

December ?, 2010/January ?, 2011

«Name»

«Title»

«Address»

Dear «Salutation»:

We are pleased to report that the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) was awarded a contract from the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) to study criminal appeals. This study, which has the support of the Executive Committee of the National Conference of Appellate Court Clerks (NCACC), provides an excellent opportunity for the «Appellate_Court_Division» to contribute to the very limited empirical knowledge of the factors that prompt defendants to seek appellate review and the outcomes of those reviews. Furthermore, this project will provide a wealth of knowledge upon which to draw for pursuing best practices and understanding the important work of appellate courts, which serve as an integral part of the criminal justice process.

This study of appeals involves two separate data collection components. In the first component, the NCSC will collect basic information, such as case processing details, dispositions, and issues on appeal, for a sample of criminal appeals that were disposed of in 2010. For this component, we will need your assistance in compiling a list of those appeals. The list should include the case number, defendant last name, date of disposition, type of appeal (felony or misdemeanor, if known), whether or not the appeal is from a death penalty case, and whether or not the appeal was first reviewed by the [name of intermediate appellate court]. A template for the list will be electronically provided. Additionally, we may need your help in accessing case documents (docket sheets, legal briefs, and opinions) unless your court offers online access. If these documents are available online, please let us know, and we can gather all of the information we need without additional assistance from your court.

The second component of the study involves documenting the operational and procedural characteristics of appellate courts nationwide. NCSC staff will attempt to gather most of this information from public documents, but for the sake of accuracy, we may need to contact you, or an appointed contact person, for clarification of information or to obtain information that is not immediately accessible. These data will be compiled into a profile database that will be available on the NCSC's Web site. The database will provide detail about the diverse practices and structural frameworks within which the appellate courts operate, encouraging appellate courts to make informative and valuable comparisons for policy and court management decisions.

Although participation in this study is voluntary, the response of your agency is very important to this project, and I hope you and your staff will agree to assist us. We estimate that it should take your staff about 3 to 18 hours to complete all aspects including sample list generation and submission of necessary materials for the criminal appeals project. In compliance with the Paper Work Reduction Act, we weighed the resources required to collect these data against the critical information that will be generated with your participation. This information has been reviewed and approved by the Office of Management and Budget (please see OMB control number XXX on the data collection forms).

The participation of the «Appellate_Court_Division» is very important to this study, and I hope you and your staff will agree to assist us. I encourage you to contact Shauna Strickland, Project Manager, at sstrickland@ncsc.org if you have any questions regarding the current study or the assistance that we will need from you. Please let us know your preferred method of communication (e.g., e-mail, phone) and if we should contact someone else from the court to serve as a contact for this project. Under separate cover, similar correspondence has been sent to <<cc>>. «NCSC_Contact» has been assigned as your court liaison and will be in touch with you in the near future to begin the data collection process. I look forward to working with you on this valuable project.

Sincerely,

Nicole L. Waters, Ph. D.
Project Director
(757) 259-1574
nwaters@ncsc.org

Court Liaison:
«NCSC_Contact»
[NCSC Title]
(757) 259-«Phone»
«Email»

c: «c__Appellate_Clerk__Addl_Judges»