



Van H. Wanggaard

Wisconsin State Senator

TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 944

Thank you committee members for today's hearing on Senate Bill 944, the "Judicial Transparency Act."

Last August, the Wisconsin Supreme Court claimed it was entering a new era of transparency. The exact words of Justice Rebecca Dallet were that the new Court majority "voted to advance a number of transparency and accountability measures."

To encourage the transparency and accountability of the Wisconsin judicial system, Representative Tusler and I have introduced Senate Bill 944, the "Judicial Transparency Act." This bill requires the Wisconsin Circuit Court Access Program (CCAP) be searchable by county, judge and penalty.

After some additional research, I am drafting an amendment to limit the bill to just be searchable by judge or court official. While the other fields are worthy to be searchable, they are not currently a "field" in CCAP. These fields, specifically the penalty, are text-block based, and therefore not searchable. To include them would require a massive change in the CCAP system, and how CCAP users, that is to say court officials, work within the CCAP system.

Allowing the public to search CCAP by judge increase the transparency and accountability of the judicial system. The public will be better informed about how judges handle cases, from bail to sentence. They will be able to see the workload of each judge, and how their schedules differ. It will ease some of the mystery of the judicial process.

I hope this committee will join me and the Wisconsin Supreme Court in our combined efforts to make the court system more transparent and accountable.

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RON TUSLER

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 3rd ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 944

Senate Committee on Judiciary & Public Safety

February 6, 2024

Chair Wanggaard and committee members,

Today, I stand before you to discuss the importance of the proposed bill concerning the Consolidated Court Automation Program (CCAP) – a pivotal tool for our judiciary and the public. As it stands, CCAP offers a wealth of court information, yet it's limited by its search functionality, restricted to party name and case number. This limitation hinders our ability to fully utilize this valuable resource for understanding and analyzing judicial activities in Wisconsin.

The bill in question seeks to enhance CCAP by expanding its search capabilities to include searches by judge, county, and penalty imposed. This is not about adding new information; rather, it's about making the wealth of existing information within CCAP more accessible and usable. By doing so, we will significantly increase the transparency of our judicial system. This is crucial for public trust and for researchers, journalists, and citizens seeking to understand patterns and outcomes in our courts.

Currently, the director of state courts holds the discretion over what information is accessible via the CCAP website, with certain mandated exceptions. This bill would further direct the director of state courts to ensure that information regarding the county of charge, the assigned judge, all adjudicated cases by the judge, and imposed penalties, if any, are available in a searchable format.

This enhancement is not just an improvement in technology; it's a stride toward greater judicial transparency and accountability. It empowers our citizens to be better informed and engaged with the judicial process. It supports our legal professionals in their pursuit of justice. And it upholds our commitment to an open and transparent judicial system.

I urge you to consider the profound impact this bill could have on our state's judicial transparency and the public's right to information. It is a step forward in ensuring that our judicial system is not only just, but also accessible and understandable to every citizen it serves.

Thank you.