

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 to you this Report of the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts for the calendar year 1998. Our goal is to provide you with a general reference document that reflects the dedicated service of the staff of the Administrative Office and the staff and members of the boards and committees of the Supreme Court.

Those of us entrusted with managing and operating Pennsylvania's court system take our responsibilities very seriously. Within this report you will find descriptions for an array of programs and services that provide the framework for an effective judicial system and improvements in the administration of justice.

If a general theme emerged concerning the operation of the Commonwealth's courts in 1998, it would be one in which the Judiciary continued to move in the direction of improving service, access and justice for all Pennsylvanians.

By embracing the latest technologies, sharing information and broadening public participation in the court system, many achievements were made over the year.

Shortly after the start of the year, the Supreme Court moved to strengthen and expand its relationship with the public and its sister branches of state government. The court did so by reviving and broadening the Judicial Council of Pennsylvania, an advisory body with membership from both the private and public sectors.

Among the issues the council initially considered were the planning necessary to move to a greater unification of the judicial system, the accessibility of local rules of court to legal practitioners and the public, and the Judiciary's facility needs in the Harrisburg area.

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Another indication of the Court's desire to hear more diverse voices came in June when the first non-lawyer was selected to chair the Disciplinary Board of the Supreme Court. Carolyn Rudnitsky, a Selinsgrove therapist and educator, also became the first woman to head the board since its creation more than 25 years ago.

Created in 1972, the Disciplinary Board investigates complaints about the conduct of Pennsylvania's 51,000-plus practicing attorneys. Investigations are initiated by the Disciplinary Board on its own or in response to a complaint.

Chief Justice of Pennsylvania John P. Flaherty also issued a call during the year to the state's attorneys to volunteer more of their time and talents to help poor Pennsylvanians who come before the courts in search of justice. The call coincided with the Pennsylvania Bar Association's creation of a Task Force on the Delivery of Legal Services, composed of lawyers and law faculty.

Mindful of Pennsylvania's long and proud history of reondng to the legal needs of its poorer citizens through volunteer service, the chief justice implored attorneys to "ensure the doors of justice will be open" to those who are unable to afford professional help.

The process by which Pennsylvanians elect statewide judges also came under review in 1998 as another example of the court's interest in enhancing public trust and confidence in the judiciary.

The Supreme Court's Special Commission to Limit Campaign Expenditures released its findings after several months of study that included hearings to gather public input.

Though the commission was charged with studying all aspects of the state's judicial campaigns, its major focus centered on determining how to limit ever-increasing campaign spending. Among the group's recommendations were proposed limits on campaign spending, contributions and advertising.

In another election-related matter, the court amended two rules governing judicial conduct to eliminate uncertainty over campaign fundraising activity. The changes clarified when fundraising must end for minor court, trial court and appellate court jurists.

The court also demonstrated the Judiciary's commitment to improved criminal/civil litigation by adopting the state's first rules of evidence. An advisory committee that included attorneys, judges and law school professors recommended adoption of the rules after extensive collaboration and consultation with members of the General Assembly. The Committee on Rules of Evidence was also formally constituted as an advisory body for the courts.

Another example of continuing administrative progress in the courts came with the issuance of new search warrant forms in October 1998 that are easier to access, use and update than previous forms. Thanks to technological advances made possible by Pennsylvania's automated District Justice System, and the Judiciary's effective use of the Internet, new electronic application forms were made available to authorized users in offices and in the field.

The new forms were devised over several months with input from prosecutors, criminal defense lawyers, police officers and judges.

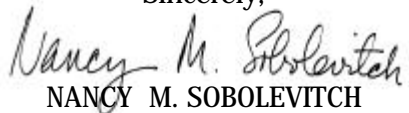
Individual accomplishments during the year included Justice Sandra Schultz Newman's election to the prestigious American Law Institute. Madame Justice Newman joined the select nationwide ranks of other distinguished judges, attorneys and law faculty to promote the law and its adaptation to social needs and justice and encourage scholarly legal work.

The year also marked the passing of former Supreme Court Justice Juanita Kidd Stout who died in August at age 79. Madame Justice Stout was the first black woman to sit on the Pennsylvania Supreme Court.

Madame Justice Stout was appointed by former Governor Robert P. Casey in January 1988 to fill an unexpired term on the high court. She stepped down from the bench later that year after reaching the mandatory retirement age of 70.

As we look back on the year – and the many individuals whose energy and determination helped make a difference – we can be confident in managing an effective court system on behalf of all Pennsylvanians in the years that lie ahead.

Sincerely,



NANCY M. SOBOLEVITCH
Court Administrator of Pennsylvania

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