

TESTIMONY

SB 18

"Provide additional judge for 18th Judicial District"

Gallatin County Commissioners are on record supporting the new judgeship, and understand and have formally agreed to supply court and necessary administrative space across from Judge Salvagni's Courtroom, for a 3rd Judge. While there has not been official action regarding starting a timetable for needed remodeling, conversations with my colleagues indicate our commitment to speed up the planning and construction process to complete the space by January 2006. This, of course, is contingent upon your official creation of a 3rd District Court for Gallatin County.

This support is not made in a vacuum, but is part of a 2-year process of re-inventing the county's entire criminal justice system. This involved working with a nationally respected criminal justice consultant, making many institutional and procedural changes to improve the efficiency of the whole system, creating new departments including Public Defenders and Court Services, and hiring a second consulting firm to create a 20 year space and facilities plan. The 20-year plan recommends a new "Courthouse" and 4 District Court Judges, and that is the track that we are embarking upon.

There are many aspects to high growth rates that are good – continued economic prosperity being principle among them. There are also a few sobering realities when growth in our county went from 50,000 people in 1990 to almost 80,000 people today. The need for criminal justice improvements, like jail space and more court resources, climb almost commensurately with the population increases.

As County Commissioners, we well understand budget realities. We have rarely, if ever, asked the state for more budget resources. But the state has assumed the District Courts, and Gallatin County has grown tremendously.

The Gallatin County Commission is committed to do its part to meet the rising caseload demands. We respectfully request that the Legislature assist us with this very real need.