



AOPC ANNUAL REPORT 2017

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF PENNSYLVANIA COURTS



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Message from the court administrator

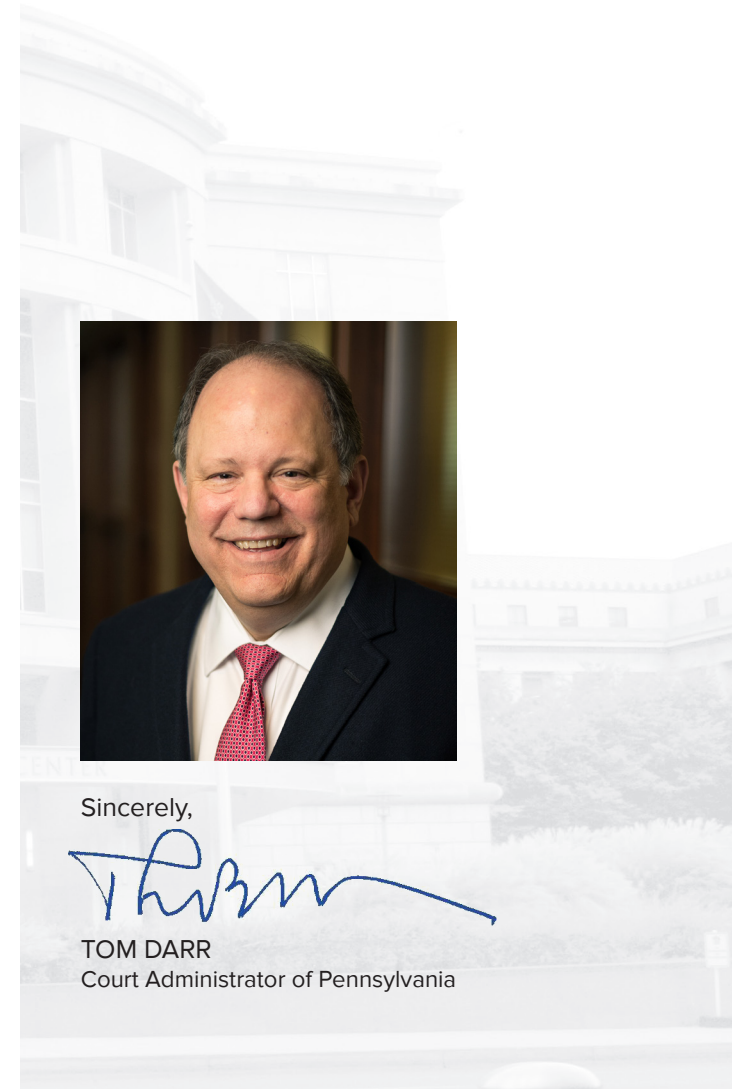
I am pleased to present this Annual Report of the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC). The delay in presenting this 2017 information occurs because of staff transitions and the desire to readjust the report's format. We regret the delay but hope the new format proves useful.

Among our highest priorities, the AOPC has long been committed to facilitating access to justice— whether that comes in the form of recruiting and certifying court interpreters, advocating for Pennsylvania's elders with the creation of the new Guardianship Tracking System (GTS) or offering rehabilitative programs through our problem-solving courts.

While technology and innovation are modernizing these efforts, the AOPC remains committed to its original mission of keeping Pennsylvania's courts open, transparent, safe and efficient.

This report primarily focuses on the departments and offices that make up the AOPC, while also referencing the work and role of the Court's various boards and committees which fall under the direction and supervision of the Supreme Court.

Comments regarding this report may be directed to AOPC/ Communications.



