

The banner features a blue background with abstract white and light blue geometric patterns, including lines and dots. The text is centered and reads "Jefferson County" in a gold, serif font, with "DISTRICT COURT REORGANIZATION" in a bold, gold, sans-serif font below it.

# Jefferson County DISTRICT COURT REORGANIZATION

## **Overview**

- The basic structure of Jefferson District Court has remained fundamentally unchanged since the passage of the Judicial Article in 1975.
- There have been significant changes to the composition of District Court during the past 30 years, including a shifting of judicial resources, rises in population and caseloads, jurisdiction changes and the development of therapeutic courts.
- All justice system partners were consulted, provided input and were instrumental in developing a reorganized approach to doing the work of District Court with the goals of balancing the court's dockets, enhancing judicial accountability and promoting public access to the courts.
- The key stakeholders and collaborators for the reorganization include the Jefferson District Court judges, the Jefferson Office of Circuit Court Clerk, the Jefferson County Attorney's Office, the Jefferson County Public Defender's Office, the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office, the Jefferson Court Administrator's Office, law enforcement agencies, the Louisville Bar Association, the private bar (civil and defense), the Louisville Metro Criminal Justice Commission, Louisville Metro Corrections, Louisville Metro Police Department and the Administrative Office of the Courts.
- Under the new model, 10 district judges will be assigned to a general criminal docket in which they all will hear cases involving traffic offenses, felonies, misdemeanors, warrants and nonsupport. The criminal cases will be divided alphabetically among the judges, with each judge having the same volume of cases. The other seven district judges will handle the civil dockets.
- The 10 criminal dockets will be heard with both morning and afternoon dockets. Morning dockets will include complex litigation cases in which attorneys, police officers and other witnesses must be called. The afternoon dockets will be for those cases that can generally be handled with one court appearance. These would include less complex cases such as those involving citations or bad checks.
- Judges assigned to the criminal courts will have two consecutive afternoons to hear all trials without other cases being scheduled for them. Judges will not need to get another judge to cover their trials or other cases scheduled for their court as they have in the past because they will have dedicated time for trials. If the parties in a scheduled trial settle or the trial otherwise must take place at another time, the judge could cover for another docket in an emergency situation or handle other duties.

## ***Benefits/Results***

- The number of citizens required to be in the courthouse in the morning will be reduced, which will result in a shorter line to move through the entrance security checkpoints.
- The changes will help balance the judges' caseloads and associated work, the use of personnel resources and the use of the court facility. Under the current system, 90 percent of criminal cases are scheduled for 9 a.m., resulting in a crowded courthouse and a morning docket that sometimes runs over and disrupts the afternoon schedule. The judges overseeing the criminal dockets will split the number of daily cases almost evenly between the morning (55 percent) and afternoon (45 percent) to reduce overcrowding in public waiting areas and the time people wait for their court hearings.
- Personnel will receive cross-training as they work on 10 identical dockets with longer rotations of judges in a division (one-year minimum). This should result in a more efficient system and more consistency in processing.
- The system will result in predictability with case scheduling and clear expectations for lunch breaks for deputy clerks, attorneys, litigants, the jury pool and judges.
- The new plan for judges to hear all types of criminal cases will make it possible, in some instances, for one judge to address multiple charges on the same defendant. With the current docket, a defendant charged with a felony and a separate traffic offense would need to appear before one judge for the felony and another on the traffic offense.
- The reorganization plan also includes better signage and docket posting to provide clear direction to litigants about when and where cases are being heard.
- There will be uniform technology and technology upgrades to assist in case coordination.
- All 10 criminal courts will use the Enhanced Supervision Domestic Violence protocol. Only two courts use it now.
- The reorganization will alleviate overcrowding in public waiting areas and wait times for court hearings.
- There will be a shorter time between court dates with judges scheduling specific court times for their own dockets. Judges have a feel for the time needed for particular court events.