

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 with its six 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 and Court-Related Education. The three departments in Mechanicsburg, just south of Harrisburg, are Administration, which includes Financial Systems, Payroll and Human Resources; Judicial Automation; and Communications/Legislative Affairs. Another department -- Judicial Programs (formerly "Court Management") -- awaits reestablishment.

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.

Office of the Court Administrator

In addition to supporting the work of the Court Administrator of Pennsylvania, staff in the office of the court administrator provide visiting judges to assist with court backlogs and cases involving recusals.

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 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 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
- support to the Judicial Reestablishment Committee, including the drafting of reestablishment guidelines and assembling caseload statistic and census figure/population reports
- a study of data regarding judicial safety and security in Pennsylvania, resulting in two published articles as well as presentations
- an analysis of transcripts fee schedules in the 60 judicial districts
- the development of "eForms," which enable judicial districts to submit all of the monthly caseload statistical reports electronically and include caseload analysis tools such as built-in charts and graphs that offer instant feedback, allowing judicial districts to manage their caseloads more effectively

- feasibility analysis of expanding the caseload statistical reports to include more case types, such as the addition of Indirect Criminal Contempt information to the Protection from Abuse report
- support to the AOPC Financial Systems 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, and 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.

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.

Judicial Automation

The AOPC's various automation divisions -- Information Technology, Statewide Automation and the Supreme Court's Office of Legal Systems -- are tasked with developing and maintaining case management systems and other applications as well as providing technology support to the Supreme Court justices, judicial staff and administrative court staff in Pennsylvania.

Several important projects were completed or in progress during 2000.

Pennsylvania Appellate Court Case Management System (PACMS)

The AOPC's most ambitious system to come online in 2000 was the Pennsylvania Appellate Court Case Management System. This system provides case management functions for the Commonwealth's appellate court chambers and filing offices. The system contains case docketing and administrative functions as well as chambers functions including online voting. The system was written in Visual Basic and uses a Sybase database engine and Seagate Crystal Reports to generate notices, forms and reports.

Over the next year, the PACMS staff will continue to enhance the software and provide new functionality, such as the ability for the general public to obtain up-to-date docket sheets for each of the appellate courts over the Web.

Administrative Support Application Project (ASAP)

ASAP is an integrated administrative package for AOPC's finance, human resources, payroll and administrative services departments. It was first introduced to AOPC and First Judicial District users in 1999. Because it did not contain some requested functionality, however, an

effort to provide more flexibility and functionality by reworking some of the base system was initiated. Additional staff was assigned to the project, and new development began while other staff continued to maintain the current system. Completion of the enhancements is scheduled for January 2003.

District Justice System (DJS)

During this calendar year, the AOPC began the roll-out of thin client devices to the district justice courts to provide access to Pennsylvania's Integrated Justice Network (JNET). The district courts also received Microsoft Word software.

DJS staff continued to modify the system based on changes in rules and legislation and to provide enhancements requested by the District Justice System users.

Common Pleas Project

In 1995 the AOPC terminated its initial efforts on a criminal case management system for the Courts of Common Pleas due to inadequate funding. At that time an enormous amount of effort had gone into determining system requirements and designing preliminary screens.

In 2000 an effort to develop this system was reinitiated. A consultant was hired to review the old materials and update them for use in developing an integrated, statewide Common Pleas criminal case management system. Based on site visits and joint application development sessions with users from various counties, new requirements were developed, changes to business practices and rules were noted, and a new set of high-level specifications for the Common Pleas System were generated for a Request for Proposal to be issued for the new system. The Request for Proposal is scheduled for release in spring of 2001.

In conjunction with the Common Pleas System efforts, the AOPC, working with its consultant, also conducted a study of its information technology departments in preparation for beginning the Common Pleas Project. As a result, the Information Technology and Statewide Automation Departments and the Supreme Court's Office of Legal Systems were unified into one large Judicial Automation Department, which now has responsibility for all AOPC and Supreme Court automation initiatives.

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

The Office of Human Resources:

- monitors and ensures 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, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964
- maintains all UJS fringe benefit programs and counsels judiciary personnel regarding their provisions and utilization. The selection of medical programs includes traditional indemnity medical insurance, preferred provider organizations, health maintenance organizations, and a variety of specialized medical insurance plans. Other programs include group and individual life insurance, long-term disability insurance, long-term care insurance, work-related disability and accidental death insurance programs for judiciary personnel.
- 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, and supervises the proper maintenance and administration of these policies
- recruits candidates to fill employment positions within the UJS, designs and places position advertisements, screens candidate resumes, schedules and conducts employment interviews, completes background and reference checks, monitors and facilitates the hiring of selected candidates, provides new hire orientation programs to incoming personnel, and assists employees with questions and concerns related to their pay and fringe benefit programs
- develops and administers AOPC hiring procedures and assists managers in the recruiting, interviewing and hiring of new staff. This includes designing position advertisements, reviewing candidate resumes, scheduling and/or conducting interviews, and completing background and reference checks on candidates
- monitors UJS employment actions to ensure compliance with existing statutes and UJS policies and procedures, performs exit interviews with terminating employees, and assists departing employees with questions and concerns related to their judiciary employment
- maintains COBRA, Retiree and Survivor Medical Insurance Programs that provide medical insurance coverage to former employees, retired judiciary personnel, and surviving spouses of deceased judiciary personnel

- administers uniform classification and pay plans for the UJS, develops and maintains appropriate class specifications and job descriptions, and insures the consistent application of uniform classification and pay standards for all UJS employment positions
- maintains the UJS complement of employment positions, and prepares and processes the personnel transaction orders necessary to effect changes in employee pay and employment status
- develops training curriculum, policies, and procedures; schedules and administers training programs for judiciary personnel; and maintains necessary training logs and records

Financial Systems Unit

Financial Systems 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. The Financial Systems unit 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. Financial systems 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 \$235.4 million in annual appropriations, including \$32.1 million in grants to counties
- participating in the annual financial audit of the UJS. This includes preparing and providing the necessary financial records and information and responding to questions; reviewing the audit results; drafting footnotes to statements; and approving the draft that is submitted to and voted upon by the Judicial Audit Agency (JAA). Staff also participate in the JAA and make recommendations to the JAA regarding accounting policies and procedures
- 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, including purchases, service contracts and reconciliation. 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, Financial Systems has been participating on a "need" basis in the development of an updated automated 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.

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 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 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 2000 the department coordinated nine conferences:

- *New Judges Conference*
January 9-15, 2000
- *Pennsylvania Conference of State Trial Judges Mid-Annual Conference*
February 24-27, 2000
- *Corporate and Commercial Law Program*
May 29 and June 23, 2000
- *President Judges/Pennsylvania Association of Court Management Annual Conference*
June 4-7, 2000
- *Pennsylvania Conference of State Trial Judges Annual Conference*
July 27-30, 2000
- *Creative Sentencing Seminar*
September 8, 15, 22, 2000
- *Evidence Seminar*
October 13 and 27 and November 17, 2000
- *Pennsylvania Association of Court Management Mid-Annual Conference*
November 5-7, 2000
- *Pennsylvania Joint Family Law Conference*
November 30-December 1, 2000

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 disclosures and disseminates news clippings of interest state-wide for the Pennsylvania judiciary.

Judicial Services' other functions include publishing *Jurisprudence*, a judicial newsletter

linking Pennsylvania's trial judges across the state; 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. 