Sincerely,

TOM DARR
Court Administrator of Pennsylvania

How the court system works

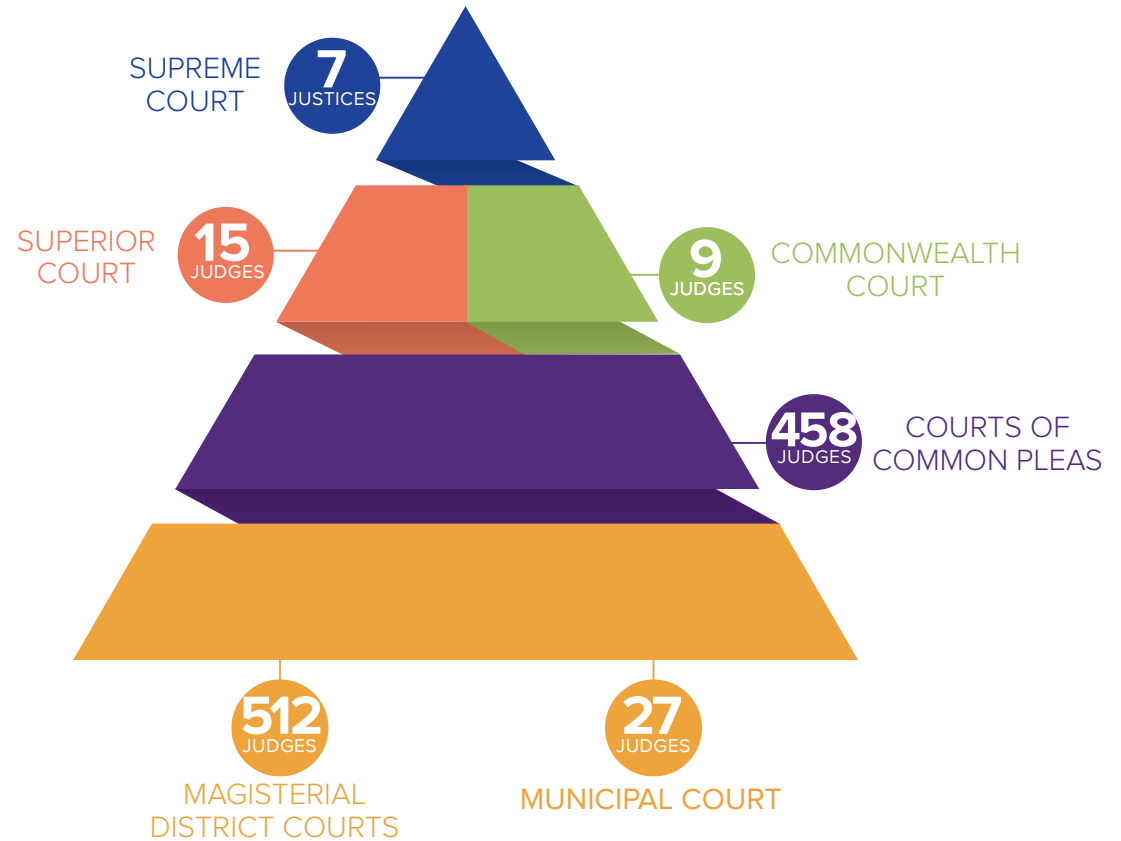
FACILITATING ACCESS TO JUSTICE IS THE HIGHEST PRIORITY OF PENNSYLVANIA'S COURTS.

We approach each and every day with this focus – to keep courts open, safe, accessible, fair, effective, responsive and accountable.

Pennsylvania continues to lead the nation in our use of technology to make the courts accessible and efficient. Our court data is used widely in government to help make informed policy decisions and to foster public safety.

Our programs provide opportunities for dramatic differences in peoples' lives and are proving to be cost-savers as well.

The Pennsylvania court system is structured like a pyramid with the Supreme Court at the top. All courts fall under the umbrella of the



Unified Judicial System (UJS) headed by the Supreme Court. In the interest of full transparency and accountability, Pennsylvania's UJS provides comprehensive public access to court records online and upon request. [Learn more about Pennsylvania's Unified Judicial System.](#)

WHO WE ARE

Defining the AOPC

The Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC) is the administrative arm of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court.

Led by the Chief Justice of Pennsylvania, the Supreme Court supervises and administers Pennsylvania's judicial branch of government. To assist it, the Supreme Court appoints the court administrator of Pennsylvania.

THE AOPC IS RESPONSIBLE FOR:



Representing the court system to the public and at all government levels, providing each with reliable information



Developing and maintaining information technology resources, such as case, financial and administrative management systems



Facilitating safe and accessible courts for all



Providing legal services to system personnel



Recommending **court system improvements** and program innovations



Conducting **continuing education programs** for judges and staff



Managing administrative functions including finance and human resources



Educating the public about the courts' roles and functions, ensuring all court information is as transparent and publicly accessible as possible



Assisting president judges and district court administrators in **management** of local courts

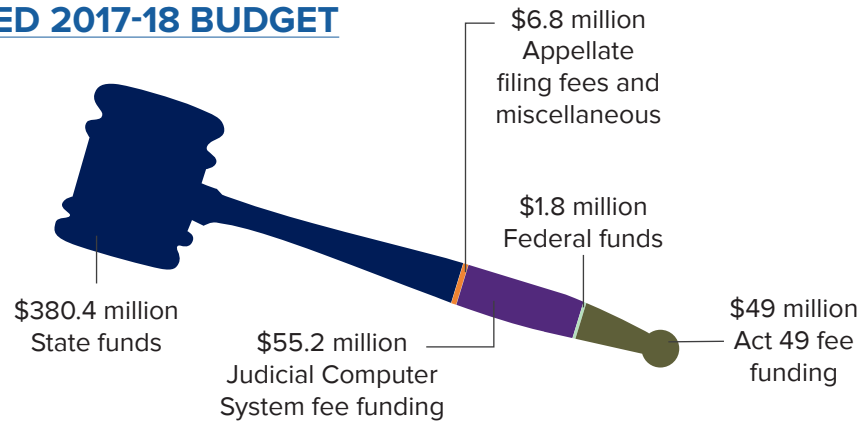
How the court system is funded

AOPC/Finance provides critical management of budget, accounting and payroll systems for the entire UJS and serves as the primary resource for the organization on financial matters.

The Pennsylvania Constitution calls for justice to be administered without “sale, denial or delay.” That mandate shapes the core mission of the courts – delivering fair, timely and accessible justice for all. Adequate funding with an ongoing commitment to efficiency and the wise and transparent use of public funds allows the mission to be met.

