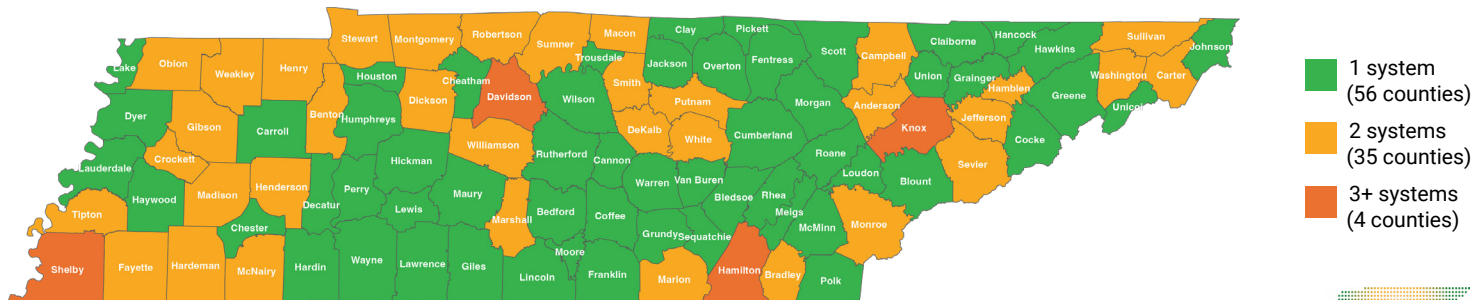


Connecting Tennessee's Courts: Implementation Lessons from Other States to Strengthen Justice Outcomes

Tennessee's court system includes more than 400 courts in 32 judicial districts using 14 different case management systems.¹ This variation creates differences in how court records are entered, stored, and shared, limiting the ability to coordinate across jurisdictions and making it difficult to consistently measure court performance and justice outcomes statewide.

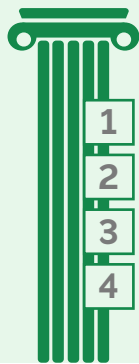
Tennessee counties use multiple case management systems across their local courts.



Source: Deliverable 2.1 Current State Assessment, CMS Applications Used Across Tennessee (2024)

However, Tennessee's Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) is building a "once-in-a-generation" statewide court technology solution incorporating the same case management, e-filing, payment processing, and data reporting processes.² This will improve coordination and resource planning across jurisdictions while giving judges, clerks, policymakers, and the public a more complete and reliable picture of how Tennessee's justice system is working.

As implementation of Tennessee's court technology solution gets underway, we share four lessons drawn from other states' experiences to help maximize the impact of this significant investment.



IMPLEMENTATION LESSONS

- 1 Phasing:** Pilot the system in select counties before a statewide rollout.
- 2 Data Governance:** Adopt consistent statewide policies for data access, privacy, and cybersecurity.
- 3 Data Quality:** Adopt statewide data quality standards, to ensure consistent, reliable reporting.
- 4 Sustaining the System:** Dedicate permanent court technology staff to maintain and improve the system.

Tennessee's fragmented court system limits coordination, transparency, and statewide decision-making.

