

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. In addition to the court administrator's office, the departments in Philadelphia include Policy Research and Statistics, Legal, and Judicial Services and Court-Related Education. The deputy court administrator's office is located in Mechanicsburg, just south of Harrisburg, and includes Communications/Legislative Affairs, Administrative Services and Payroll. Also found in Mechanicsburg are the Finance, Human Resources and Judicial Automation Departments. The newly reestablished Judicial Programs Department (formerly "Court Management") has offices at both sites.

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.

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 (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 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 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:

- a study of post-conviction collateral relief (PCRA) petitions to assist the Criminal Procedural Rules Committee in its review of procedures
- an analysis of trial court decisional delay based on the 1997 amendments to Rule of Judicial Administration 703, specifically examining cases awaiting decision over twelve months
- provide research and support to the Judicial Council's Committee on Court Security
- an analysis of transcripts fee schedules in the 60 judicial districts
- assist with drafting amendments to Rules of Judicial Administration
- design of statistical reports for the Common Pleas Automation Project
- expand caseload statistical reporting to include more case types and procedures, such as Mini-Jury Utilization information
- support to the AOPC Finance Department in responding to legislative requests for forecasts and projections involving new initiatives affecting the judiciary.

Within the Policy Research and Statistics Department, the Docket Transcript Section receives, reviews and corrects data on misdemeanor, felony and escalating summary cases filed in the 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 those using the forms on a daily basis.

Legal Department

The Legal Department provides advice and counsel to the Court Administrator of Pennsylvania 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 -- including those of the various courts of the Commonwealth and judicial agencies as well as the Pennsylvania Board of Law Examiners -- 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 and negotiating 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 of Pennsylvania

- assisting in procurement matters
- reviewing legislation affecting the judiciary.

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 2001 the department coordinated even conferences:

- *Pennsylvania Conference of State Trial Judges Mid-Annual Conference*
February 22-25, 2001
- *Commercial Law*
April 19, May 3, 24, 2001
- *Families in Crisis*
May 8-10, 2001
- *President Judges/Pennsylvania Association of Court Management Annual Conference*
June 3-6, 2001
- *Pennsylvania Conference of State Trial Judges Annual Conference*
July 26-29, 2001
- *Settlement Techniques*
October 11, 18, 25, 2001
- *Pennsylvania Association of Court Management Mid-Annual Conference*
November 4-6, 2001

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; handles the filing of financial disclosure statements; works 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 acts as liaison to the Minor Judiciary Education Board.

Judicial Programs

The Judicial Programs Department's 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:

- conceiving, developing and implementing new judicial programs; evaluating and maintaining existing programs
- providing information about judicial program development and trends either within Pennsylvania or 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 program 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.

Judicial Automation

The AOPC's Judicial Automation Department is responsible for developing and maintaining case management systems and other applications for courts and administrative staff. 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.

Reorganization

In late January of 2001, the court administrator announced a complete restructuring of the AOPC's information technology divisions. The Statewide Automation and Information Technology Departments were merged into a unified Judicial Automation Department. This department was tasked with the support of all AOPC and Supreme Court computer systems.

One goal of the reorganization was to unify the computer operations of the AOPC and the appellate courts. The other goal was to

develop a staff prepared to move forward with the Common Pleas automation project and to maintain and upgrade the existing computer systems in place at the AOPC.

In October of 2001, further organizational changes were announced within the Judicial Automation Department, specifically geared at the Common Pleas Project. A management structure for the project was developed that made use of the skills and talents of existing staff.

Common Pleas Project

In April of 2001, the AOPC released a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the development of a Common Pleas criminal case management system. The RFP was unique in that it divided the work to be performed into four distinct entities, called project units, as follows:

- Project Unit One - overall project management and system design activities
- Project Unit Two - database-related activities
- Project Unit Three - programming, report and notice development activities
- Project Unit Four - training and document services.

The RFP was written in a way to permit vendors to bid on as many of the project units as they chose; however, each project unit was evaluated separately and awarded separately.

In September contracts were signed with Deloitte Consulting, Sybase and The Davison Group. Joint Application Design sessions began with representatives from the counties, and by December the first set of sessions had been completed, and the vendors and staff were well into the development process.

The Common Pleas Criminal Case Management System will be deployed primarily

in the county judicial, court administration and clerks of courts offices. It will provide comprehensive case management and processing, including the production of forms, notices and reports. It will also provide the capability for statewide inquiry in various areas and electronic transmission of data to and from many state agencies, including the state police for disposition reporting and the Department of Revenue for financial reporting.

Pennsylvania Appellate Court Case Management System (PACMS)

The Pennsylvania Appellate Case Management System was successfully installed in the appellate court filing offices in late 2000. In the first quarter of 2001, the system was installed in all appellate court judicial chambers, and additional functionality requested by the users during development was added to the system. The enhancement included the release of several hundred management reports for use by the chambers and filing office staff.

Additionally in 2001, PACMS staff introduced on-line docketing statements. A Web site was established to permit Internet users to view and print real-time docket sheets for appellate court cases. The Web docket sheet facility can be found at <http://pacmsdocketsheet.aopc.org>.

Administrative Support Application Project (ASAP)

The ASAP software developed by the AOPC provides an integrated administrative package for the AOPC's finance, human resources, payroll and administrative services departments. While continuing to maintain the current software, a team of AOPC and contract programmers began to enhance and rewrite the ASAP system to provide more flexibility and functionality. Completion of the enhancements is targeted for January of 2003.

District Justice System (DJS)

The installation of Thin Client devices in the district justice offices to provide access to JNET, the executive branch's integrated justice network, and Microsoft Word was completed midway through 2001. A project to install modems and backup lines in each district justice office was also completed in this calendar year. JNET and Word training for DJS staff began and will be complete in the first third of 2002.

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

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 Human Resources Unit, it also orients and answers any questions new employees may have as the employees become members of the judiciary staff.

Human Resources

The Office 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; 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 and a special commission, 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 \$257.5 million in annual appropriations, including \$32.1 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 (approximately \$28.9 million), 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.

In addition to these functions, the Finance Department has been participating on a "need" basis in the development of an updated auto-mated accounting system to serve the UJS to ensure that it fulfills accounting and budgeting needs and requirements. In this process staff have been working to identify and assist in the resolution of incorrect processes and formats. Staff have also been working to establish procedures for the use of the automated system and train users. **AOPC**