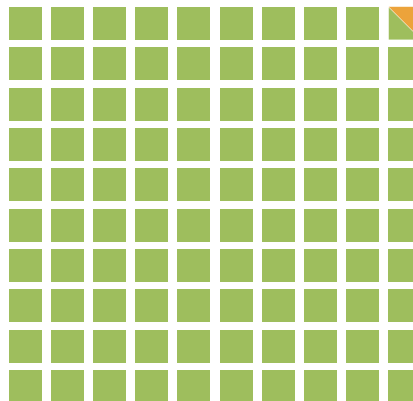
The judiciary strives to use tax dollars wisely and efficiently. Over the last nine years, reducing its personnel complement, renegotiating leases and contracts, containing benefit costs and limiting merit and cost-of-living increases has saved more than \$75 million.

PROPOSED 2017-18 BUDGET



JUDICIAL SYSTEM FUNDING

The judiciary receives about ½ of 1% of the state budget



MORE THAN \$75.3 MILLION IN SAVINGS



- complement
 - renegotiated leases
 - MDJ eliminations
 - health care cost efficiencies
 - limited merit and cost-of-living increases
-

WHO WE ARE

By the numbers



Pennsylvania's problem-solving courts had a **63% combined successful graduation rate.**



Pennsylvania courts collected nearly **\$471 million** in fees, fines, costs and restitution.



29% of Pennsylvania's active judges were women.



2.3 million new cases were filed in magisterial district courts.



39,083 protection from abuse (PFA) orders were filed.



52% of children who were under court supervision and left the system were reunited with family or relatives.



66.2 million docket sheets were viewed for free on our website.



Family court judges monitored over **15,500 youth who were adjudicated delinquent**, promoting youth rehabilitation and public safety.



44,342 people served on a jury.



Facilitated **34,809** requests for interpreters.



More than **7,000 followers** on Twitter @PACourts.



Judges completed more than **34,000 hours** of continuing education.

For more numbers see the [AOPC's interactive data dashboards.](#)

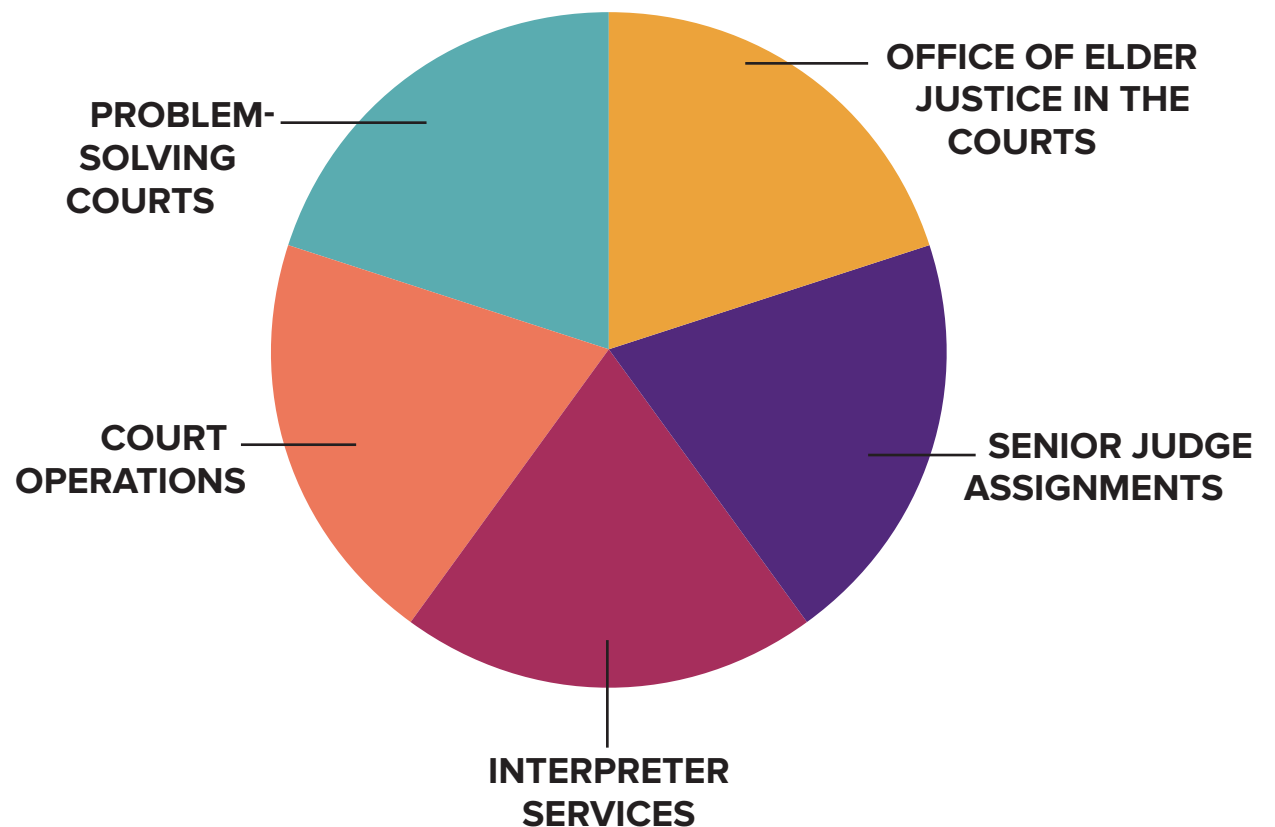
FACILITATING ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Judicial operations

[AOPC/Judicial District Operations and Programs](#) Department works closely with court administration at both the state and local level to supplement the efficient operation of minor and trial courts and to promote equitable access to justice.