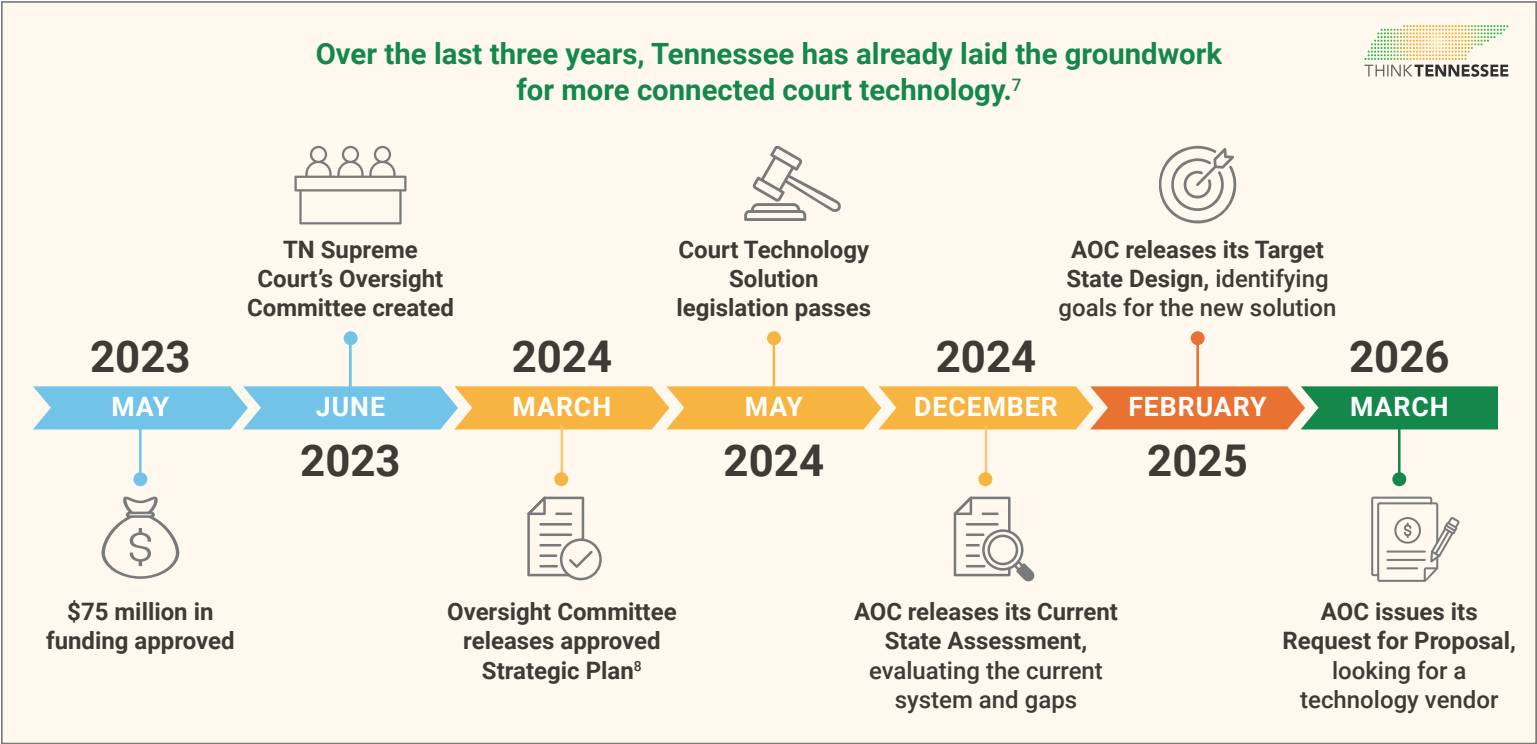
Tennessee courts use a combination of **14 different case management systems**. Most Tennessee counties use AOC's Tennessee Court Information System ("TnCIS") for at least some courts: 56 counties use only TnCIS, 35 use TnCIS alongside at least one other system, and four operate entirely outside of TnCIS.³ This combination of different systems limits the ability to access information, coordinate across counties, and track court system performance consistently statewide.

Without a unified process and data, it is difficult for **people navigating the courts** (who must use different systems), **practitioners** (with data siloed by county), and **policymakers** (incomplete data and inconsistent formats prevent statewide comparisons).

A shared court technology solution will create a single, reliable source of information across Tennessee's courts.

