

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 state 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 and Research, Legal and Judicial Services. The deputy court administrator's office is located in Mechanicsburg, just south of Harrisburg, and includes Communications/Legislative Affairs, Administrative Services, Payroll and Judicial Security. Also found in Mechanicsburg are the Finance, Human Resources, Judicial Automation and Judicial Education Departments. The Judicial Programs Department has offices at both locations.

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
- overseeing the security of court facilities
- 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 and Research Department

The Administrative Office's Policy and Research 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 caseload management reviews of individual trial courts to statewide evaluations of the safety and security of court facilities.

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.pacourts.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:

- statistical compilation of medical malpractice filings and jury verdicts across the state
- study of Pennsylvania child custody practices and procedures
- design of interactive caseload statistical reporting on the UJS Web site. Customized statistical reports are now available online
- a statewide assessment of court reporting and transcript operations in the Courts of Common Pleas
- revision of orphans' court data collection practices and publications
- a county-by-county inventory of asbestos litigation
- development of a juvenile delinquency caseload statistical report in coordination with the new Juvenile Court Judges Commission automated Case Management System (JCMS)
- support services and training to various committees and associations such as the

Pennsylvania Association of Court Management and the Mid-Atlantic Association of Court Management

- on-site support for local courts in compiling and analyzing caseload statistics
- selection of participating counties and jurors in regional and statewide investigating grand juries in keeping with Pennsylvania Rule of Criminal Procedure 241
- ongoing revision of caseload data collection methods, including a cover sheet that would accompany civil case filings to more precisely identify case types, and publications to keep Pennsylvania current with national trends and standards.
- statewide analysis of juror costs to assist with legislative analyses.

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 state court administrator 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 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 or negotiating leases and contracts for most of the state court system
- providing legal and administrative assistance and advice to the state court administrator
- assisting in procurement matters
- reviewing legislation affecting the judiciary.

Judicial Services Department

The Judicial Services Department provides logistical planning, coordination, administration and staffing for an extensive schedule of educational conferences, seminars and meetings for the Supreme Court, the Administrative Office and affiliated groups.

In 2007 the department coordinated the following conferences:

- *President Judges/Pennsylvania Association of Court Management Annual Conference*
June 3-6, 2007
- *Appellate Court Program*
June 18-21, 2007
- *Pennsylvania Conference of State Trial Judges Annual Conference*
July 19-22, 2007
- *Satellite Program: Civil Litigation*
October 11-12, 18-19, 25-26, 2007
- *Pennsylvania Association of Court Management Conference*
November 4-7, 2007

- *National Association of Women Judges Annual Conference*
November 7-11, 2007
- *Satellite Program: Court Improvement Project*
November 12-13, 2007
- *Judges-Journalism Conference*
December 7, 2007
- overseeing senior judicial assignments, requests for change of venue/venire and AOPC communication with judicial districts concerning president judge elections
- overseeing training, testing and certification of court interpreters
- assisting judicial districts in planning, implementing and maintaining problem-solving courts.

Judicial Programs

The mission of the Judicial Programs Department is twofold: to assist court administrators, judges and staff throughout Pennsylvania to ensure the efficient operation of Pennsylvania's minor and trial courts and to promote equitable access to and administration of justice.

In addition to providing support to judicial districts on issues related to their administrative functions, the department works 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:

- reviewing and assessing local court requests for state-level court administration personnel and other related human resources needs
- collecting, analyzing and disseminating data and information regarding court 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

In 2007 the department was involved in several noteworthy endeavors.

Office of Children and Families in the Courts

In 2007 the Supreme Court's initiative to improve outcomes for abused and neglected children in the judicial system came to life in the operations of the Office of Children and Families in the Courts (OCFC). This effort, funded entirely through federal grants, operates under the stewardship of Supreme Court Justice Max Baer with the support of the Supreme Court and the AOPC.

The first task of the OCFC was the creation of an infrastructure in which all relevant judicial, child welfare and educational officials in each county could meet to share information, discuss common problems and collaborate in crafting solutions to improve the child welfare system of each county. At the same time, a great need has been identified that will enable counties throughout Pennsylvania to share information so that common problems can be better identified and solutions achieved.

