



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

Public Information Office

Securing Pennsylvania's Courts

The Pennsylvania Supreme Court seeks to ensure the safety of judges, jurors, witnesses, crime victims and all others in all court facilities in Pennsylvania. The court's Judicial Council in 2002 established the Committee on Judicial Safety and Preparedness to develop ways to improve court safety.

Through the work of that committee and the Office of Judicial Security of the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC) many steps have been taken to enhance security at magisterial district courts and common pleas courts throughout the Commonwealth. These measures include:

- Installation of duress alarms and surveillance cameras in magisterial district courts as well as shatterproof glass at transaction counters and improved methods for securing defendants in custody.
- Development of a Judicial Safety Handbook that outlines recommended security practices, procedures and guidelines for courts.
- Training for staff in magisterial district courts in "best practices" to ensure court security and personal safety, and to control and resolve conflicts when they arise inside court facilities.
- Providing video conferencing equipment to magisterial district courts to allow for preliminary arraignments while defendants are held in secure facilities.
- Formation of local committees to address local court security issues.

Security improvements also have been made in many county common pleas courts, including metal detectors, wireless duress alarms, employee identification badge systems and X-ray inspection machines.

In addition, a statewide incident reporting system has been established. When a security incident occurs, it is reported electronically to the AOPC and to the court administrator in the county where it occurs. These reports enable AOPC security staff to spot trends and identify ways to better address problems.

The effort to improve court security depends on the collaboration of many people in the justice system. Accordingly, the membership of the Committee on Judicial Safety and Preparedness includes representatives of the County Commissioners Association, the Domestic Relations Association, the Sheriffs Association, the County Probation and Parole Officers Association, president judges, magisterial district judges, court administrators and the staff of the AOPC.