

Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts

The Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts, also called the Administrative Office and the AOPC, is the administrative arm of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. It was established in January 1969 following the Constitutional Convention of 1967-68, which defined the Supreme Court's authority for supervision and administration of all state courts.

The Court Administrator of Pennsylvania has been empowered to carry out the Supreme Court's administrative duties and is responsible for assuring that the business of the courts is promptly and properly disposed.

The Administrative Office conducts business from offices in Philadelphia and the Harrisburg area. In addition to the court administrator's office, the departments in Philadelphia include Policy and Research, Legal, and Judicial Services. The deputy court administrator's office is located in Mechanicsburg, just south of Harrisburg, and includes Communications/Legislative Affairs, Administrative Services, Payroll and Judicial Security. Also found in Mechanicsburg are the Finance, Human Resources, Judicial Automation and Judicial Education Departments. The Judicial Programs Department has offices at both locations.

The Administrative Office's supervisory, administrative and long-range planning duties include:

- reviewing practices, procedures and efficiency at all levels of the court system and in all related offices
- developing recommendations to the Supreme Court regarding improvement of the system and related offices
- representing the judicial system before legislative bodies

- examining administrative and business methods used by offices in or related to the court system
- collecting statistical data
- examining the state of the dockets and making recommendations for expediting litigation
- managing fiscal affairs, including budget preparation, disbursements approval and goods and services procurement
- overseeing the security of court facilities
- supervising all administrative matters relating to offices engaged in clerical functions
- maintaining personnel records
- conducting education programs for system personnel
- receiving and responding to comments from the public
- publishing an annual report
- providing legal services to system personnel.

A brief description of each unit of the AOPC and its functions follows.

Policy and Research Department

The Administrative Office's Policy and Research Department analyzes and evaluates the operations of the Unified Judicial System's (UJS) various components. During any given year, the department conducts a variety of studies, ranging from caseflow management reviews of individual trial courts to statewide evaluations of the safety and security of court facilities.

A core function of the department is to systematically assemble data on the caseloads

of county and local courts, including the numbers and types of new, disposed and pending cases, and, for certain case types, the ages of the cases awaiting adjudication. The statistical information is reviewed and periodically verified through audits of county dockets. The Administrative Office annually publishes the data in the Caseload Statistics of the Unified Judicial System of Pennsylvania. This report is available from the AOPC page on the UJS Web site at www.courts.state.pa.us.

The Administrative Office uses the statistical information gathered for many purposes, including the monitoring of county court system operations and development of policy initiatives consistent with its mandate under the Rules of Judicial Administration.

Among the departmental projects recently completed or now in progress are:

- statistical compilation of medical malpractice filings and jury verdicts across the state
- study of child custody practices and procedures in support of the work of the Pennsylvania Bar Association's Commission on Justice Initiatives
- design of interactive caseload statistical reporting on the UJS Web site. Customized statistical reports are now available on-line
- design of automated security incident reporting system for the Judicial Council's committee on court security
- expansion of caseload statistical reporting to include more case types and disposition outcomes, including automated reporting through the statewide criminal Common Pleas Case Management System (CPCMS)
- development of a juvenile delinquency caseload statistical report in coordination with the new Juvenile Court Judges Commission automated Case Management System (JCMS)

- support services and training to various committees and associations such as the Pennsylvania Association of Court Management and the Mid-Atlantic Association of Court Management
- on-site support for local courts in compiling and analyzing caseload statistics
- selection of participating counties and jurors in regional and statewide investigating grand juries in keeping with Pennsylvania Rule of Criminal Procedure 241.

Another responsibility of the department lies in the design of the many forms used in the state court system. The development of new forms and the modification of existing forms require extensive consultation with system personnel, especially those using the forms on a daily basis.

Legal Department

The Legal Department provides advice and counsel to the state court administrator and to the other units of the Unified Judicial System (UJS) while also assisting in various administrative areas.

Specifically, the chief counsel's staff represent UJS personnel in state and federal litigation. Representation is not provided in criminal or disciplinary actions. Actions involving UJS personnel often include suits filed in the federal district courts that raise various civil rights and constitutional issues. Typical state court proceedings involving court personnel pertain to petitions for review of governmental actions, petitions to determine the rights and duties of public officials, and appeals.