The infrastructure is known as the Pennsylvania's Roundtables for Children Initiative. At the base are local meetings in each judicial district known as Children's Roundtables that include child welfare professionals. Each Children's Roundtable sends two representatives to one of ten Leadership Roundtables where participants from counties of similar size discuss common problems and exchange ideas

for solutions. At the top of the structure is the Statewide Roundtable where representatives from each Leadership Roundtable, along with representatives from state agencies and organizations that have an impact on child welfare, meet to discuss issues and problems from a statewide perspective.

The complete infrastructure results in collaboration among agencies and branches and among the various judicial districts around the state, a true network of sharing among all groups involved in child welfare. The first complete round of meetings occurred at all three levels.

With regard to the need for complete and reliable data concerning the operations of juvenile dependency courts in the state, the OCFC is working with the AOPC's Judicial Automation Department to develop improved data in that area.

Problem-Solving Courts

Problem-solving courts, such as drug courts, DUI courts and mental health courts, were the subject of Judicial Programs' efforts in 2007.

With the desire and need among judicial districts to investigate or initiate problem-solving courts around the state, one of the key needs has been training for those courts. Through a grant from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD), a training program for existing drug courts was presented to an overflow crowd of 200 judges, administrators, attorneys and treatment court personnel in State College. Nationally known presenters spoke on a variety of treatment court topics.

A separate program was presented for court personnel from judicial districts, exploring the possibility of establishing treatment courts. This program also was sponsored by a grant from the PCCD. Teams from more than 15

districts heard from experts from Pennsylvania and throughout the nation about the basics of starting a problem-solving court.

Court Interpreters

In the wake of the passage of Act 172 of 2006, which requires that foreign language and sign language interpreters working in the courts of the Commonwealth be certified by the AOPC, the Judicial Programs Department created an interpreter certification program.

The first step toward the ultimate goal of testing and certification was the creation of a registry of court interpreters working in the state. The next step was a mandatory training session. Two-day sessions were presented in various locations across the state beginning in the spring and lasting through the summer.

Those who complete the training session are eligible to take a three-part test necessary to be certified. Applicants first must pass a written examination that measures the candidate's general English language proficiency and usage, knowledge of court-related terms and familiarity with ethical and professional conduct. Applicants then must pass a written exam that assesses their knowledge of the foreign language they speak. Candidates who pass both written exams must then take an oral performance exam that is a simulation of an actual courtroom interpretation. Those who complete this rigorous process become certified interpreters able to work in any court in the Commonwealth. Those who do not pass the final exam have the opportunity for further training and retesting. They still may work as court interpreters under limited circumstances.

Judicial Automation

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

in the Unified Judicial System. 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.

Pennsylvania Appellate Court Case Management System (PACMS)

The Pennsylvania Appellate Court Case Management System (PACMS) is an integrated case management system designed for Pennsylvania's appellate courts—Supreme, Superior and Commonwealth.

The PACMS rewrite project began with Joint Application Development sessions with end-users to define requirements for the updated system. Based on these requirements, a document management component has been added to the project as well as e-filing as a later phase of the project. The system is slated to go live in mid-2009.

Common Pleas Case Management System (CPCMS)

CPCMS is a statewide case management system for Pennsylvania's trial courts that includes docketing, accounting and other important case management functions. The first phase of development covers criminal courts and is used primarily by clerks of courts, court administration and judges and their staffs.

The system produces more than 400 forms and reports, including master account reports. It provides a facility to export report data from the system to other applications such as Microsoft Excel and Access so that counties can customize the presentation of information, if desired.

CPCMS continues to be used by all clerks of courts offices, court administration offices and

criminal judges within the Commonwealth. Many regional training sessions and other ongoing training programs were held this year for both new and existing system-users. The training sessions focus on enhancements to the system as well as providing advanced training in complex areas such as accounting.

The use of the public and secure Web docket sheets continues in popularity with an average of one million hits per month.

This year, in conjunction with the newly established Center for Children and Families in the Courts, Judicial Automation began work on a dependency case module for CPCMS. Pilot counties were selected with a goal of implementing the module in most counties by the end of 2008. The focus of the system is to be able to generate local and statewide statistical information based on national performance measures that will allow the courts to assess their efficiency in handling dependency matters.