While funding for all AOPC operations comes mainly from appropriated state funds and also from fee funding, it receives a small amount of federal funds –including a STOP Grant.

COMPONENTS OF JUDICIAL DISTRICT OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT:



Evaluating judicial resources

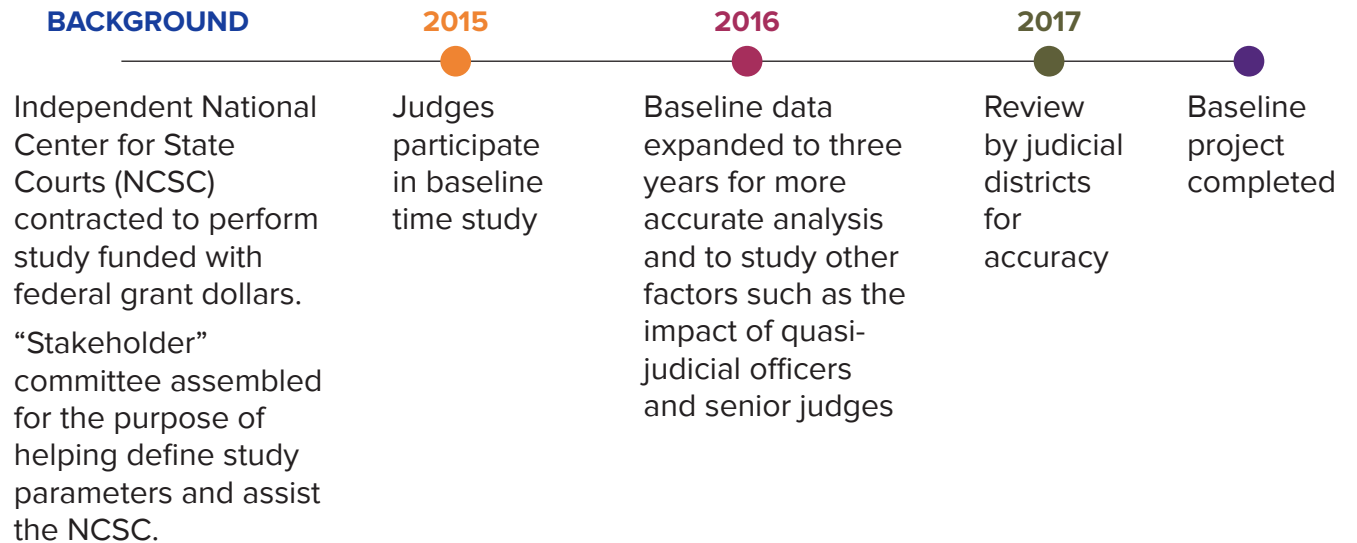
The [Common Pleas Judicial Needs Assessment](#), administered by AOPC/

Judicial District Operations is a statewide study that uses data to help determine the ideal allocation of judicial resources needed to manage and resolve current Common Pleas Court caseloads.

But a judicial needs assessment is not a simple metric that indicates whether a judicial district has the right amount of judges, too many or too few. It is really the beginning of the analysis and discussion for decision-makers to examine judicial resources necessary to meet the needs of traditional and specialized caseloads.

Going forward, the study will serve as a component of ongoing year-to-year measurement and analysis.

JUDICIAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT TIMELINE



Overall, Pennsylvania's Courts of Common Pleas are "sized" correctly according to a time study of three years of data. That means that counties generally have the right number of judicial resources to do the job. This study is a component of ongoing year-to-year analysis that incorporates additional information.

Common Pleas judges completed nearly **40 million minutes a year** of case-specific work during the three-years study

FACILITATING ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Problem-solving courts

More than 20 years ago, Pennsylvania established [problem-solving courts](#), in an effort to address a growing need in the community for those struggling with addiction. Since that time, the need for additional services and support to address major social policy issues has grown, and the role of the courts along with it.

Today, more than 115 problem-solving courts are operational across the state, serving those with DUI offenses, veterans, those living with a mental illness and more. These specialized courts focus on behaviors and conditions that many times are linked to crime and social problems and have a major impact on the court system.

Rather than serve jail time, defendants may complete community service and are given access to counseling, treatment opportunities for addiction, educational assistance and healthcare support.

Completing the program and graduating opens doors to the future for these defendants, with many seeing their charges dismissed, sentences reduced or criminal records expunged.

2017 HIGHLIGHTS:



Participants completed **30,281 hours** of community service



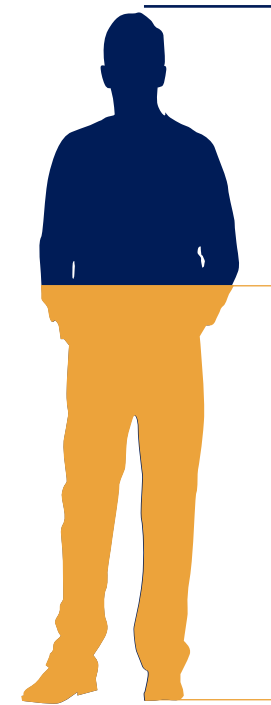
290 participants achieved an increase in education



685 participants who were unemployed found jobs



Successful graduates spent an average of **646 days** in the program.



