

Preface
from the
Court
Administrator

To: The Honorable Chief Justice of Pennsylvania and Honorable Justices of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania and to the Citizens of the Commonwealth

I am pleased to present this Report of the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts for 2001. Our goal is to provide a general reference document that reflects the hard work and dedicated service of the Administrative Office and the boards and committees of the Supreme Court.

Within this report we have attempted to outline the array of programs and services that provide the framework of our effective judicial system. This report also serves to highlight noteworthy accomplishments in the administration of justice that took place during what was both a very busy and productive year.

The judiciary continued to improve service, access and the administration of justice for all Pennsylvanians in 2001. It did so, in large part, through collaborative decision-making within the judicial branch and among the executive and legislative branches. One example during 2001 of enhanced collaborative decision-making among Pennsylvania's governing branches was the creation of a special task force designed to study the state's minor courts.

The Intergovernmental Task Force to Study the District Justice System was charged with recommending administrative and operational changes to make justice at the local level even more effective. Its findings were outlined in a report that was adopted by the Supreme Court. The complete report is available on-line at www.courts.state.pa.us, the judiciary's Web site.

Created in May 2001, the 22-member task force was made up of representatives from the judiciary, General Assembly and executive branch of government. Its creation coincided with the Supreme Court's requirement to realign or reestablish magisterial districts each decade once new census data is available. The task force was developed to propose guidelines for realigning the districts, while also taking a broader look at whether the overall district justice system could operate even more effectively.

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A significant new Supreme Court advisory group also was created in 2001 as a result of the collective aspirations of Pennsylvania's three branches of government: the Juvenile Court Procedural Rules Committee. Nine experienced members of the bench and bar were appointed to the committee to review procedural practices in juvenile court and respond to questions from the bench, bar and public about juvenile court matters.

The committee was an outgrowth of work begun by the Juvenile Court Rules Project, which was established by the Supreme Court and funded by the state legislature in response to changes in juvenile law that emerged during the General Assembly's 1995 Special Session on Crime.

Among the committee's first tasks was a review of proposed procedural rules that were initiated in the Juvenile Court Rules Project, governing key elements of juvenile case processing. The project included an examination of juvenile court national standards, statutory and case law and studies of local practices that vary widely throughout Pennsylvania.

During 2001 Chief Justice of Pennsylvania John P. Flaherty urged the state's attorneys to make a voluntary financial contribution in the form of a separate check accompanying his or her annual attorney registration renewal form to help fund local legal services for indigent Pennsylvanians. He outlined his request in a two-page letter mailed to attorneys across the Commonwealth, suggesting a minimum \$50 tax-exempt contribution. The plea marked the second time in three years that the chief justice called on attorneys to provide more *pro bono publico* service, or when lawyers represent clients without a fee "for the public good."

Chief Justice Flaherty closed out 2001 by accepting the post of Chief Justice Emeritus after his year-end mandatory retirement from the bench. He was succeeded as chief justice by Justice Stephen A. Zappala. Chief Justice Emeritus Flaherty agreed to help lead and foster continuing education programs for jurists in his new non-adjudicatory role, noting the rise in cases with cutting-edge issues in technology, family law and many other areas that demand professional development for jurists.

Other changes on the bench during the year included the November 2001 statewide election of Justice J. Michael Eakin, who formally joined the court in January 2002. Justice Eakin, a Mechanicsburg native, had been a judge on the Superior Court of Pennsylvania since 1996.

A successful reorganizing of the AOPC's legal department took place during the year, providing a positive framework for meeting the diverse needs for counsel and representation within the state court system. I appointed Howard Holmes as chief legal counsel in July

2001, setting the stage for a number of administrative changes. Among those changes were the appointments of Staff Attorney Maryellen Gallagher as assistant chief legal counsel and Assistant Counsel A. Taylor Williams as assistant chief of litigation.

AOPC attorneys provide legal services to the Unified Judicial System and, when appropriate, legal representation, which may involve litigation or be something of a more “transactional” nature. AOPC attorneys frequently negotiate and review contracts and leases, and day-to-day legal counsel is provided on a wide array of topics, including human resources and public records access issues. AOPC attorneys also provide counsel, research and valuable input for the judiciary’s automation projects, including the automated District Justice System and the Common Pleas Criminal Automation Project.

Regarding automation, Pennsylvania’s judiciary launched a new pilot project on-line during the year that allows attorneys, judges, litigants and the general public to retrieve up-to-date appellate court case information on the Internet. The Pennsylvania Appellate Court Management System (PACMS) Docket Sheet Web site is an easy-to-use resource that was designed to provide immediate access to anyone wanting to quickly view and print case information. The new online case information is available through a link on the Pennsylvania judiciary Web site.

Pennsylvania’s state court system long has been among the nation’s leaders in fostering new technology to enhance efficiency in court operations and boost public trust and confidence in the judicial branch of government. Pennsylvania was one of the earliest states to establish an automated system for minor courts (December 1992) and became the second state court system to operate a Web site (April 1995), providing public access to a host of data such as appellate court opinions.

A new publication produced during the year was designed to help Pennsylvanians learn more about their state court system. “Pennsylvania’s Judicial System: A Citizen’s Guide” provides readers with a general overview of the judiciary. The goal is to broadly educate Pennsylvanians about the resources, services and workings of their state court system. The first-of-its-kind brochure by Pennsylvania’s courts is the culmination of more than a year of research, organizing and writing about a diverse state court system that is one of the nation’s oldest. A committee made up of court administrators from around the state helped develop the eight-panel publication.

The full-color brochures have been distributed to each district court administrator and are available within Pennsylvania’s 60 judicial districts, including “row offices,” or from the AOPC directly. In addition, the brochure also appears on the Pennsylvania Judiciary Web site.

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The year ended on a sad note with the passing of former Court Administrator of Pennsylvania Nancy M. Sobolevitch, 63, of Berwyn, who died December 26, 2001, from complications related to a liver-kidney transplant she received in August.

Mrs. Sobolevitch was the first woman, non-lawyer to be appointed Court administrator by the Supreme Court. She took office as Court Administrator of Pennsylvania's Unified Judicial System on March 31, 1986, retiring January 2, 2000, after having served longer than any of her predecessors.

The judiciary takes great pride in demonstrating to you through this report the challenges faced by the courts and how they are being met through our efforts to provide effective service, access and justice for all Pennsylvanians.

Sincerely,



ZYGMONT A. PINES

Court Administrator of Pennsylvania