Other significant activities include:

- active participation in planning and implementing the Judicial Computer System and related statewide court automation programs

- reviewing or negotiating leases and contracts for most of the state court system
- providing legal and administrative assistance and advice to the state court administrator
- assisting in procurement matters
- reviewing legislation affecting the judiciary.

Judicial Services Department

The Judicial Services Department provides logistical planning, coordination, administration and staffing for an extensive schedule of educational conferences, seminars and meetings for the Supreme Court, the Administrative Office and affiliated groups.

In 2005 the department coordinated seven conferences:

- *Pennsylvania Conference of State Trial Judges Mid-Annual Conference*
February 24-27, 2005
- *Satellite Program: Sentencing*
April 5, 6, 19, 20, 2005
- *President Judges/Pennsylvania Association of Court Management Annual Conference*
June 5-8, 2005
- *Pennsylvania Conference of State Trial Judges Annual Conference*
July 21-24, 2005
- *Satellite Program: Evidence*
October 18, 19; November 14, 15, 2005
- *Pennsylvania Association of Court Management Mid-Annual Conference*
November 6-8, 2005

Through aggressive negotiation and detailed knowledge of Pennsylvania's hospitality industry, the Judicial Services Department is able to ensure that multi-day conferences

proceed effectively under terms which are favorable to the Commonwealth.

Judicial Services also negotiates office space for judicial offices across the Commonwealth, subject to final legal review by the chief counsel's legal staff; maintains and updates all Pennsylvania state department lists; and handles the filing of financial disclosure statements.

Judicial Programs

The Judicial Programs Department mission is to assist court administrators, judges and staff throughout Pennsylvania's 60 judicial districts in ensuring the efficient operation of Pennsylvania's minor and trial courts and to promote the equitable administration of justice throughout the Commonwealth. Judicial Programs provides assistance to the local courts on diverse issues such as financial management, caseflow management, personnel, technology and other aspects of managing a complex judicial system. The department will also work closely with the Supreme Court, the Court's rules committees and other departments within the AOPC to assist with implementation of policies, procedures, rule changes and reporting standards. This assistance includes:

- providing information about judicial program development and trends within Pennsylvania and nationally
- reviewing and assessing local court requests for complement level and/or organizational structure changes and other related human resources needs
- collecting, analyzing and disseminating data and information regarding court operations
- establishing standards and procedures for program performance, audits and evaluation
- devising, developing and conducting training and continuing education programs for local court staff

- analyzing the impact of legislation related to judicial operations and devising solutions for implementation of new statutes and statutory changes
- overseeing senior judicial assignments, requests for changes of venue/venire and AOPC communication with judicial districts concerning president judge elections
- developing training, testing and certification of court interpreters
- assisting judicial districts in planning, implementing and maintaining problem-solving courts.

Judicial Automation

The AOPC's Judicial Automation Department is responsible for developing and maintaining case management and other software applications for courts and administrative staff in the Unified Judicial System. This department also provides general technology support to the Supreme Court justices, their staffs and the administrative court staff in Pennsylvania.

The highlights of several important projects undertaken by this department are described below.

Common Pleas Case Management System (CPCMS)

CPCMS is a statewide case management system for Pennsylvania's trial courts that includes docketing, accounting and other important case management functions. The first phase of development covers criminal courts, and it will be used primarily by clerks of courts, court administration and judges and their staffs.

The system produces more than 400 forms and reports, including master account reports. It provides a facility to export report data from the system to other applications such

as Microsoft Excel and Access so that counties can customize the presentation of information, if desired.

During 2005 rollout of the Common Pleas System in all but five counties was completed. Work began on enhancing the system to accommodate the unique requirements of Philadelphia County, which is slated for installation in mid-2006.

The system facilitates sharing of important criminal case information such as bail and warrant information statewide. It also uses a data hub to transmit information to and from other state agencies and uses the Pennsylvania Justice Network (JNET) as a data transportation mechanism as well as to present information to other criminal justice agencies.

