



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. The four departments in Mechanicsburg, just south of Harrisburg, are Administration, which includes Financial Systems, Payroll and Benefits; the Judicial Computer Project; Judicial Computer Services; 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

Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts

- 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.

Executive Office of the Court Administrator

Staff provide visiting judges to assist with court backlogs and cases involving recusals and provide administrative support to the Court Administrator.

Policy Research and Statistics Department

The Administrative Office's Policy Research and Statistics Department analyzes and evaluates the workings of the Unified Judicial System's various components by examining policies and operations. 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 the county and local courts, including the numbers and types of new, disposed and pending cases, and, for certain categories of cases, the ages of the cases pending adjudication. The 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 also available from the AOPC home page on the Internet, at <http://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 projects undertaken during the past year, the departmental director, together with staff of the Supreme Court's rules committees, has developed a series of formal policy recommendations to:

- unify and streamline local court procedures in order to facilitate the multi-jurisdictional practice of law across the state, reduce litigation delays and costs, and raise the standards of procedural justice in the Commonwealth (proposed Rule of Judicial Administration 103)
- facilitate prompt trial court decision-making (proposed Rule of Judicial Administration 703). This rule was recently promulgated by the Supreme Court with an effective date of January 28, 1997.

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 database is also used for statistical research by the AOPC and other state agencies.

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 and to the other units of the Unified Judicial System (UJS) while also engaging in a variety of administrative duties.

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 Project, 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, (formerly the Data Processing Department), provides staff and services for the Judicial Computer Project (JCP) to bring automation to the courts of Pennsylvania. The department also provides electronic judicial information to other agencies; supports the AOPC's financial, human resources, benefits 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 provided increasing utility to courts and users of court information in Pennsylvania in 1996. By December over 1,500 different users were hitting the 536 pages of information available and downloading 213 megabytes of data per month.

An FTP (Internet File Transfer Protocol) site, accessible to the Commonwealth's Municipal Area Network (MAN), was installed early in the year, allowing data transfer between the AOPC and the Treasury Department, the Pennsylvania State Police and other agencies.

The AOPC also installed an Internet mail post office so that the staff can communicate via the Internet with the outside world. In addition, an imaging system, based on Adobe Acrobat PDF software, replaced paper files and gave users the ability to search DJS documentation from their desktops.

Software Development Unit

Statewide District Justice Automation System

A major accomplishment in the Statewide District Justice Automation System (DJS) in 1996 was the implementation of the system changes resulting from the adoption of the new bail rules that went into effect on July 1, 1996. The changes required to be made in the system to accommodate the rules were extensive and complex. For example, the system had to be redesigned so that any combination of bail types could be accepted and recorded in the system. Thus, a defendant in a bid to satisfy a \$25,000 bail, may do so with any combination of real estate (in or outside of Pennsylvania), cash, surety and government bearer bonds.

The change necessitated the modification/creation of over 148 application objects in the system. This included the creation of 29 new screens, 25 new bail codes for use by district justice office staff in processing bail, four new forms, five new database files and five new case management reports. The creation of the database files consequently led to the conversion of data into the new database.

The implementation of these changes in the live environment was accomplished without

a hitch and the changes were in place on the effective date of the rule.

Another major change to the system in 1996 was the implementation of the new landlord/tenant rules. In addition, 457 routine changes based on user requests were made and implemented statewide.

Over 60,000 programming and analysis hours were expended in analysis, design, coding, testing and training.

The DJS is comprised of 2,723 software programs containing 453,000 lines of code.

Administrative Support Application Project

Work continued on the development of a client/server, Internet/Intranet-enabled application for the AOPC administrative offices, including Payroll, Finance, Procurement and Human Resources. Highlights of 1996 include:

- completion of 30 Functional Requirement Joint Application Development (JAD) sessions
- production of an eleven-volume Functional Requirements document, including process flowcharts, functional requirements listing, reports requirements listing, and forms requirement listing
- development and demonstration of a test payroll application on a client/server platform
- evaluation of application development tools, including Visual FoxPro, Visual Basic, Powerbuilder, Cold Fusion and HTML
- commencement of the conceptual design phase of the project, which includes procedural flows and designs for menus, screens, forms and reports.

Enhancements to Existing Administrative Support Processes

Other projects completed by the Software Development Unit in 1996 include:

- developing processing to allow direct download of Treasury warrant/check reconciliation

information via electronic transmission to replace manual entry procedures

- modifying existing State Employees Retirement System (SERS) reporting via magnetic tape to conform to new SERS computer system application requirements
- addition of work-related disability status and leave processing
- preparation of database files for downloading into Lotus, dBase and MS Access files.

Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) and Public Access

The Administrative Office's EDI and Public Access 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 small PC-based systems.

The interchange of data between the AOPC and other state and local entities, a cost effective and efficient solution, continues to grow. During 1996 the original bulletin board system was converted completely to an Internet solution. Thirteen counties use the EDIOU data as input for their systems. The use of EDIOU has expanded with the addition of the Allentown and Erie Parking Authorities, bringing the total number of users to five. Specifications for Internet and e-mail submissions were piloted with Allentown.

In addition to the popular electronic filing procedures, specific court management reports based on newly revised statistical information are made available to county court administrators at established intervals for use in their day-to-day court management tasks and strategic planning. EDI also posts pertinent warrant, calendar and disposition information for these agencies' information systems to pick up.

Since the establishment of a public access policy in 1994, formal requests for data

have increased. The EDI/Public Access section received and responded to 48 formal requests for information in 1996. Of these, two recurring requests regarding civil cases and judgments were placed into production. Thirty-seven of the requests were from other state agencies, six were from the media and five were of a general public nature.