From July 1, 2016 - June 30, 2017

2,459 participants were admitted.

1,490 defendants graduated.

Supporting Pennsylvania's elders

From 2010 through 2017, the population of Pennsylvania's elders age 65 and over grew at a rate more than 20 times that of the state's general population – a 16.3% increase.* Pennsylvania ranked seventh in the nation for the percent of its population 65 years and older.

AOPC's [Office of Elder Justice in the Courts \(OEJC\)](#) assists the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania and the Advisory Council on Elder Justice in the Courts in implementing the recommendations made by the Elder Law Task Force, while fostering collaborations with elder justice entities.

Through education, training programs and presentations, the OEJC promotes best practices in the areas of guardianship, elder abuse/neglect and access to justice for elders in the Commonwealth's courts. The OEJC also calls attention to the prevention of elder abuse.

* Penn State Data Center Research Brief, Population Characteristics and Change: 2010 to 2017, Updated 7/10/2018

2017 HIGHLIGHTS:



Created informational posters and brochures about the warning signs of elder abuse and how to report it for distribution within the court system*



Participated in fifteen educational programs about the Advisory Council's work that were presented to diverse elder justice entities



Contracted with **Temple University** to develop educational sessions for judges and training programs for court staff on elder abuse and exploitation



Participated extensively with AOPC/IT in the development of the **Guardianship Tracking System**



Began collaborating with the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania and the Social Security Administration representatives about data-sharing and other issues regarding the representative-payment program

* Paid for with STOP Grant funds

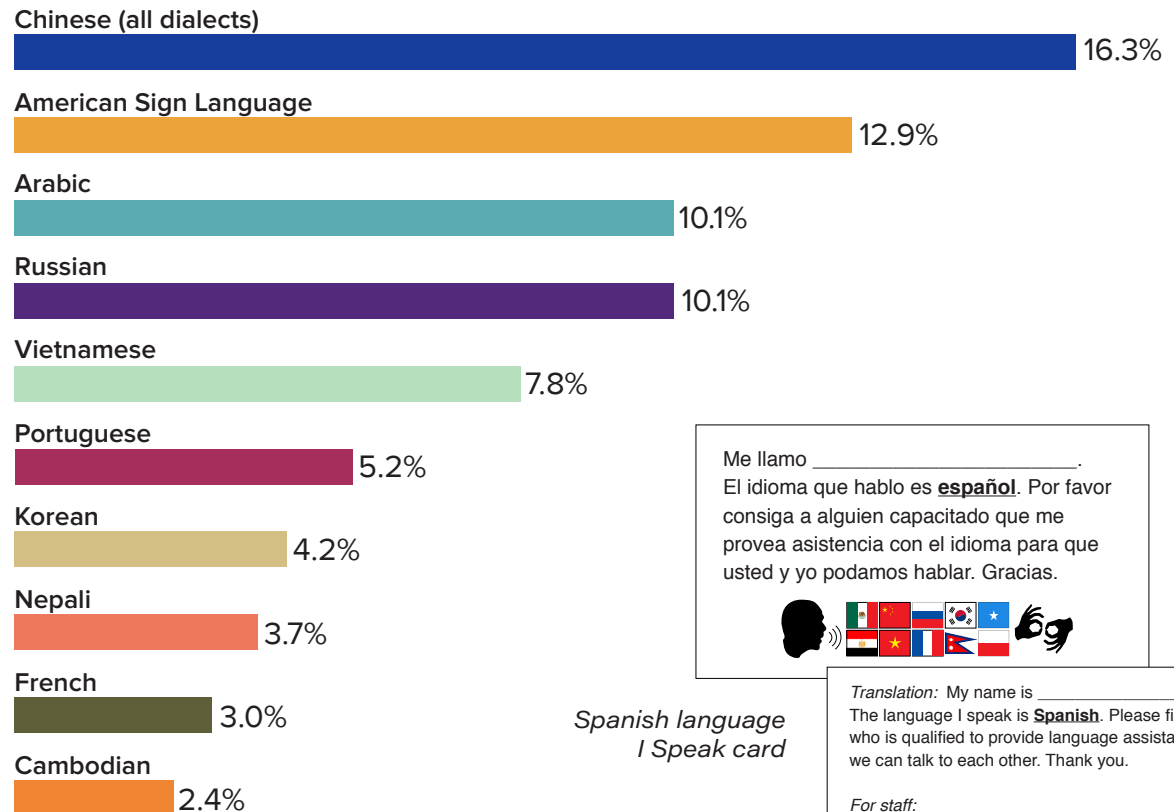
FACILITATING ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Language access

The Supreme Court adopted a [Language Access Plan](#) for the Unified Judicial System in March 2017 and appointed a Monitoring and Evaluation Team comprised of a judge, foreign and sign language interpreters, a district court administrator, and practicing attorneys to undertake implementation and evaluation of the plan. A [judicial bench card for working with interpreters](#), [I Speak cards](#), and a [Notice of Language Rights](#) were produced and disseminated to the judicial districts.

