

Thank you Chairman Hillyer, Vice Chair Matthews, Ranking Member Galonski, and esteemed colleagues for granting me the opportunity to address you today regarding House Bill 283, which will add a judge to the Adams County common pleas court.

Currently, Adams County grapples with a single judge serving our entire community. House Bill 283 aims to rectify this situation by establishing two divisions within the court. One judgeship will handle civil, criminal, and domestic relations cases, while the other will oversee probate and juvenile cases. By streamlining our legal processes, we will ensure that every resident, from child to adult, has access to their constitutional right to a speedy trial.

This journey began on February 22, 2010, when a dedicated committee comprising individuals like the Common Pleas Judge Brett Spencer and Court Administrator Angie Richmond was formed. Despite financial constraints in the post-2008 economy, the committee persevered. Although initially dissolved in 2011, the Commissioners, including Roger Rhonemus, Justin Cooper, Brian Baldrige (now Director of Ag Baldrige), and Law Library Board Member Ken Armstrong continued to make change. Today the current commissioners Barbara Moore, Kelly Jones, and Diane Ward have diligently prepared for this vital expansion over the past several years. They now are more than ready to take on the additional financial resources and office space.

Adams County stands at a critical juncture. According to a recent study commissioned by the Ohio Supreme Court in July 2023, our county is one of only four in Ohio with just one judge. The demand for legal intervention in domestic relations cases has been steadily rising since 2016. Moreover, cases involving post-decree litigation have surged, indicating the pressing need for additional judicial resources. Most concerning is the rise in child abuse, neglect, and dependency cases. Adams County leads the state in the number of children subject to court involvement on a per child capita basis. Abuse and neglect cases have tripled in just three years.

I commend the unwavering dedication of our court staff, who have shown immense resilience despite limited resources. However, our community deserves more. Our children are calling out for help, and it is our moral obligation to ensure their safety. House Bill 283 is not just a legal necessity; it's a lifeline for the vulnerable members of our community.

I appreciate your time and attention. I am here to address any questions or concerns you may have. Thank you.