Magisterial District Judge System (MDJS)

The Magisterial District Judge System provides case management and accounting functions to all magisterial district judges (MDJs) and their staffs statewide, approximately 3,500 users. The system has been in place since 1992 and generates all forms needed for civil, criminal and traffic case-processing.

The MDJS rewrite project was kicked off early this year. A Joint Application Development team composed of magisterial district judges, their staffs and MDJ court administrators was appointed to work with Judicial Automation to develop system requirements. Meetings were held throughout the year to review new screens and functionality.

Development of the new system will be done in-house. The system will be a modern Windows-based system and will be much more flexible and easier to use.

Administrative Support Application Project (ASAP)

ASAP is a software application that was developed in-house at the AOPC to support the administrative functions of the appellate courts, AOPC and First Judicial District (Philadelphia). The system includes payroll, human resources and finance modules.

Developers supporting this project continue to enhance the system and add new reports based on user requests. This year ASAP programmers have refined the judiciary's Web-based system for filing Statements of Financial Interest to allow judicial officers who retire or resign during the year to file their statements online.

The ASAP team also supports applications developed for the Board of Law Examiners.

Systems Support

The Systems Support team was focused on the following efforts during 2007:

- designing a new telecommunications infrastructure for the courts with competitively-selected vendors to support general office technology as well as use of the various case management systems supported by the AOPC
- developing plans for an in-house Network Operations Center to provide monitoring and dispatch services related to sites operating on the new telecommunications network as well as providing a monitoring infrastructure and the actual monitoring of critical applications servers, Web servers, Web sites and other IT infrastructure resources besides the network
- expanding the capacity of the judiciary's disaster recovery site in coordination with other judiciary efforts related to business continuity planning.

Deputy Court Administrator's Office

Judicial Security

The goal of Judicial Security is to make every state court facility in Pennsylvania a safe place not only for jurists and their staff, but for litigants and their families, jurors, witnesses, victims of crime and the general public to conduct their business.

In 2007 the AOPC completed the project to reimburse counties for the purchase of one or more of four physical security enhancements for courthouses: magnetometers, x-ray screening machines, wireless duress alarm systems and card-key access systems. Fifty-seven counties participated in this project.

The Unified Judicial System of Pennsylvania Judicial Safety Handbook was developed and distributed to all Common Pleas and magisterial district judges in the state as well as all court administrators. The handbook provides safety and security tips for judges to use in their courtrooms, courthouses and homes and in the community.

In addition to the handbook, the Security Manual and Guidebook developed in 2004 was updated to provide guidance on handling biohazard threats and events. The update was based upon the collaborative work of the AOPC and the University of Pittsburgh's Center for Public Health Preparedness.

In the fall a third round of regional workshops was conducted for all local court security committees throughout the Commonwealth. These committees, comprised primarily of president judges, sheriffs, court administrators, county commissioner chairs/county executives and magisterial district judges, are encouraged to meet regularly in order to formulate and implement plans to respond to emergency situations in their courts. During the third round, committee members participated in a table-top exercise designed to capture

strengths and weaknesses in response to an emergency scenario.

Also in the fall, a committee was formed to assist with the development of a proposal and selection of a vendor to provide for video arraignment capabilities in magisterial district courts. With funding from the Pennsylvania legislature, Judicial Security began the process to enable magisterial district judges to conduct preliminary arraignments via live video conferencing.

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 the magisterial district judge and Common Pleas courts, staff also monitor and report on legislation that may necessitate changes to the respective 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 Office of Human Resources, it also orients and answers any questions new employees may have as the employees become members of the judiciary staff.

Judicial Education

The Judicial Education Department was formed in 2005 to provide continuing education to Pennsylvania's jurists. The department works closely with various planning committees to design programs that address new and emerging areas of law and issues of import and interest to judges.

Supreme Court, Superior Court and Commonwealth Court

Since 2004 jurists on Pennsylvania's three appellate courts have attended an annual Appellate Courts Conference. The conference addresses the needs specific to judges serving appellate duties. In addition to educational programs, members of each court hold administrative sessions at these conferences.

The Appellate Courts Conference featured these programs in 2007:

- United States Supreme Court Update
- Executive Power in an Age of Terrorism
- Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Charles Evan Hughes and Judicial Independence.

