

NORTH CAROLINA RURAL COURTS COMMISSION
REMARKS TO
N.C. SUPERIOR COURT JUDGES
FALL 2006 CONFERENCE

The North Carolina Rural Courts Commission was created by Order of the Supreme Court of North Carolina on January 30, 2006. Chief Justice Sarah E. Parker has provided outstanding support to the work of the Commission upon her appointment as Chief Justice.

The Commission is charged with identifying particular needs of rural counties with regard to court security, facilities, recordkeeping, technology, capital improvements, adequate funding and operations. The Commission is further charged with assisting counties in meeting these needs. The Commission is charged with working cooperatively with officials in rural counties, communicating their needs as appropriate to the AOC, other state agencies and to members of the General Assembly. The Commission reports its activities and recommendations to the Chief Justice.

There are 15 members of the Commission who serve terms which vary from one to three years. The members are:

Jerry Brewer, Trial Court Administrator, Judicial Districts 29A and 29B
Charles E. Brown, Chief District Court Judge, Judicial District 19C
Richard L. Doughton, Special Superior Court Judge
Robert C. Ervin, Resident Superior Court Judge, Judicial District 25A
Milton F. Fitch, Jr., Resident Superior Court Judge, Judicial District 7B/C
David F. Hoke, Assistant Director, AOC

Ola M. Lewis, Senior Resident Superior Court Judge, Judicial District 13
H. Paul McCoy, Jr., Chief District Court Judge, Judicial District 6A
Wayne L. Michael, Chief District Court Judge, Judicial District 22
William W. Nicholls, Jr., Trial Court Administrator, Judicial Districts 7A
and 7B/C, Vice

Chair

Michael D. Parker, District Attorney, Judicial District 20

Sharon Sadler, Clerk of Superior Court, Hyde County

John Snow, Senator, North Carolina Senate

Kimberly S. Taylor, Resident Superior Court Judge, Judicial District 22,
Chair

Ella Wrenn, Trial Court Coordinator, Judicial District 9

During its initial phase, four members of the Commission visited 13 counties across all Judicial Divisions of North Carolina to determine if rural counties in our state faced particular challenges which differed from those faced by urban counties. These four members are Judges Charles E. Brown, Ola M. Lewis and Kimberly S. Taylor and Trial Court Administrator William W. Nicholls, Jr. A report was made to the Chief Justice detailing findings from these visits. It was determined that rural counties faced particular challenges as to:

- Courthouse security
- Courthouse facilities
- Foreign language interpreters, especially Spanish
- Drug and alcohol abuse assessments and counseling
- Local budget difficulties related to shrinking tax bases and imposed costs

such

as Medicaid pass-through

The Commission has visited six counties to date this year-- Anson, Avery, Beaufort, Richmond, Tyrrell and Watauga. Members met with local county and court officials, members of the bar, law enforcement, the media and other interested parties in order to hear their needs and to identify local challenges. Written findings and recommendations were made and shared with participants as well as the Chief Justice.

To date the Commission has found conditions ranging from excellent to abysmal. Some facilities are literally “falling down” and have infestations of pigeon mites and bat colonies. Other courthouses have leaks, dangerous wiring, inadequate plumbing, inaccessible buildings, offices and courtrooms. Some rural counties have no courthouse security at all while others have made excellent progress to maintain safety in their facilities.

The Commission has also found county and court officials working cooperatively to implement long-range plans to address court and county needs. Avery County serves as a model for working together and planning.

The Commission will be visiting rural counties in the Eighth Division this fall (Rutherford, McDowell). During the long session, the Commission will communicate with the General Assembly regarding funding needs, substance abuse assessment and counseling challenges, court interpreters, and the need for minimal courthouse security.