out the week.

Date: 10/14/2009 9:31:56 PM

**Comments:** 1. In order to reduce costs for guardian ad litem's pay a professional to do alot of the required legwork (visits to the homes, foster homes, staffing etc )that the guardian ad litem now gets paid 60.00 hour to do . The GAL does the legal part of the case.  
2. I have known of many people who do not disclose accurate information on the forms for court appointed attorneys, and have made in excess of 60,000. They get an attorney appointed for their criminal charges when they should be paying for them rather than tax payers. Firm up this process.  
3. Require more cases to be mediated rather than clog up the court system especially divorce or child custody cases.

Date: 10/14/2009 8:26:57 PM

**Comments:** Since 95% of budget is due to personnel cost, why not cut the salaries of all court employees. starting with chief justice marsha Ternus on down by 10.1%..That way no individual would have to lose his or her job. The sacrifice would be borne by all equally. The efficiency of the court system would not suffer and chief justice ternus would be perceived as a fair and just arbiter.

Date: 10/14/2009 5:21:23 PM

**Comments:** Roll back step raises given to management positions which are not covered by collective bargaining agreements. Management should be the first to sacrifice, in my opinion, not the public and certainly not the lower paid employees.

Date: 10/14/2009 5:21:23 PM

**Comments:** Since there is no way to contact you through the website stated, I am contacting you in this manner -- the iowacourts.gov is unavailable at this time... makes me wonder if it's an actual problem, or just waaaay too many people trying to enter suggestions.

I have worked for the Clerk of Court's office going on 26 years -- I am not old enough to retire, lacking 10 mos, and at this time, if I lose my position, I will be unable to draw social security or apply for medicare.... My husband is 77 and has a number of health issues which only my insurance covers. I know this is just one of many stories that you have and will hear, but I hope you are listening. There MUST be options other than layoffs -- this would affect so many people adversely - increasing unemployment costs and lowering tax income because no one would be spending as much.... I fail to see how layoffs would help the budget problem -- I think it would only exacerbate it!

We used furloughs earlier this year and it helped -- I know the 'legislature' is opposed -- what would it matter to them?? they are not the ones being affected and I know of no other employee who objects to this proposal -- not only is it more fair across the board, unemployment would be held to a minimum... how can this possibly be wrong?? Court services would also be affected adversely by layoffs. Our office is at a minimum now and to expect others to try and cover all the work lost by layoffs is ludicrous -- if the court system is falling behind now, how will it be when we lose people??

Please rethink your options -- layoffs are not the answer - people are important -- services are important -- new buildings, matching funds, etc, are areas in which our government could and should consider reducing, or even stopping, at this drastic time.

Thank you for your consideration.

Date: 10/14/2009 4:20:59 PM

**Comments:** I would suggest that ALL state employees take a furlough day every two weeks ! I and other state employees would rather take days without pay than to see the office personnel terminated. Jobs are not plentiful as you well know. Termination of court staff will only up the unemployment lines. How is this going to help our economy?

Thank you for your consideration to this request.

Date: 10/14/2009 2:44:59 PM

**Comments:** Unassign leadworkers they receive a 4.5% differential above the employee's regular wage rate. Eliminate the out of classification pay. Eliminate travel reimbursement for mileage, meals etc. Consider the travel as part of the job as there is court personal who travel to work everyday and have to pay for parking. Everybody who is not topped out and will get an increase in wages. See if a compromise would work of getting extra hours for time off instead of extra pay.