As a complement to CPCMS, the AOPC developed a Web site to provide both public and secure Web docket sheets. The response to the electronic availability of these documents has been overwhelmingly positive, with over 2.5 million hits in 2005. The secure docket sheets are made available to county court and related criminal justice personnel through use of a secure log-in, personal identification number (PIN) and password. They are also available to law enforcement through JNET.

A warrant application was launched through JNET to provide integrated query capability for both magisterial district judge (MDJ) and CPCMS warrant data. Users receive results from both systems in a single grid and can print a summary report as well as access docket sheets from both systems. All active warrants, irrespective of issue date, and inactive warrants going back one year are available. This information is now available to users with secure docket log-ins and is accessible through the CPCMS application.

Pennsylvania Appellate Court Case Management System (PACMS)

The Pennsylvania Appellate Court Case Management System (PACMS) is an integrated

case management system designed for Pennsylvania's appellate courts -- Supreme, Superior and Commonwealth.

Enhancements to PACMS continued, mainly in the form of new and modified system reports, including several statistical reports for Superior Court.

Administrative Support Application Project (ASAP)

ASAP is a software application that was developed in-house at the AOPC to support the administrative functions of the appellate courts, AOPC and First Judicial District. The system includes payroll, human resources and finance modules.

In 2005 ASAP staff continued to maintain and enhance the system.

The ASAP staff also resumed responsibility for maintaining the Pennsylvania Board of Law Examiner's Bar Exam Applicant Registry (BEAR) system and its on-line bar applicant system, CUB.

Magisterial District Judge System (MDJS)

The Magisterial District Judge System provides case management and accounting functions to all magisterial district judges and their staffs statewide, approximately 3,500 users. The system has been in place since 1992 and generates all forms needed for civil, criminal and traffic case processing.

Activities in 2005 included:

- replacing all printers in the district courts
- fall workshops and presentations at MDJ continuing education classes.
- planning for a rewrite of the MDJS, which is 13 years old, began.

Web Development

The Web team continued to support the existing system while beginning to plan for a redesign of the entire Unified Judicial System Web page.

The security incident reporting system for magisterial district judges was released to all MDJ courts in 2005. It is a result of the work being done by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court's Judicial Council Subcommittee on Judicial Security. Development of a similar system for the Courts of Common Pleas is underway and on track for release in 2006.

Systems Support

AOPC systems support staff continued to support and maintain hardware and telecommunications systems required for various AOPC case management systems and office automation functions.

Deputy Court Administrator's Office

Communications/Legislative Affairs

In its role as both legislative and media liaison, the Office of Communications and Legislative Affairs represents the AOPC before the state's executive and legislative branches of government as well as to the media. As media liaison, staff field inquiries from reporters, draft press releases, publish the AOPC annual report, develop other publications and set up press conferences.

The office also monitors the progress of legislation in the General Assembly; compiles and publishes a legislative summary when the General Assembly is in session; and, when appropriate, comments on the effect legislation may have on the fiscal and administrative operations of the judicial system. With the computerization of magisterial district judge

offices, staff also monitor and report on legislation that may necessitate changes to the magisterial district judge software programs.

Judicial Security

The goal of Judicial Security is to make every state court facility in Pennsylvania a safe place for not only jurists and their staff, but for litigants and their families, jurors, witnesses, victims of crime and the general public to conduct their business.

The unit traces its origins to an in-house study conducted in 1999 which broke new ground in understanding the nature of threats to state jurists. The results of the study, which were eventually published in two national journals, highlighted a strong need to address judicial security.

The Committee on Judicial Safety and Preparedness, established by the Judicial Council following publication of the survey, carried out further study and consulted with experts, including the Secret Service; the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms; the Pennsylvania State Police; sheriffs and private consultants. This led to the formation of the Judicial Security unit in late 2002.

In 2005 the committee, chaired by Justice Sandra Schultz Newman, embarked on four major initiatives to improve security for magisterial district courts throughout Pennsylvania as follows:

- physical changes to the courts themselves. With funding from the Pennsylvania legislature, courts will receive closed circuit television cameras, wireless duress alarms and easily viewable signs announcing that a court is under 24-hour surveillance. In addition, the AOPC will reimburse courts for the cost of shatterproof glass for their public transaction counters and for a means to secure in-custody defendants where the courts have so requested, based on their needs.