THE TOP 10 LANGUAGES REQUESTED OTHER THAN SPANISH

81% of all interactions were for Spanish language interpreters



Me llamo _____.
El idioma que hablo es **español**. Por favor consiga a alguien capacitado que me provea asistencia con el idioma para que usted y yo podamos hablar. Gracias.



Spanish language
I Speak card

Translation: My name is _____.
The language I speak is **Spanish**. Please find someone who is qualified to provide language assistance so that we can talk to each other. Thank you.

For staff:
For counter assistance, utilize bilingual staff or contact your telephone interpreting provider. For a courtroom proceeding, contact your court's Language Access Coordinator for assistance.

Recruiting and certifying court interpreters

AOPC's [Interpreter Certification Program \(ICP\)](#), established in 2004, is a critical part of the UJS's Language Access Plan. It aids the judiciary in providing language access for all court proceedings and services by recruiting, training and certifying court interpreters.

The ICP holds four orientation sessions per year and engages in numerous outreach events statewide, increasing their exposure in local communities and enlisting qualified candidates.

2017 HIGHLIGHTS:



\$3.69 million spent on
34,805 interpreter requests



217 interpreters on the statewide roster
represent **33 languages**



participated in **eight outreach events**



Developed and implemented **trauma-informed interpreter training***

* Paid for with STOP grant funds

KEEPING COURTS SAFE AND SECURE

Judicial District Security

AOPC's [Office of Judicial District Security](#) evaluates and manages emerging threats, in addition to implementing innovative protective measures and security protocols.

Their staff review security policies and procedures, develop training and educational materials to enhance situational awareness and incident avoidance, and provide regional workshops for local court security committees throughout the state.

The office also evaluates security needs and requests for security enhancements and administers ongoing grant programs to provide courts with essential security equipment.

2017 HIGHLIGHTS:



623 security incidents reported for common pleas and magisterial district courts. Of those,



511 involved law enforcement



107 incidents results in criminal charges



Rolled out the new security incident filing platform (PAJIRS) to all common pleas and magisterial district courts.



Held a **Local Court Security Workshop for 380 participants**. It focused on potential risk to the court facility and measures to improve court facility security, with a focus on **staff training**.



All common pleas and magisterial district courts were afforded an opportunity to participate in a **video conferencing upgrade** via reimbursement.

PROVIDING FOR THE MOST VULNERABLE

Protecting children

The judiciary's federally-funded [Office of Children and Families in the Courts \(OCFC\)](#), a program initiated by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, continues to have dramatic impacts on the lives of children while contributing savings to the state.

OCFC works with judicial leaders and child advocates to place neglected and abused children in permanent homes rather than in temporary foster care. This improves a child's opportunities to succeed and significantly reduces the cost of institutional care - a savings of hundreds of millions of dollars in the past decade.

2017 HIGHLIGHTS:

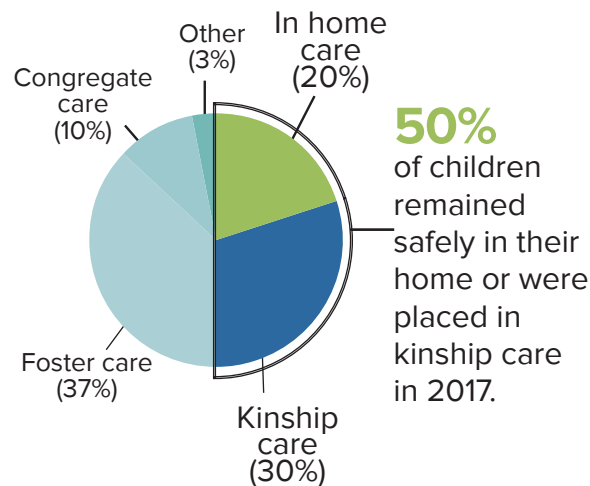


Celebrated **10 years of helping** to improve the lives of children in Pennsylvania through continuous growth and improvements to the dependency system.



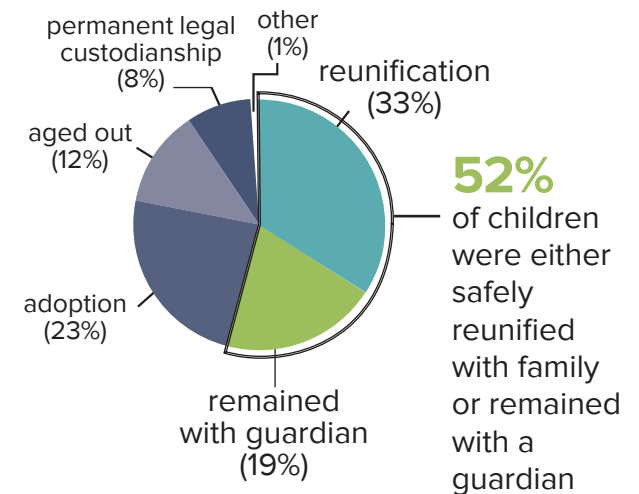
Launched **Family Engagement Initiative**, a collaboration between the judiciary, legal advocates and the child welfare system to meaningfully involve family and focus on child well-being.

Kinship care placements nearly doubled over the past five years



20,270 Total placements in 2017

Reasons court supervision ended in 2017



Leading in court innovations

[AOPC/Information Technology](#)

develops, maintains and updates statewide case management systems for all three levels of Pennsylvania's courts (Appellate, Common Pleas and Magisterial District courts). The systems are linked, allowing case data and information to be shared as cases move through the court system.

