

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 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 with its seven operational units divided between each. In addition to the court administrator's office, the three units in Philadelphia include Policy Research and Statistics, Legal, and Judicial Services. A fourth department -- Judicial Programs (formerly "Court Management") -- awaits reestablishment. The four departments in Mechanicsburg, just south of Harrisburg, are Administration, which includes Financial Systems, Payroll and Human Resources; the Judicial Computer System; Information Technology; and Communications/Legislative Affairs.

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
- 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.

Office of the Court Administrator

In addition to supporting the work of the Court Administrator of Pennsylvania, staff in the office of the court administrator provide visiting judges to assist with court backlogs and cases involving recusals.

Policy Research and Statistics Department

The Administrative Office's Policy Research and Statistics Department analyzes and evaluates the operations of the Unified Judicial System's various components. During any given year the department conducts a variety of studies, ranging from caseload management reviews of individual trial courts to statewide surveys of the structure and functioning of judicial support agencies, e.g., offices of the prothonotary and clerk of courts.

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 home page on the Internet, at www.courts.state.pa.us under "Administrative Office," in "AOPC Departments."

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:

- statewide review of local procedures for obtaining a Protection From Abuse (PFA) order
- an analysis of trial court decisional delay based on the 1997 amendments to Rule of Judicial Administration 703, specifically examining Post Conviction Relief Act (PCRA) cases
- comparative analysis of civil filings at the state and national levels
- staff support to the Juvenile Court Rules Project, including a series of detailed surveys on local procedures in juvenile delinquency cases
- survey of judicial safety of the state's trial and special court judges
- analysis of condensed transcripts and e-transcripts with the aim of developing proposals to amend Chapter 5000 of the Pennsylvania Rules of Judicial Administration (governing court reporting transcripts)
- updating and refining the caseload statistical reporting system, including
 - the addition of the PFA Statistical Report
 - revisions to the Family Court Report to provide greater detail in the disposition of divorce cases
 - a breakdown of child dependency cases into abuse/neglect and status offense categories

- cooperative efforts with PACSES for the reporting of detailed child support cases
- survey of senior judge chamber facilities and support staff, followed by a rule change approved by the Supreme Court to meet the needs of senior judges (Pa. R.J.A. 701).

Within the Policy Research and Statistics Department, the Docket Transcript Section receives, reviews and corrects data on all misdemeanor, felony and escalating summary cases filed in the 60 judicial districts. The information is submitted on paper forms and computer tapes. Staff send extracts of the data to the Pennsylvania State Police, where individual criminal histories, or rap sheets, are compiled. The AOPC and other state agencies also use the database for statistical research.

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 the end-users of the forms.

Legal Department

The Legal Department provides advice and counsel to the 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 represents UJS personnel -- including those of the various courts of the Commonwealth, the Disciplinary Board, and the Pennsylvania Board of Law Examiners -- in litigation. 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 and petitions to determine the rights and duties of public officials.

Other significant activities involving counsel staff include:

- active participation in planning and implementing the Judicial Computer System, the statewide court automation program
- reviewing leases and contracts for appellate court offices and related offices, chambers and committees of the UJS
- providing legal and administrative assistance and advice to the court administrator
- assisting in the process of conducting proportionality reviews in first degree murder cases
- assisting in procurement matters
- reviewing legislation affecting the judiciary.

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

Information Technology Department

The Information Technology Department provides staff and services for the JCS to bring automation to the courts of Pennsylvania. The department also provides electronic judicial information to other agencies; supports the AOPC's payroll, financial, human resources and administrative functions; and supports the

AOPC's day-to-day office automation requirements. It is organized into a Software Development Unit and a Computer Operations Unit.

The AOPC Web site, www.courts.state.pa.us, continued to increase in 1998. The site had approximately 1.8 million hits in 1998, with nearly as many hits in the last three months of the year as in all of 1997. During 1998, users accessed more than double the number of pages they viewed in 1997.

The AOPC also began setting up its own Web server in-house, a process which will give it total control over its site. The project is expected to be completed in 1999.