- staff training in personal security and safety. The training will enable staff to deal effectively with verbally and physically disruptive litigants and to develop security protocols to protect themselves and their coworkers. All magisterial district court staff will have an opportunity to receive this training within a two-year period.
- development of the Unified Judicial System of Pennsylvania's Court Safety and Security Manual. The manual is designed to provide a framework for increasing security in court facilities. To familiarize local security committees with the manual's content, Judicial Security staff conducted regional workshops in the fall of 2005.

A second round of workshops is planned for the summer and fall of 2006 and will focus on several key areas of concern expressed by local court security committee members in the fall workshops.

- development of the Pennsylvania Judicial Incident Reporting System (PAJIRS). This system, inaugurated July 15, 2005, provides magisterial district judges and their staff with a means to report security incidents that occur in their offices. The reports are electronically forwarded to Judicial Security staff and district court administrators. Judicial Security staff review each incident and contact the individual who filed the report, where assistance is warranted.

As of December 31, 2005, 67 incidents had been reported in PAJIRS. They include threats against a judge's life, physical assaults, verbally aggressive and threatening litigants and vandalism of court offices.

Administrative Services

Administrative Services oversees a variety of administrative-related tasks, including procurement for the Administrative Office and for Philadelphia courts under the First Judicial

District/AOPC Procurement Unit. It handles all issues relating to facility management, fixed asset control, mail and messenger services and vehicle management. It also provides support to many UJS agencies in a variety of ways.

Payroll

The Payroll Unit administers the monthly, biweekly and supplemental payrolls for more than 1,600 jurists and staff. Together with the Office of Human Resources, it also orients and answers any questions new employees may have as the employees become members of the judiciary staff.

Judicial Education

The Judicial Education Department was formed to meet the need of providing continuing education to Pennsylvania's jurists.

Human Resources

The Department of Human Resources

- monitors and ensures UJS compliance with state and federal employment statutes
- maintains all UJS fringe benefit programs and counsels judiciary personnel regarding their provisions and utilization
- administers the UJS employee leave accounting program and the UJS Unemployment Compensation and Workers Compensation programs
- formulates and administers the personnel policies and procedures that govern the personnel operations of the UJS
- assists managers in the recruiting, interviewing and hiring of new staff and develops and administers AOPC hiring procedures

- administers uniform classification and pay plans for the UJS
- develops training curriculum, policies and procedures for judiciary personnel.

Finance

The Finance Department is responsible for managing all budgets, accounting and the accounting system for the Unified Judicial System. It serves as the primary resource to the various components comprising the UJS regarding financial matters. It fulfills its responsibility through the following activities:

- developing necessary policies and procedures on accounting and budget issues, and training staff at all levels in their use
- monitoring and preparing the budget for some 35 UJS line items in the Commonwealth's annual budget. These line-item appropriations include not only the funding for the Administrative Office, but for all of the state-funded courts, most Supreme Court advisory procedural rules committees, juror cost reimbursements, and county court reimbursements. Finance staff develop budget materials for the justices and court administrator of Pennsylvania, including briefing materials used for hearings before the legislative appropriations committees. Staff monitor budget trends, maintain communications and regular reporting to the various legislative and executive branch agencies as required by law and tradition, and participate in budget hearings as required.

- managing \$317.2 million in annual appropriations, including \$37.4 million in grants to counties
- participating in the annual financial audit of the UJS
- serving as the central clearinghouse for all financial transactions impacting the judiciary
- overseeing the finances of the First Judicial District/AOPC Procurement Unit, including recommending investment and banking strategy. The procurement unit, created by and operating under an agreement between the Administrative Office and Philadelphia City government, was established to improve the procurement function in Philadelphia's three courts. Since the agreement was put into effect, the First Judicial District has realized significant savings through efficiencies in its procurement function.
- undertaking special projects, as requested and upon its own initiative, to develop financial information regarding cost trends, comparative analyses and the like. Such information includes analyses of legislation for fiscal impact routinely requested by the both the legislative and executive branches.
- responding to questions and providing information on the judiciary's financial operations as needed to the legislature, the executive branch, other judiciary employees and the public.

AOPC