

Geoff Bradley, Democratic Candidate for Monroe County Circuit Court
Responses to questions from the Greater Bloomington Chamber of Commerce
For the June 2, 2020 Primary Election

- 1. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected the way that the court system is handling its work. In some ways, the period offers an opportunity to reset. Are there any changes to the circuit court system that you'd support post-pandemic? How would you advocate to implement those changes?**
- 2. Monroe County government has undertaken a criminal justice study. What changes to the current system do you support, and why?**

I will address these questions together because I believe the issues raised are interrelated. Both questions deal with the structure of our court system as it works to fulfill its mission and goals of (1) service to the public, (2) providing responsible and progressive management with fiscal responsibility, and (3) complying with the law and judicial ethics. As Indiana Supreme Court Chief Justice Loretta Rush said in 2019, “[W]hat we do have is a constitutional charge to provide open, accessible and fair courts. That is achieved only when we place litigants, victims, witnesses, jurors—all court customers—at the center of every equation, just as our courthouses are at the center of every community.” The response by Monroe County to current and future issues must strive to achieve the constitutional charge and goals of not only the Monroe County Circuit Court, but of the Indiana Judiciary as a whole.

In 2019, Monroe County government leaders embarked on an assessment of the criminal justice system to identify the strengths and gaps in the service provided. While the title of the study is focused on the criminal justice system, the results, recommendations, and response by Monroe County officials to the study will have an impact on all aspects of the judicial system, not just the courts. Two recent studies completed by the consultants for Vigo County (IN) and Boyle-Mercer County (KY) in 2018 are illustrative. For example, in the Boyle-Mercer County report the consultants addressed criminal case processing, alternatives to incarceration, innovative community responses for helping people with drug addiction, inmate health (mental health and behavioral health) and programming. Since the results of the Monroe County study will likely be provided in the latter half of 2020, I would anticipate that in 2021 Monroe County government officials will determine what recommendations are to be pursued and the strategy for implementation.

While the actual length and impact of COVID-19 is unknown at this time, at the appropriate time there will be an opportunity to identify the strengths and gaps in the services provided by the court system during the pandemic. Flexibility is required as evidenced earlier this month with the actions taken with the jail population due to the increased danger to incarcerated individuals of COVID-19 exposure and transmission. Utilizing the criminal justice study, the input of medical professionals, state and local agencies, and organizations impacted by COVID-19 will be important in assessing the appropriate response. I look forward to being part of the discussion and working with the other judges and county officials to synthesize what we have learned. My experience in a different state's court system, where I practiced in Ohio from 1994-2001, will diversify the conversation.

When considering the implementation of any changes, it is important to note that the Monroe County Circuit Courts are unified in one body. The Board of Judges works in concert to make policy decisions and review operations of the court system to maintain consistency in each court. Therefore, the Board of Judges must effectively and meaningfully collaborate to not only maintain but advance the interest of our judiciary. The Court acts cooperatively with other governmental units:

- (1) Seventy-four percent (74%) of the Court's budget is provided by the Monroe County Council;
- (2) The Board of Commissioners controls the building where the Court's services and business are conducted; and
- (3) The Monroe County Correctional Facility structure is also overseen by our Commissioners.

I believe that it is essential as a judicial officer to collaborate with the other members of the Board of Judges, building administrators and staff, and the Monroe County Council and Board of Commissioners. As a member of the Board of Judges, I look forward to being a part of the discussion and offering my experience to identify programs, services and approaches that will allow Monroe County to adapt and respond to its evolving needs in order to ensure a fair, equitable and effective system. My experience working in teams throughout my professional and volunteer initiatives will be an asset.

3. What are the top challenges facing Monroe County Circuit Court, and how do you propose addressing those challenges?

a. Preserving and enhancing everyone's access to the judicial system.

While some people might normally associate the court system with addressing criminal matters, the court system impacts the community in a diverse and wide range of matters. The court system is involved with:

- adoptions, divorces, and child-custody matters;
- contract issues;
- landlord-tenant disputes;
- resolving issues after an accident;
- employment matters; and
- zoning.

These are wide-ranging issues, and the court system must act in a fair and efficient manner so that parties have attainable and equal court access. As United States Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall stated, "We must never forget that the only real source of power that we as judges can tap is the respect of the people." It is therefore important that we continue work to earn the faith, confidence, and acceptance of the community with the court system.

Access to the court system begins with an efficiently managed and organized Court. Much of a judge's role is creating an effective system for the administrative affairs of the court. I

would seek to remove barriers for all customers of the court to ensure the speedy delivery of justice and an efficient court system for all of Monroe County.

One example is the use of technology to improve the efficiency of the courts. A component of the pretrial release program involves sending text messages to criminal defendants to remind them of upcoming court hearings. This is a cost effective and efficient way to reduce the number of people who fail to appear for court hearings.

I am devoted to preserving and furthering the investments, modernizations, and innovations of the Monroe County Circuit Court. I would support and work with members of the Board of Judges to continue current support and identify new options.

Another aspect of access to the court system is working to maintain fairness for all participants. The Commission on Race & Gender Fairness has worked to study the status of race and gender fairness in Indiana's justice system. It investigates ways to improve race and gender fairness in the courts, legal system, and state and local government, as well as among legal service providers and public organizations. In 2017, the commission released a report with recommendations based on their 2017 community forums. In 2002, the commission released "Honored to Serve," a report on race and gender fairness. The reports made various observations and recommendations concerning different aspects of the court system. These recommendations would be useful to explore for the Board of Judges.

b. Evolving and adapting to the needs of individuals and families in the community, including addressing mental health and substance use disorder issues.

It is important for the civil and criminal system to be willing to assess and evolve to meet the needs, welfare, and safety of our community. The issues impact all aspects of the justice system in civil and criminal proceedings from infants to our senior citizens. Monroe County has demonstrated a willingness to identify and utilize new and modern ideas through a variety of initiatives and programs such as the Family Court, Counsel in the Court, Pretrial Release Program, and Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI). Monroe County has been at the leading edge in the state in developing alternative problem-solving courts, such as our drug court, mental health court, and veteran's court. I would continue to support the initiatives developed by the problem-solving courts, the Substance Use Disorder Community Awareness Commission and other community partners, and work to expand programs and services.

As discussed in the first two questions, how these and other issues can be addressed will be influenced by the forthcoming Monroe County Comprehensive Criminal Justice Review. That will provide an opportunity for the Board of Judges to collaborate with various stakeholders in the government and community to identify ways in which the judicial system can be positively impacted. As a member of the Board of Judges, I will work not only within the boundaries of the law, but also to balance the budgetary needs of the Court and further its service within the guidelines established by the Monroe County government.