Software Development Unit

Statewide District Justice Automation System

Major changes were made to the Statewide District Automation System in response to the adoption by the Supreme Court of Criminal Procedural Rules Committee Recommendations 7 and 8. Recommendation 7 addressed the generation of a pre-warrant notice when a payment of the amount owed on a citation is defaulted. Recommendation 8 implemented procedures from Rule 30, Contempt Proceedings before District Justices; Rule 31, Appeals from Contempt Adjudication; and Rule 32, Defaults in Payment of Fine imposed as punishment. The implementation of the changes brought about by these rules in the DJS was significant. Over 100 objects were modified/created in the implementation of these rules.

In addition to these major software development efforts, the menu structure of the DJS system was completely overhauled to facilitate users' navigation of the system. Routine enhancements and changes are constantly being made to the DJS software in response to user requests.

Administrative Support Application Project

Significant progress was made in 1998 in the development of the Administrative Office's application software project (ASAP). Highlights include:

- award of the programming services contract to a vendor
- commencement and completion of the re-view functional/detail specifications for the payroll module with the vendor.
- commencement and completion of the re-view of the payroll database design with the vendor
- commencement of the development of the payroll module program in a three-tier client/server architecture
- commencement of the analysis of the migration of the existing payroll data on the PRIME into the new ASAP database.

In the existing PRIME system, a major effort in 1998 was the conversion to a new EDI format for the data transmitted to the Department of Treasury per the Department of Treasury's stipulations.

Electronic Data Interchange and Public Access

The Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) and Public Access (PA) section coordinates and manages public access to DJS data and the electronic interchange of this data with other county or state government agencies. In addition, this unit develops and maintains several small PC-based systems. Currently, 31 counties are set up to use the data as input to their systems. This includes not only Common Pleas Courts, but probation, prison and warrant management systems as well.

Since the establishment of a public access policy in 1994, formal requests for data have more than doubled. The EDI/PA Section received and responded to 88 requests for

information. Sixty of these requests were from other state and local agencies; 12 were from media; and 16 were from the public.

EDI activities continue to save other state and local agencies millions of dollars per year by eliminating redundant keying and assisting in the automation of manual functions.

JNET

The Justice Network (JNET), a coordinated effort of state agencies and the judiciary, is now online. JNET will provide registered users with data from a variety of agencies such as criminal history information from the state police and warrant and bail information from the district courts.

A big step to this processing was the development of a notifications system. This system will allow agencies to subscribe to information that will help them monitor and track individuals who enter the criminal justice system.

Currently, arrest information is for-warded to the AOPC and warrant information is sent to a number of subscribers, including state probation and parole officers.

The JNET effort has also paved the way toward on-line disposition reporting. Moving toward this goal, the AOPC will have in place, a method through which Common Pleas Courts can send case disposition information and immediately process and forward this information to the Pennsylvania State Police for processing into the Criminal History Repository. Currently, AOPC receives and processes the data via tape. The new process allows for data validation on initial entry and incorporation of previously entered data without rekeying.

Computer Operations Unit

In the summer of 1998 the AOPC completed a statewide upgrade of the DJS AS/400 operating system. The upgrade provided

enhanced TCP/IP functionality for our planned move to TCP/IP as our network protocol.

The LAN section migrated office e-mail to MS Exchange Server for enhanced intra-office communications and calendaring and completed a switch to MS Office Suite on all AOPC desktops. Additionally, laptops were provided for all district court administrators, complete with Internet access to provide for interoffice communications and future JNET connectivity.

The Computer Operations Unit improved network security while completing secure web certification from the International Computer Security Association, becoming the first state agency in the country to obtain such a certification.

A change management function provides installation verification, change coordination and version control for all DJS software developed. Technical support staff distributed a total of 397 program changes in this period on 174 different days. All changes are pre-announced before additional testing and are coordinated using the facilities of an integrated calendaring and e-mail groupware package.

Judicial Computer Support Department

The Judicial Computer Support Department provides training, responds to requests for equipment and provides help desk support for users of the JCS. The Director of Statewide Automation, who supervises the Judicial Computer Support Department, also serves as senior project manager or contract administrator for most AOPC information technology projects.

