



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

NEWS RELEASE

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Should Improve Jury Diversity, Cut Costs

Pennsylvania Courts Help Develop National ‘Jury Management Tool’

HARRISBURG, PA, July 12, 2010—Pennsylvania courts now have a new software tool designed to identify areas of strength and weakness in jury operations, suggest targeted strategies to improve performance, and estimate the fiscal and operational impact of those improvement efforts.

“I strongly encourage court administrators to take advantage of this tool to assess jury administration in ways that could save money and improve the diversity of their jury pools,” Chief Justice Ronald D. Castille said. “The tool will allow administrators to see how many jury summonses were successfully delivered, how many of those delivered were completed and returned, how many people appeared for duty, how many were excused, and how many jurors just didn’t ‘show.’”

“The jury software tool not only gives the administrator the data,” Chief Justice Castille added, “it contains information on best practices in jury management to help correct inadequacies or inefficiencies that are detected, giving us an idea which courts are doing well and which could use a little help.”

The online diagnostic tool, know as The Jury Managers’ Toolbox™ (JMT), was developed by the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) in conjunction with Pennsylvania court officials and those from six other states with a grant from the State Justice Institute.

According to the NCSC, jury trials tend to use a disproportionate share of court resources. Moreover, maintaining a pool of prospective jurors who can be summoned to serve within a relatively short period of time is more costly and labor-intensive than most courts realize.

Joseph J. Mittleman, Director of Judicial Programs with the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC), noted that in October 2008, for the first time in Pennsylvania, all counties in the Commonwealth had the option to obtain names of potential jurors from a central statewide jury list compiled by the his office.

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“The jury tool complements our statewide list that was designed to considerably expand existing county jury pools by identifying more citizens who are eligible to serve as jurors,” Mittleman said. “We encourage court administrators to consider using the jury list compiled by the AOPC and use the free jury tool that can help improve the operations of the jury system, focusing primarily on jury yield and juror utilization, and potentially save money.”

Monroe County Judge Ronald E. Vican said, “Monroe County was pleased to serve as a pilot court for the National Center of State Courts’ testing of the jury toolbox. We continue to look forward to employing the many uses of the toolbox, including, but not limited to the analysis of how representative and inclusive are our jury pools.”

Bucks County District Court Administrator Doug Praul recently saw a demonstration of the jury toolbox. He said, “For nearly three decades, Bucks County has used a mainframe application to administer its jury system and while it has served us well in that time, it cannot readily provide the data we need to manage our jury resources. We are now poised to implement a new jury management system that will give us virtually real-time access to jury usage data. But the data alone is not enough. Jury Manager's Toolbox will give us the ability to assess this data and make meaningful decisions about juror service. The toolbox will make our jury selection process fairer, more efficient, and less burdensome on our citizens.”

“After reviewing the Jury Managers' Toolbox, I very quickly learned that we had areas needing improvement,” said Erie County District Court Administrator Thomas Aaron. “Addressing a few areas such as the non-response and failure to appear by potential jurors will greatly enhance our jury yield, benefiting the county and jurors that are a vital part to our court process. The jury managers’ software is easy, straight forward and will give us the tool to see where improvement is necessary to enhance Erie County’s jury selection process.”

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BACKGROUND: *The JMT focuses primarily on jury yield and juror utilization, the two key performance measures for jury operations. The calculations for these measures are based on one of the NCSC CourTools measures and uses findings from the NCSC’s “The State-of-the-States Survey of Jury Improvement Efforts: A Compendium Report” for baseline comparison statistics. The software also incorporates population, demographic, and socioeconomic statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau to provide detailed analyses that take local community characteristics into consideration. Supplemental tools address the most common areas of poor performance in jury operations, especially undeliverable summonses, non-response and failure-to-appear rates, under-inclusive and non-representative master jury lists, and overly lenient or inconsistent excusal rates.*