Court technology helps make court information significantly more accessible, improves collection of fines, fees, costs and restitution, and creates administrative efficiencies for courts and other government agencies.

2017 HIGHLIGHTS:



2.65 million

cases were docketed



\$114 million

in fines, fees, costs collected online through PAePay®



66.5 million

docket sheets were viewed on our website



221,000

documents were e-filed statewide



38,000

law enforcement and public safety officials used our case management systems to perform daily duties

System design and development

Funded by fees and fines rather than taxpayer dollars, AOPC/IT provides office support for the Pennsylvania Supreme Court and AOPC, and performs all aspects of the software development lifecycle in systems' design – from writing the code and testing its functions, to overseeing its implementation, to providing all necessary training and help desk support.

2017 HIGHLIGHTS:



Completed the bulk of design and began coding for the new **Guardianship Tracking System**



Continued to **improve the use of Common Pleas Case Management System** by rolling out document management and e-filing to complement case processing



Worked to create system accommodations for two major legislative mandates – the **State Income Tax Intercept**, allowing for any unpaid court obligations to be captured from tax refunds, as well as **Limited Access**, a predecessor to Clean Slate that allows a person to petition the court to seal their criminal record from public view. Only certain qualifying misdemeanors and ungraded offenses were eligible, and the defendant must have completed all court-obligations before petitioning.



Created and maintained a system allowing over **75,000 attorneys** to complete their annual registration and pay their annual fee **entirely online**.

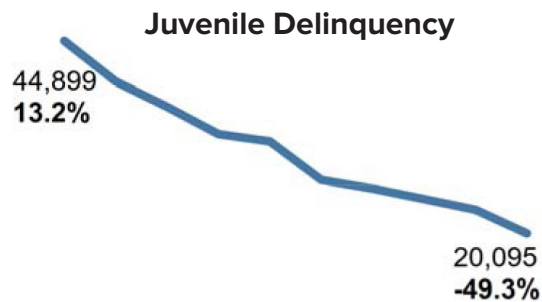
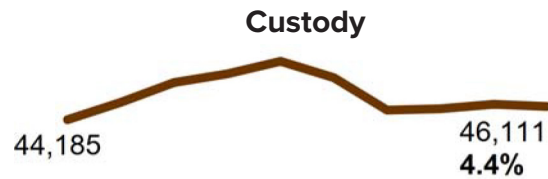
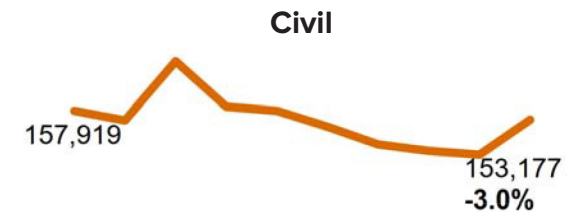
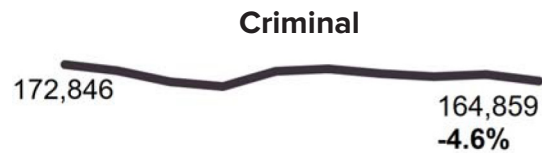
ASSEMBLING AND ANALYZING COURT DATA

Research and Statistics

[AOPC/Research and Statistics](#) collects and analyzes statewide court data, developing annual caseload statistics to help determine trends that inform policy and practice improvements.

In addition to providing data and analysis to the courts on topics related to case management, and court programs and operations, AOPC/Research and Statistics facilitates the public's access to this information by publishing data online via web-based reports and on the courts' interactive data dashboards.

STATEWIDE FILINGS FROM 2008-2017:



View the full collection of [2017 court data](#) from all levels of the court system.

Drafting and recommending rules

More than 180 appointed volunteers — most of whom are lawyers and judges — make up the various boards, committees and advisory groups that aid the Pennsylvania Supreme Court on a wide range of court matters.

More specifically, the rules committees assist the Court in establishing statewide rules governing procedures in cases. These committees study and draft rules before making recommendations to the Court.

Rule change proposals are published for public comment before being submitted to or adopted by the Supreme Court.

RULES COMMITTEES 2017 HIGHLIGHTS:



The **eight committees** are made up of **95 members** that met **26 times**.



43 proposed recommendations were published for public comment.



33 recommendations were submitted to the Court for consideration.



23 recommendations were adopted by the Court.

Rules Committees

- Appellate Court
- Criminal
- Civil
- Domestic Relations
- Orphans' Court
- Rules of Evidence
- Juvenile Court
- Minor Court

Read more about the [roles and functions of the different rules committees](#).

Regulating the practice of law

The following Supreme Court Boards are responsible for regulating lawyers and the practice of law throughout the commonwealth. Most of the boards are funded by fee revenue* – most of which comes from the **\$225 attorney registration fee** collected by the Disciplinary Board annually.

2017 HIGHLIGHTS:

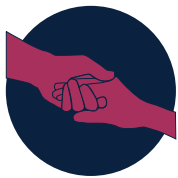


The **Board of Law Examiners** is empowered to assess the competency, character and fitness of candidates seeking admission to the bar. It administers the bar exam to prospective lawyers twice every year and issues a certificate recommending admission to those that meet the requirements.