Such initiatives have required the coordination of several AOPC computer systems and allow the AOPC flexibility in sending or receiving information. They have also eliminated the problem of incompatible or overloaded computer systems, modems and communications lines between the AOPC and other agencies.

A change was made to the public access policy in 1996 to reflect the privacy concerns of juveniles, victims and witnesses. Additionally, specific identifiers such as Operator's License Numbers and Social Security Numbers were removed from access to protect all individuals appearing in the District Justice System.

EDI activities continue to save other state and local agencies an estimated \$5.5 million per year by eliminating redundant keying.

In addition to the above activities, the EDI/Public Access section maintained accounting adjustments for the District Justice System and changes to the Proportionality Review Database, and created and maintained a distributed Name and Address Database System that includes an Intranet-based Lookup component.

Computer Operations Unit

Computer operations staff provide communications and hardware diagnostic service dispatching, archiving, backup, disaster recovery, and daily operation support for the Commonwealth's 577 district justice offices and night courts. This covers 3,367 registered users

as well as the AOPC and appeals courts fiscal, benefits, and personnel computer system. Additionally, operations continued to provide help to the Administrative Support Application Project (ASAP) for the testing of the AS/400 Advance Server as the new platform for the fiscal, benefits and personnel computer system.

The last 15 remote AS/400 RAID disk technology upgrades, providing additional data protection and virtually eliminating downtime attributed to disk failures, were completed in 1996. Additionally, the unit installed an AS/400 Advanced Server as a replacement for CEN02 and rewrote programs in RPG ILE to streamline processes.

A change management function provides installation verification, change coordination and version control for all DJS software developed. Technical support staff distributed a total of 457 program changes in this period on 198 different days. All changes are preannounced for additional testing and coordination using the facilities of an integrated calendaring and e-mail groupware package.

Judicial Computer Support Department

The Judicial Computer Support Department handles training, equipment change requests, the help desk and legal issues related to the Judicial Computer Project. It also provides office automation training and user support for AOPC staff as need arises and resources permit.

Training Unit

The training staff provide classes for district justices and for new employees in district justice offices. They also train new AOPC staff on the automated District Justice System (DJS), provide instruction for AOPC staff on PC applications, and prepare and present a class for district justice continuing education classes at Wilson College in Chambersburg each year.

In addition to training, staff test new software code and develop all electronic help text and laser faxes that are released with any new program change to the DJS. The trainers also research and provide solutions for second-level help desk calls and create and download queries for information from the system for users on request.

Trainers serve as facilitators at Joint Application Design (JAD) sessions and as advocates for the user when design changes are being made to the DJS. This unit is also frequently called upon to conduct statewide surveys, analyze information gathered and create reports for AOPC staff. Individual DJ audit reports performed by the State Auditor General's office are reviewed by the unit and recommendations are made for remediation to the State Court Administrator.

In prior years the training unit has provided instruction for district justices and their employees within the counties. Due to staff reductions prompted by inadequate funding, however, this training has been curtailed. Regional one-day seminars that were beneficial to the operation of the district courts have also been canceled.

Equipment Change Request Unit

All statewide requests for additional hardware, to move hardware or to add new cable are coordinated through this unit. In 1996 district justices and court administrators made 144 requests for this service.

This unit also monitors the telecommunications billings of over \$1.4 million from over 21 telephone service providers statewide.

Help Desk Unit

The Help Desk's staff receive approximately 5,000 calls per month from district justices and their employees. These calls,

which average three minutes in length, cover every possible topic related to the DJS, from hardware to software to procedural matters, from simple questions to complex problems.

Each call received is logged into an automated call management system. Problems referenced in the calls are used to create a historical database, which enables Help Desk staff to quickly find answers to future calls by using the solution database.

The Help Desk Unit also processes requests for expungements of defendant records. In 1996 it received court orders to expunge 6,657 records from the automated system.

The unit also monitors the IBM service contract to ensure calls are being answered within contract limits.

Legal Services Unit

Staff attorneys assigned to this unit have specific knowledge and expertise in legal issues related to the operation of DJ offices and the DJS. They provide support to the programming staff on program design, play an active role in JAD sessions, provide an interface with the statewide Supreme Court procedural rules committees and address questions of a legal nature that are asked of the help desk staff. They also provide ad hoc support to AOPC staff on district justice-related court management issues in lieu of a formal court management department.

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, 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.

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 (1) to assess the impact of statewide funding of the courts on the Unified Judicial System, and (2) to 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 responsibility includes:

- developing necessary policies and procedures on accounting and budget issues
- monitoring and preparing the budget request for 29 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 29 line items and deal with operational issues and policies.
- managing \$197.8 million in annual appropriations to the Judiciary, including \$36 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. 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 related 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 1996 the department coordinated eight major conferences:

- *Pennsylvania Conference of State Trial Judges Mid-Annual Conference*
Philadelphia
February 22-25, 1996
- *New Judges Conference*
Harrisburg
March 14-17, 1996
- *Pennsylvania Conference of State Trial Judges/National Judicial College, Trying and Settling Land Use Cases*
Farmington
March 27-29, 1996
- *Pennsylvania Conference of State Trial Judges/National Judicial College, Financial Statements in the Courtroom*
Farmington
April 1-3, 1996
- *President Judges/Pennsylvania Association of Court Management Annual Meeting*
Pittsburgh
June 9-12, 1996
- *Pennsylvania Conference of State Trial Judges Annual Conference*
Hershey
July 25-28, 1996
- *Pennsylvania Conference of State Trial Judges Computer Proficiency Conference*
Williamsport
October 17-19, 1996

- *Pennsylvania Joint Family Law Annual Conference*
State College
December 1-4, 1996

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. 