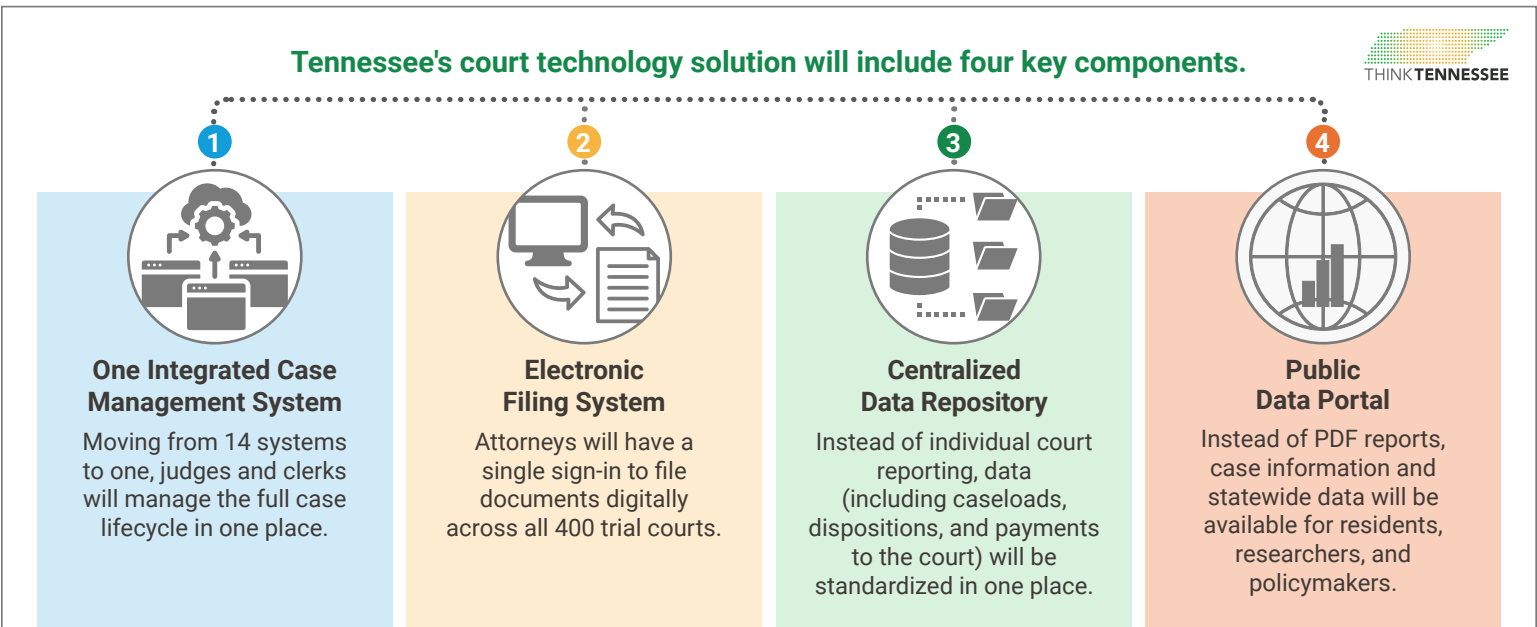
Tennessee's new system grew out of a recognized need for better coordination and information sharing across the state's courts.

In 2023, the legislature approved \$75 million in funding for court technology, and the Tennessee Supreme Court established an oversight committee to study challenges and set a vision for a new system.^{4,5} In 2024, legislation passed authorizing the AOC to develop the centralized system.⁶



The solution will feature a centralized case management system and data repository, electronic filing, and a public data portal.

To prepare for building this system, the AOC has assessed the current state of court technology, engaged more than 130 stakeholders, and worked to establish a Court Technology Transformation Office to oversee implementation.⁹ Their planning report outlines what the new solution is intended to look like and deliver across all four components.¹⁰



Source: Deliverable 3.1, Target State Design, prepared by Gartner (a consultant for Tennessee's AOC).

➤ **A shared court technology solution will help Tennessee deliver more consistent, transparent, and effective justice.**