Administrative Unit

Staff provides clerical and administrative services for all personnel units under the Judicial Computer Department, including processing

mass mailings, filing, copying, research, accounts payable and receivable, and various scheduling of meetings and overnight reservations as needed. Clerical staff also provides relief for the main receptionist during lunch breaks and scheduled vacations.

Contract Administration and Project Management

The staff assigned to these tasks researches and compiles necessary information to draft Requests for Proposals for information technology consulting services for the AOPC. They play a major role in vendor selection, contract negotiations and the subsequent contract administration and project management following the awarding of a contract.

Training Unit

In 1998 unit personnel trained 96 district justice staff, new employees and court administrators at the central site in Mechanicsburg. Staff also traveled throughout the state, conducting regional training for 1,400 users.

In addition to training, staff participated in research, analysis, testing and writing program change requests in many areas. One major change came about due to Recommendations 7 and 8 from the Criminal Procedural Rules Committee. Recommendation 7 establishes new procedures regarding default in payment of fines and costs after conviction and amends Rule 75 to require a pre-warrant notice before issuing an arrest warrant for payment default. Recommendation 8 implements district justice contempt powers.

The Training Unit performs user tests on all major code changes to the DJS.

Trainers meet regularly with user groups to discuss concerns and suggestions regarding the automated system. Training staff researched

and answered more than 8,500 second-level help desk calls in 1998.

Work continues on the development of new documentation manuals for the automated system. This unit writes and prepares updates to the manual in the form of laser fax notices to the district justice offices.

Equipment Change Request Unit

All statewide requests for additional hardware, to move hardware or to add new cable are coordinated through this unit. In 1998 the unit responded to 132 requests for additional equipment and equipment/office relocations.

Help Desk Unit

The help desk responded to 55,215 calls in 1998. This included calls resulting from changes to the DJS brought about by new rule changes, new legislation and user suggestions or requests. Calls resulted from new programs, accounting problems, two persons accessing the same record, slow system response time, equipment failure and incorrect processing.

Changes to the DJS are made frequently and the programming unit trains the help desk staff so that it will be able to respond to problems or questions users may have when changes are released.

Help desk staff also monitor the maintenance contract to ensure that any malfunctioning DJS equipment is fixed within the times specified in the maintenance contract so that the office work schedule is not negatively impacted. In 1998, 2,214 maintenance calls were received and completed.

The Help Desk Unit also reviews the design of new programs prior to their release in order to evaluate their impact on user operations, answers questions from programmers on user procedures, assembles user documentation

for second-level calls, and reviews laser faxes prior to their release in order to ensure that they are clear. In 1998 the help desk assisted in the redesign of the DJS menu screens.

Legal Services Unit

The staff attorney assigned to the DJS has specific knowledge and expertise in legal issues related to the operation of the automated system.

The attorney provides legal consultation to the programming and training staff on program design and provides an interface with the Civil and Criminal Procedural Rules Committees.

Administration Department

The Administration Department, with staff in both Harrisburg and Philadelphia, is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the AOPC, providing support and services to other units of the Administrative Office, the appellate courts and the Unified Judicial System as a whole. It includes Human Resources, Financial Systems, Administrative Services and Payroll.

Human Resources Unit

Human Resources staff responsibilities include:

- monitoring and ensuring UJS compliance with state and federal employment statutes such as the Fair Labor Standards Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Family and Medical Leave Act, the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the State Employees' Retirement Code
- maintaining the UJS's fringe benefits programs and counseling judiciary personnel regarding them. These programs include various primary and supplemental medical insurance plans, the UJS's life insurance, long-term disability insurance, paid leave, and

Unemployment Compensation and Workers Compensation programs. Staff also administer separate work-related disability and accidental death programs for members of the judiciary.

