

4.4.19  
Gilliam County Court  
Listening Session: Juvenile Court Operations

Present were Judge Elizabeth Farrar, Commissioner Leslie Wetherell, Commissioner Sherrie Wilkins, Court Administrator Sandy McKay, and Recorder Mary Dyer. Circuit Court Judge John Wolf, Circuit Court Administrator Angie Tennison, and Gilliam County Juvenile Program Director Amy Nation were also present.

Judge Farrar explained that the purpose of the Listening Session, and introduced Circuit Court Judge Wolf and Court Administrator Angie Tennison.

Judge Wolf explained that he is one of four Circuit Court judges covering Hood River, Wasco, Gilliam, Sherman, and Wheeler Counties. He described the distribution of responsibilities and said he has covered most of Gilliam County's cases. Judge Farrar said that emergency hearings have been scheduled within the statutory timeframe, and Judge Wolf noted that the overriding priority is to conduct hearings in person. Tennison said the Court prefers for the same judge to remain with juvenile cases, which provides greater continuity for families.

Commissioner Wetherell reported that County residents have expressed concern that partnerships often start out good but eventually dwindle. Judge Wolf said the five counties comprise one judicial district, and that a juvenile case in Gilliam County has the same priority as a case in Wasco or Hood River County. There are currently nine or 10 active juvenile cases in Gilliam County.

Commissioner Wetherell also commented that citizens are concerned about a loss of local control, but it is her understanding that Juvenile Director Amy Nation would continue to be involved. Judge Wolf said he doesn't foresee substantial changes in Nation's responsibilities. Tennison explained that the Court's must adhere to time standards that are tracked statewide, which provides for a level of accountability. She also noted that Gilliam, Sherman and Wheeler Counties are the only counties in the state that have maintained county jurisdiction.

Gilliam County District Attorney Marion Weatherford reiterated his comment at an earlier work session that he is neutral on the matter. He explained that he has the right to intervene in dependency cases if he thinks it necessary, but said that Nation's role hasn't changed. Regarding delinquency cases, Weatherford said 95 percent of the work is done by the juvenile director. Nation said she has done several formal accountability

agreements, and so far, only one agreement has been revoked due to the severity of the issues.

Jonna Rattray, CASA volunteer and member of the CASA Board of Directors, expressed concern regarding loss of local control, and the lack of foster homes in Gilliam County. She said she spoke with Judge Pryor and Judge Shaw, who agreed that the County shouldn't give up local control. She urged the Court to be as proactive as possible.

Arlington resident Marta Mikkalo asked about training for county juvenile judges, and Judge Farrar responded that she would be required to attend a two-week training in Reno. Mikkalo also asked Judge Farrar how much time juvenile court responsibilities would take from her position as county judge. Judge Farrar said that when cases are signed over to circuit court, Nation prepares a court order for Judge Farrar's signature, but maintaining juvenile court in Gilliam County would require considerable time and training to handle cases appropriately.

Mikkalo also commented on the increasing difficulties of juvenile cases, and potential problems caused by lack of neutrality in a small county. She suggested it might make more sense to turn juvenile cases over to circuit court so Judge Farrar would have time to help the County grow and be successful. Judge Farrar commented that most people don't realize that dependency cases are also her responsibility.

Candy Humphreys, Gilliam-Wheeler CASA Director, reiterated her previous comments that the juvenile court jurisdiction should be maintained in Gilliam County.

Judge Farrar announced that a second listening session will be held at the Gilliam County Courthouse on May 1 at 5 p.m. Commissioner Wilkins encouraged the public to participate in the process and said the Court is here to listen.

Judge Farrar adjourned the listening session at 6:35 p.m.

GILLIAM COUNTY COURT

By \_\_\_\_\_  
Elizabeth Farrar, Judge

By \_\_\_\_\_  
Leslie Wetherell, Commissioner

By \_\_\_\_\_

Sherrie Wilkins, Commissioner

Mary H. Dyer/Recorder \_\_\_\_\_