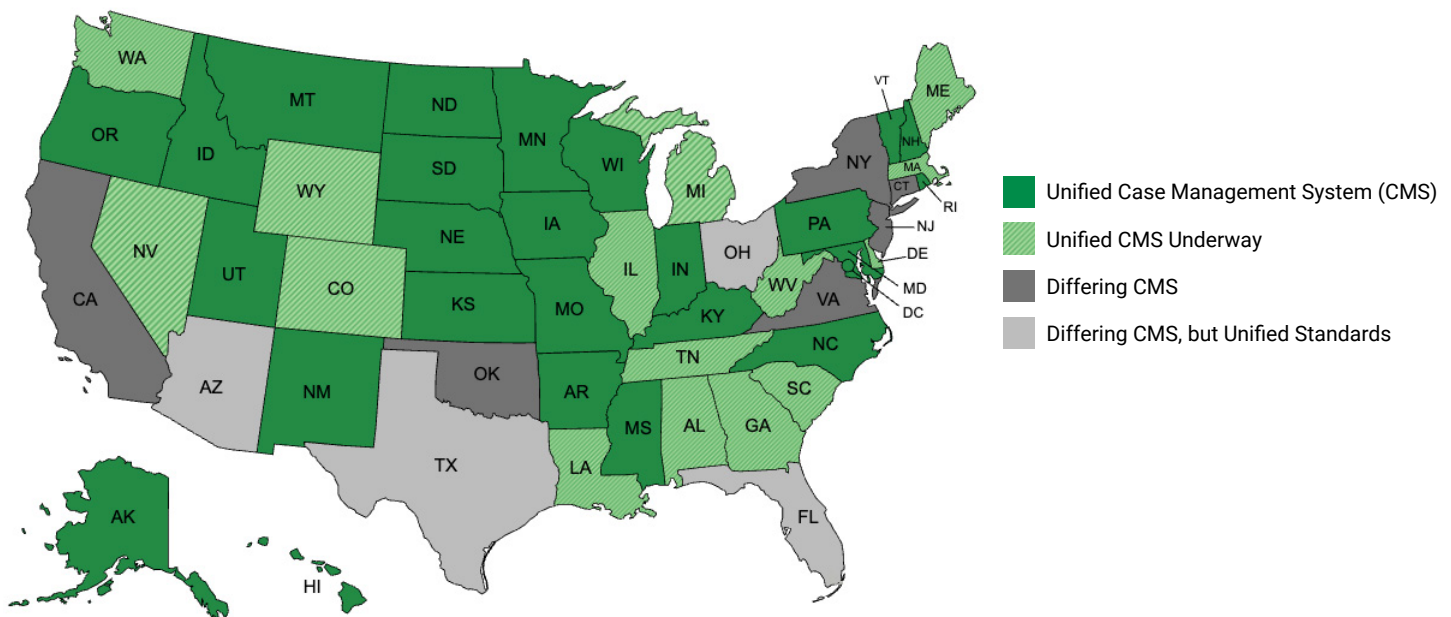
This investment is not just about modernizing technology—it provides judges, clerks, policymakers, and the public more complete information to improve how justice is delivered across the state.

- ✔ **Improve consistency across the justice system.** With the current variation in case outcomes across counties—from case dismissal rates (ranging from 0.4% in Bledsoe County to 74.3% in Pickett County) to guilty pleas (ranging from 14.3% in Shelby County to 81.0% in Henderson County)—statewide data can give policymakers the tools to better understand and address these differences.¹¹
- ✔ **Help attorneys and judges make informed decisions.** Real-time access to a person's full case history across jurisdictions supports more consistent and complete pre-trial decisions.
- ✔ **Allocate resources more effectively.** The state comptroller's office reports that incomplete data is preventing it from updating the weighted caseload study used to direct resources for district attorneys and public defenders.¹² A shared data system would help provide the complete and consistent information needed to allocate resources across districts.
- ✔ **Increase transparency and public confidence.** A public-facing data portal gives journalists, researchers, and advocates the ability to see how the system is performing—building public confidence that the justice system is operating fairly and consistently.
- ✔ **Evaluate the impact of criminal justice reforms.** A unified solution gives policymakers and researchers reliable, statewide data needed to evaluate whether reforms are working and where to focus next.

Experiences from other states point to four implementation lessons for Tennessee.

Courts in **25 states** already use a unified technology solution, and an additional **15** (including Tennessee) are currently in the process.

All but 10 states have, or are in the process of building, a unified court technology system.



Source: ThinkTennessee review of publicly available state court technology across all 50 states.



Looking at other states' experiences, we highlight four best practices to guide implementation of Tennessee's new system:



Pilot the system in select counties before a statewide rollout.