- developing and administering the personnel policies that govern the personnel operations of the UJS, and assisting supervisors and employees in the proper implementation of these policies
- assisting incoming and departing employees with a variety of questions and concerns relating to their judiciary employment, and maintaining the judiciary's COBRA Continuation Medical Insurance Program for former employees and dependents of judiciary personnel
- maintaining the judiciary's Retiree and Survivor Medical Insurance Programs that provide medical insurance coverage to retirees of the judiciary and surviving spouses of deceased judiciary personnel
- developing, implementing and maintaining a standardized classification and pay plan for judiciary personnel. This plan includes a series of class specifications and job descriptions designed to establish a logical and consistent means of determining the relative value of one job to another.
- developing and administering AOPC hiring procedures and assisting managers in the recruiting, interviewing and hiring of new staff. This includes designing position advertisements, reviewing resumes to select candidates for interviews and completing background/reference checks on candidates.

In addition to its day-to-day human resource responsibilities, the AOPC Office of Human Resources is continuing its ongoing efforts with the AOPC Payroll Office and the Office of Financial Management to design and develop a fully integrated payroll, personnel and

financial management system that will serve to fully automate these interrelated functions for the twenty-first century.

Finally, the AOPC Office of Human Resources is playing an integral role in ongoing efforts to (1) assess the impact of statewide funding of the courts on the Unified Judicial System, and (2) develop a strategic plan for the development and implementation of the new human resource policies and procedures that will be necessary to maintain the much larger and more diverse workforce that may result from actions to implement statewide funding of the Unified Judicial System.

Financial Systems Unit

Financial Systems is responsible for managing all budgets and accounting for the Unified Judicial System. This includes:

- developing necessary policies and procedures on accounting and budget issues
- monitoring and preparing the budget request for 36 UJS line items in the Commonwealth's annual budget. This includes not only appropriations for the Administrative Office, but for all of the Commonwealth's courts; some court committees; juror cost reimbursements; and county court reimbursements. Staff also monitor budget trends, participate in independent audits of all 36 line items and deal with operational issues and policies.
- managing \$216.4 million in annual appropriations to the judiciary, including \$32 million in grants
- serving as the central clearinghouse for all financial transactions impacting the judiciary
- overseeing the finances of the First Judicial District/AOPC Procurement Unit (approximately \$21.7 million). The procurement unit, under an agreement between the Administrative Office and Philadelphia City

government, was established to improve procurement in Philadelphia's three courts, including purchases, service contracts and reconciliation. Since the agreement was put into effect, the First Judicial District has seen a significant reduction in its procurement expenses.

- completing special projects, e.g., assisting in analyzing legislation for fiscal impact
- responding to questions on the judiciary's financial operations posed by the legislature, the executive branch, other judiciary employees and the public.

Administrative Services Unit

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 also handles all issues relating to the operation of AOPC office buildings and provides support to many UJS agencies in a variety of ways.

Payroll Unit

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

Judicial Services Department

The Judicial Services Department plans, coordinates, administers and provides staff support for an extensive schedule of educational conferences, seminars and meetings for the Supreme Court, the Administrative Office and affiliated groups.

In 1998 the department coordinated eight major conferences:

- *New Judges Conference*
January 4-8, 1998
- *Pennsylvania Association of Court Management Mid-Annual Conference*
January 25-27, 1998
- *Pennsylvania Conference of State Trial Judges Mid-Annual Conference*
February 26-March 1, 1998
- *President Judges/Pennsylvania Association of Court Management Annual Conference*
May 31-June 3, 1998
- *Pennsylvania Conference of State Trial Judges Annual Conference*
July 22-26, 1998
- *Rules of Evidence Seminars*
September 11, 18, 25, 1998
- *Joint Family Law Conference-Domestic Relations Association of Pennsylvania*
November 29-December 2, 1998
- *Commercial Law Program*
December 2-4, 1998

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 staff, and maintains a computerized data bank of contact information for the Unified Judicial System's affiliated groups. It also maintains and updates all Pennsylvania state department lists, handles all financial disclosures, and disseminates news clippings of interest statewide for the Pennsylvania judiciary.

Judicial Services' other functions include publishing *Jurisprudence*, a judicial newsletter linking Pennsylvania's trial judges across the state; serving as liaison and secretariat for the Supreme Court Ad Hoc Committee on Evidence; working with the Joint Task Force to insure Gender Fairness in the Courts and the Joint Task Force to insure Racial & Ethnic Fairness in the Courts; and acting as liaison to the Minor Judiciary Education Board. 