Courts of Common Pleas

During 2007 more than 85 percent of all trial judges in the Commonwealth attended state-sponsored continuing education programs. Primarily, these programs were held at conferences of the Pennsylvania Conference of

State Trial Judges, which meets twice a year. Staff of the Judicial Education Department worked with the Education Committee of the conference to provide support for the conferences. The three-day conferences provided state-of-the-art educational programs and allowed judges to discuss issues of common interest and concern.

Among the programs at the conference's 2007 meetings were:

- Scientific Custody Evaluations
- Evidence and the Child Witness
- The Schiavo Case: The Right to Die
- Mentally Ill Defendants in the Criminal Court Setting
- Offender Assessment, Programming and Reentry Initiatives
- Bankruptcy Pointers for State Trial Judges
- Controlling Counsel in the Courtroom
- Civil Law Update
- Criminal Law Update
- The Cost of Justice
- Pandemic and Continuity of Operations Planning
- Contempt Powers in Support Enforcement
- Cultural Considerations in Family Court Proceedings
- The Psychological Dynamics of Mistaken Eye Witness Testimony
- The Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act for Juvenile Court Judges
- Proposed Changes to the Guardianship Statute

Symposia

The Judicial Education Department also presents symposia across the Commonwealth. These two-day programs allow jurists the opportunity for in-depth examination of discrete areas of law in smaller, more intensive groups. Often, these sessions are repeated in different regions of the state to maintain small group size and encourage open and critical discourse.

The department presented the following symposia in 2007:

- **Managing the Capital Case in Pennsylvania**
This program was developed with assistance from the Capital Litigation Improvement Initiative, a collaborative effort with staff at the National Judicial College funded through a grant by the Bureau of Justice Administration. In all, 166 Pennsylvania judges from 49 judicial districts (55 counties) completed the program.
- **Managing Complexities in Civil Litigation**
This program was offered in three locations across the state and was open to all trial court judges. The two-day program focused on identifying and managing complexities in civil litigation in a hands-on, workgroup format. Seventy-seven judges from across the Commonwealth attended the workshop.
- **New Judge School Faculty Development Workshop**
In addition to evaluating the New Judge School curriculum and identifying appropriate faculty, a "Train the Trainers" program was presented in November 2007 for New Judge School faculty. The training focused on incorporating the principles of adult learning into conference programs to enhance teaching effectiveness.

New Product Development

Several new products were developed during 2007 to enhance the educational

experience of judges and to increase efficiency in the delivery of educational programs. In addition, department staff contributed to the development of educational materials to enhance civic education about the judiciary and its role in our democracy. Included in these products:

- Legislators' Guide to the Pennsylvania Judiciary

The Judicial Education Department collaborated with staff from the Supreme Court's Judicial Council and the AOPC's Office of Communications and Legislative Affairs to produce a guide to the Pennsylvania judiciary for new legislators. Included in the guide are descriptions of the overall court system, the roles of the various courts, the committees that support the judiciary's activities and the history of the Pennsylvania judiciary.

- Public Health Law CD

The department collaborated with the Pittsburgh School of Public Health to produce an electronic version of the Pennsylvania Public Health Law Bench Book. The CD includes the full text of the bench book as well as the full text of all cases and statutes referenced therein, hyperlinked from the text for convenience. The electronic version was distributed to all trial judges in the Commonwealth.

- Conference Materials on CD

Select conference materials are now being provided on CD rather than in hard copy. The protocol for this was developed by the Judicial Education Department staff and effectively demonstrated at the 2007 annual meeting of the Pennsylvania Conference of State Trial Judges. The CD, with a table of contents, included all written materials from the conference as well as supplemental and non-essential materials. The purpose was to make supplemental material easily accessible, to reduce the size of the conference binder and to reduce costs. The new format has become the standard for judicial education conferences throughout the state.

- Faculty Handbook

A faculty handbook was developed for distribution to conference speakers in advance of their arrival at conferences. The handbook provides logistical information useful for an individual teaching at a judicial education conference. The handbook also provides speakers with suggested presentation techniques and tips on developing effective PowerPoint presentations.

Human Resources

The Department 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 and develops and administers AOPC hiring procedures
- formulates and administers position classification and pay plans for the UJS
- monitors and administers the UJS performance management system
- 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 for 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, 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 \$358.1 million in annual appropriations, including \$39.8 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, 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.

AOPC