



Judicial Committee on Information Technology

Appellate Court and Judicial Agency Support. Carrying out strategies of the Judicial Committee on Information Technology (JCIT), the Office of Court Administration's Information Services Division implemented a new Windows-based case management and agenda system for the Supreme Court in FY 2004. In addition, division staff completed the conversion of both the Supreme Court and the Court of Criminal Appeals to the Texas Judiciary Online website early in the fiscal year. The Information Services Division continues to support the computer infrastructure for the 16 appellate courts and other judicial agencies.

Electronic Court Filing. In creating the JCIT, the 75th Texas Legislature charged the JCIT to "develop minimum standards for an electronically based document system to provide for the flow of information within the judicial system in electronic form and recommend rules relating to the electronic filing of documents with courts" (Government Code § 77.031(b)). To fulfill this mandate, JCIT has worked closely with the Department of Information Resources (DIR), the national judicial standards committees, district clerks, county clerks, commissioners' courts, and trial and appellate courts. Electronic court filing enables filers and courts to connect electronically through the state's e-Government portal, TexasOnline (www.texasonline.com) which was created by the 77th Texas Legislature to make government more accessible to Texas citizens through electronic means. The electronic filing architecture is designed to allow parties to file electronically in any participating court using a service provider of their choice. It also allows courts to accept filings from all commercial filing services without having to connect to each one individually.

In FY 2004, JCIT and TexasOnline concluded a successful pilot project in four counties to test statewide electronic court filing in Texas. The project entered the statewide implementation phase in April 2004. At the end of fiscal year 2004, six counties had implemented e-filing: Bexar, Dallas, El Paso, Fort Bend, Tarrant, and Upton. More than 40 others have expressed interest in e-filing and will be phased into the system. Based on lessons learned in the pilot, JCIT developed proposed standard rules for the implementation phase. The proposed rules were accepted by the Supreme Court in June 2004 and will remain in effect until rescinded by the Court or superseded by the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure. JCIT also provided the Supreme Court with proposed changes to the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure to incorporate electronic filing.

Telecommunications. In 2003, the Office of Court Administration contracted with the County Information Resource Agency (CIRA, part of the Texas Association of Counties (TAC)) to extend broadband Internet connectivity to courts and clerks that had no Internet access or only limited dial-up service. By the end of FY 2004, 64 courts and clerks in 19 counties had been provided broadband access to the Internet. In exchange for this improved Internet access, the recipient courts and clerks agreed to submit their monthly court activity reports to the Office of Court Administration electronically. JCIT's goal is to fund and install broadband hardware and initial connectivity in several additional rural counties. To achieve that goal, the Office of Court Administration received appropriations for FY 2004—FY 2005 to expand broadband connectivity during the biennium. In FY 2004, the Office of Court Administration again contracted with CIRA to extend broadband Internet connectivity to courts and clerks that have no Internet access or only limited dial-up service.

Trial Court Technology. In FY 2004, JCIT continued to develop innovative, low-cost solutions to meet several judicial requirements. For example, the Information Services Division coordinated the distribution of 448 surplus computers, most of which were from the 16 appellate courts, to trial courts, including 64 to support collections programs. In addition, JCIT and the Office of Court Administration assisted trial courts in obtaining surplus computer items from other state sources. Each month state agencies post surplus property item listings on the Comptroller's website. Eligible political subdivisions, including courts, can claim the items on a first come, first served basis. JCIT publicizes the availability of the items in its twice a year electronic newsletters and on its website (<http://www.courts.state.tx.us/jcit/tsp.htm>).

In January 2004, JCIT assisted the judicial training centers in planning and hosting the second Texas Court and Local Government Technology Conference in conjunction with the Government Technology Conference held in Austin. TAC served as sponsor, with the other three judicial training centers and JCIT providing co-sponsorship. The conference included seminars, technology demonstrations, online legal research training, and a wealth of vendor applications and products. A special addition for the 2004 conference was the demonstration of the National Center for State Courts' portable Courtroom 21.

JCIT and the Office of Court Administration also assisted the Department of Public Safety (DPS) in developing a federal grant application to provide fingerprint capture capabilities for district clerks and county clerks in selected pilot counties. This initiative is intended to improve the criminal history database by providing fingerprints for each criminal case disposition. The grant application was funded by the National Criminal History Improvement Program (NCHIP) in FY 2004, with funding being provided directly to DPS. The pilot program is expected to be implemented in five counties in 2005.

For several years, the Office of Court Administration contracted with CIRA to provide secure e-mail services to rural Texas counties. Through this initiative, CIRA has established secure e-mail accounts for over 1,100 officials in rural counties, including more than 350 judges, clerks, and court staff, and has also established and supports official county websites for 149 rural counties. Since FY 2001, JCIT and the Office of Court Administration have provided a portable wireless training network with 20 student laptop computers for use by the four judicial training centers. In fiscal year 2004, this system was used to support training around the state, including over 130 justices of the peace and court staff through the Justice Court Training Center.

Trial Court Case Management System. JCIT and the Office of Court Administration developed the requirements, standards, and specifications for case management systems to replace the Office of Court Administration's DOS-based software developed and distributed in the 1980's. In FY 2004, after evaluating 12 vendor applications, the Office of Court Administration selected five for placement on statewide contracts through the Department of Information Resources (DIR). Local governments can now purchase the DIR-approved case management software and services at the best available rates through DIR contracts (<http://www.dir.state.tx.us/store/busops/softwaresubjects.htm>). JCIT and the Office of Court Administration plan to continue this effort in early FY 2005 by selecting more vendors for DIR statewide contracts.

Judicial Information Technology Standards. JCIT's Standards Subcommittee is charged with researching, developing, and recommending judicial information technology standards for statewide use. In FY 2004, as part of the electronic court filing project, the Subcommittee adopted a standard affidavit of indigency for civil cases for use by clerks for all civil cases involving indigent parties (available at www.courts.state.tx.us/jcit/Efiling/IndigencyForm.doc).

*Shelby County
Courthouse*

