

Information regarding HB 232

This funding source has been in place now for some 10 years. This is the third renewal of the source. To this date a budget, estimated cost analysis or any other responsible fiscal information have never been produced. Sadly, there is a general lack of accountability for this program.

Last year alone there was some \$2 million raised for court information technology. (Fiscal note hb0018, (2001) and Senate committee minute's hb0018, page 9). In addition to those amounts, this year there are bills requested to raise money through bond sales (LC 2169) and to make other changes to the already existing surcharge (LC 2206). Both of these most probably are intended to raise even more money for this endeavor.

Yet where is the promised land? In 1999 Pat Chenovick, Supreme Court Administrator stated that the system was installed in "*55 of 56 District Courts*" and "*there are 115 courts of limited jurisdiction and 98 of these are automated*" (pages 3 and 5 of hb 41 minutes). Yet in 2003, some \$3,982,704.00 later (fiscal note hb 41 1999), the program "*is still inadequate*" according to Nancy Sweeney, Clerk of District Court, Lewis and Clark County. (P4 minute's hb 18).

Today, after an added influx of \$4 million over the last two years you are once again asked to authorize this funding. Additionally there are the 2 new bills, which are presumably going to raise even more. With no accountability there is no incentive for any real cost containment.

This committee should consider having all these monies placed in the general fund; create an appropriate fiduciary unit to oversee the funds, and force an accounting, including a budget, each session. As it is, this is a fiscal black hole, service is not improved and the citizens of Montana are not well served by such a situation.

Jeffrey J. Koch
Secretary
Montana Collectors Association