Testing the system in pilot counties helps to catch problems early, build public confidence, and give larger jurisdictions time—and experiences to learn from—to make the transition successfully.

Shelby, Davidson, Knox, and Hamilton counties have higher case volumes and more complex system needs than smaller jurisdictions and could benefit the most from a pilot rollout.¹³

Pilots help surface technical issues early to prevent larger scale errors and disruptions.

North Carolina's phased rollout of their "eCourts" system in four counties revealed technical issues that caused several people to be detained after they had posted bond or satisfied the conditions for release.¹⁴

Piloting helped to limit the scope of the issue, allowing the state to fix the problem and implement additional user training and onsite support before they rolled out the system statewide.¹⁵

Larger counties require additional planning and longer timelines.

Maryland rolled out its Maryland Electronic Courts (MDEC) system county by county over 10 years—beginning with smaller counties before moving to larger jurisdictions.¹⁶ Baltimore courts were given more time for the necessary data conversion, digitization, infrastructure upgrades, and staff training before going live in 2024.¹⁷



Adopt consistent statewide policies for data access, privacy, and cybersecurity.

To ensure privacy and security of sensitive personal data—including victim names, Social Security numbers, and custody records—states have created two-tiered systems and implemented cybersecurity protocols.

A two-tiered access system—one for the public and one for system users—protects access and privacy.

In **Florida**, only judges, state attorneys, or law enforcement can view a case with an active warrant.¹⁸ Similarly, **Indiana's** court rules provide greater access to court clerks and staff, public agencies, parties in a case, and lawyers.¹⁹

These approaches balance data transparency with privacy by building a platform with both a public version and one for authorized users with a specialized login.

Cybersecurity protocols protect against exposure of court user information.

In 2023, **Kansas'** court system was subject to a cyberattack, exposing the personal information of 150,000 people who had interacted with the courts.²⁰ As a result, most courts reverted to paper filing for nearly a year, creating a significant backlog and disrupting court operations. Since then, Kansas increased its security controls, hired its first Chief Information Security Officer, and moved its public access portal to a .gov domain name.²¹



Adopt statewide data quality standards, to ensure consistent, reliable reporting.

Consistent data definitions and reporting requirements help ensure better data quality and reliable comparisons. Many states draw on the National Center for State Courts' National Open Data Standards (NODS) for setting these shared standards and definitions.²²

Shared definitions and data quality oversight ensure reliable statewide reporting.

Minnesota's unified case management system uses standardized data practices and a data-quality unit to audit information and identify inconsistencies. Minnesotans can see how courts are operating, including trends in case filings, clearance rates, and criminal charges and convictions.²³

States with standardized data-reporting requirements have created public dashboards that provide regularly updated statistics and outcomes.

Texas courts that set bail are required to submit standardized data, including offense type, bail amount, and failure-to-appear rates, to the Texas Office of Court Administration.²⁴ That data powers **Texas' Bail Dashboard**, providing a clearer view of bail practices across counties, courts, and judges.²⁵



Dedicate permanent court technology staff to maintain and improve the system.

Experiences from other states show dedicated internal staff who understand both court operations and the technology behind the system help to adapt to state-specific needs, maintain data quality, and support courts over time.

Information technology staff help tailor systems to each state's needs.

Maryland's staff adapted their Judicial Information System to meet operational needs rather than relying entirely on vendor-designed processes. Teams coordinated the rollout strategy, managed data conversion of older records, developed state-specific workflows, and trained clerks and judges during the transition.²⁶

Long-term staff capacity can support additional integrations and upgrades.

Minnesota uses dedicated staff capacity to support additional system features and create data-quality review processes to help with data reliability. They can send automated notifications on case updates—from when a warrant is issued to a final decision—and address inconsistent coding or reporting practices.²⁷

Tennessee has an opportunity to build one of the nation's strongest court technology solutions by pairing this significant investment with thoughtful implementation. Experiences from peer states suggest that phased deployment, strong data governance, standardized reporting requirements, and sustained staffing can help the state maximize the value of that investment. Done well, this goes beyond modernizing technology to create a more transparent, consistent, and effective justice system for all Tennesseans.

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