

SUPREME COURT OF VERMONT
109 STATE STREET
MONTPELIER, VERMONT
05609-0801

CHAMBERS OF
PAUL L. REIBER
CHIEF JUSTICE

September 18, 2020

Senator Joe Benning, Chair
Representative Sandy Haas, Vice Chair
Legislative Committee on Judicial Rules
State of Vermont
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633

(sent via email to jbenning@leg.state.vt.us and shaas@leg.state.vt.us)

re: Response to your letter of August 28

Dear Senator Benning and Representative Haas,

Thanks for your August 28 letter with the addendum that aggregates various questions and concerns about our new case management system and the introduction of e-filing in select counties.

We appreciate the stress that change brings in ordinary times, and certainly more so when in the context of a public health crisis. Of course, the legislature's role is critical in this regard. I am grateful for your concern for the efforts of Vermont attorneys who provide needed legal services to their communities and clients. And I am personally grateful for the hard work of the leadership of the bar through our collaborative efforts over these last six months to address areas of common concern.

After the pandemic hit and the Supreme Court declared a judicial emergency, the Court and senior administrative leaders of the court system participated in weekly telephone conferences with VBA leadership throughout the spring and summer months to discuss our mutual interests and concerns regarding Vermont's justice system and the impact of the pandemic on the delivery of access to justice. Our meetings have now returned to their normal monthly schedule. While in some instances the dialogue between the VBA and the courts has been strained, I have to say I completely understand. I have found the concerns of the bar and the VBA leadership to derive from the same frustrations we all feel due to restrictions placed on court operations. The decision to restrict access to courthouses for public health reasons was difficult but necessary.

I appreciate that you brought to our attention the materials you forwarded with your August 28 letter. Many of the comments were well taken and have already been addressed or we are working to

address them. Candidly some of the dissatisfaction derives from features that exist in the program itself, problems that should abate through familiarity and use. Other challenges relate to training. A letter from state court administrator Patricia Gabel that specifically addresses the issues described in the Addendum is enclosed

Through an additional outreach program recently initiated by Pat, we have increased our communication with and support to users of the e-filing and portal programs, and we are starting to receive specific feedback from members of the bar and other court users. This will be helpful in targeting specific problems. Our steering board meets regularly to monitor the pace and user challenges with rollout. As you might understand, driven as much by the current public health crisis as anything, the Court's policy is to not lose momentum. And we will continue to endeavor to improve our lines of communication as we know that is vital to success of any project of this magnitude.

Let me know if you have questions. I look forward to any opportunity to further discuss your concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul L. Reiber". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Hon. Paul L. Reiber
Chief Justice, Vermont Supreme Court

cc. Sen. Becca Balint
Sen. Alison Clarkson
Sen. Dick Sears, Jr.
Rep. Thomas Burditt
Rep. Martin LaLonde
Rep. Linda Joy Sullivan