

THE DAILY REPORTER

County rejects Kimble's request for more help

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Posted Oct 11, 2017 at 9:38 AM

Updated Oct 11, 2017 at 9:38 AM

COLDWATER — In a 3-2 vote, Branch County commissioners rejected a request from Branch County Prosecutor Ralph Kimble to hire a full-time secretary receptionist, due to the increase in work load and the loss of their full-time summer help.

Former prosecutor and now District 1 Commissioner Terri Norris told the board that her research showed there was a jump in cases in 2014, but since then the number handled has been down.

Norris said she did her own research, since the prosecutor had not filed an annual report since 2012.

“Juvenile cases have been way off,” she said. “From the information I’ve collected there is very little juvenile prosecution that is occurring. There is from the city and village, but not from the state end.”

Norris said the number of parental terminations are also low.

Kimble told the commission that he was handling the appeals from the probate court.

“That’s more on the attorneys than staff,” Norris said. “I’ve checked with the Attorney General’s office, and they said they are refusing to do any of those appeals.”

Kimble said without adequate office staff, he would have to stop handling probate court work.

Norris said the Attorney General would start handling those appeals, if requested to do so by the prosecutors office.

“My personal opinion is, I don’t think I can support a full-time position,” she said.

Joining her in the vote were Commissioner Leonard Kolcz and Chairman Ted Gordon.

Commissioners Don Vrablic and Randall Hazelbaker voted to approve the increase from part time to full time.

Kimble said that with only one veteran legal secretary and a newly hired secretary, he did not have the experience to keep up with the three full-time attorneys in the three courts.

He has had trouble finding a person qualified and who can pass the background check to fill the part-time position.

It would have been a union position starting at \$11.94 per hour for a 40hour work week with the new hire benefit package. Kimble said there is money in his budget.

“I have underspent my budget by \$80,000 in each of the last two years,” he pointed out.

Branch County Administrator Bud Norman said there is money for the three months this year, but it would impact next year's budget with a full-time employee and all the benefits. There is a third secretary in the office under a federal child support grant, but that secretary cannot do any work but that under the grant without forfeiting the money.



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