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TO: Dane County Personnel and Finance Committee

FROM: Carlo Esqueda, Dane County Clerk of Circuit Court/Register In Probate

RE: Equity and Sustainability

DATE: October 24, 2019

The Committee has expressed interest in hearing from departments on the subjects of equity and sustainability efforts.

I did speak to these issues at the budget public hearing on September 12, 2019, but am happy to restate them for you here.

On our sustainability objectives-- there's really only ever been one, given the fact that my office is entirely service-driven. We don't consume much in the way of resources or produce much in the way of waste products, with the one notable exception of paper. My office, in collaboration with the Consolidated Court Automation Program, has engaged in a years-long transition to mandatory electronic filing, and that transition was completed earlier this year. Indeed, having now ushered in a sea change in the way court record keeping is accomplished, I'm counting this as our greatest accomplishment of 2019.

On the subject of equity, I want to emphasize the progress we've made in expanding our Pretrial Services function. Our Risk Assessment study, done in partnership with Arnold Ventures and the Harvard Access 2 Justice Lab, is nearing completion, after which we can fully implement the risk assessment tool to help make bond decisions more fair and equitable. Thanks to this Board's support in the budget process last year, we have added a Social Worker position this year and have therefore increased caseload capacity. We have also invested in training for the staff, offered by the Pretrial Justice Institute, and it bears noting that one of the core principles of PJI's mission and curriculum is that "there is no pretrial justice without racial justice." We look forward to a continued partnership with PJI to continuously improve our pretrial program. Still, as more examination of pretrial and bail reform occurs at the local, state, and national levels, we have more opportunities to improve in this regard, which I believe will prove to be our greatest challenge moving forward to 2020.

I should add that when I presented on the equity issue at our initial budget presentation to the Public Protection and Judiciary Committee, I also noted that achieving greater diversity within our staff is always our goal, but remains difficult to achieve in that most of our positions are "starred," meaning that I cannot pursue external recruitment to fill vacancies. And one more point—we are always trying to improve our public service with procedural justice in mind. We understand that people coming to court are usually not doing so because they especially want to--

and we recognize that many people using our services are experiencing outcomes that they may not be happy with or agree with-- and that's why we make every effort to ensure that users of the court system, regardless of how their disputes resolve, nevertheless feel that they were treated equitably in their interactions with the people and processes that make up our system.