2,361 applications were processed, most of which were for the bar exam.

2017 Pennsylvania Bar exam **pass rates:**

- July **74%**
- February **54%**



The **Interest on Lawyers Trust Account (IOLTA) Board** provides critical funding for civil legal aid to the poor and disadvantaged of Pennsylvania.

Nearly **\$16.1 million** was distributed statewide.

They awarded a three-year, **\$1,715,170** grant to the Pennsylvania Bar Foundation to administer a **Loan Repayment Assistance Program** to help legal aid attorneys manage their student loan debt.



The **Pennsylvania Lawyers Fund for Client Security Board** ensures clients will be reimbursed when lawyers misappropriate funds.

During fiscal year 2017 the board's review of **393 claims** resulted in **274 awards** totaling **\$6,094,344**.



The **Disciplinary Board of the Supreme Court** regulates attorney conduct in support of its mission to “protect the public, maintain the integrity of the profession, and safeguard the reputation of the courts.”

3,707 disciplinary complaints were opened,

3,555 disciplinary complaints were resolved.

In 2017, the Board launched a **new website**, providing visitors enhanced guidance and information.

Read more about the [specific functions of each board](#), and learn about the Court's different [advisory groups and independent entities](#).

* With the exception of the Minor Judiciary Education Board.

ASSISTING THE SUPREME COURT

Continuing education

Under order of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, all judges and lawyers in the state are required to complete continuing education requirements each year. Volunteers are appointed by the Court to make up the various boards that are responsible for overseeing these efforts.

2017 HIGHLIGHTS:



The **Continuing Legal Education (CLE) Board** regulates lawyer compliance with CLE requirements and accredits ongoing education programs for lawyers.

61,812 lawyers took **824,416 CLE credits**.

99.8% of lawyers met the requirements of the CLE Rules.



The **Minor Judiciary Education Board** administers certification and education programs for magisterial district judges and arraignment court magistrates.

583 judges each attended **week-long sessions** of judicial education.

Some 2017 MJEB session topics included:

- Alternative Dispute Resolution
- Dog Law and Animal Cruelty
- PA Motor Vehicle Code Update
- Truancy Law
- Crash (accident) reconstruction



The **Pennsylvania Continuing Judicial Education Board** was established in 2017 to oversee a continuing education program for trial and appellate judges in ethics and other designated areas of substantive law.

Judges completed a combined total of **15,369 hours** of continuing education.

Read more about the [specific functions of each board](#), and learn about the Court's different [advisory groups and independent entities](#).

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

Educating jurists

AOPC's [Judicial Education Department](#) provides continuing education opportunities to Pennsylvania's jurists, working closely with various planning committees to address new and emerging areas of law or issues of importance to judges. A knowledgeable judiciary is essential to the fair and impartial administration of justice.

Judges serving the appellate courts, Courts of Common Pleas and the Philadelphia Municipal Court complete continuing judicial education (CJE) requirements to stay abreast of changes in law, procedure, behavioral science, technological advancement and legal circumstances unique to Pennsylvania.

2017 HIGHLIGHTS:



100% of judges
complied with the 2017 CJE requirement.



more than 15,000 hours of CJE activity
were collectively reported by trial and appellate judges, an average of more than
24.2 hours of CJE activity per judge (twice the requirement).



All nine law schools

in Pennsylvania have agreed to partner with AOPC/Judicial Education in developing CJE programs. The [Pennsylvania Continuing Judicial Education Board's website](#) went live in September 2017 and provides judges access to transcripts of their CJE activities, real-time status of their compliance, info about upcoming programs and events, FAQs and contact info.

Working with state government partners

AOPC's [Office of Legislative Affairs](#)

organizationally falls under the Court Administrator's Office, and represents the AOPC before the state's executive and legislative branches of government.

Legislative Affairs staff is responsible for coordinating all interaction with the legislature, subject to the guidance of the court administrator and the Chief Justice of Pennsylvania.

They provide legislative support to the Unified Judicial System including all courts, boards, advisory groups and the AOPC.

As an important result of the judiciary's commitment to working with their government partners, proposed legislation receives crucial input from AOPC's legislative staff regarding the effects it may have on relevant courts, as well as on Pennsylvania's judicial system as a whole.

2017 HIGHLIGHTS:



Assisted in the reauthorization of surcharges that provide **\$46 million** for necessary judicial operations, making up **11%** of the judiciary's annual budget



Collaborated with state partners to develop the **Justice Reinvestment 2 Initiative**, which saves money for conventional sentencing and correction reassures and reinvests it into innovative criminal justice reforms



Assisted in the reauthorization of the expired **senior judge operational support grant program**



Served as information resource to the Legislature as they added **eight new Court of Common Pleas seats**:
• Bucks County (2) • Cumberland County • Wayne County • Washington County • Delaware County • Montgomery County • Monroe County



Facilitated data requests that assisted the legislature in its crafting of legislation amending the **Crimes Code, Transportation Code, Crime Victims Act** and other statutes

Public education and outreach

AOPC's [Office of Communications](#) manages media inquiries, social media accounts, website content, public information and educational opportunities to engage with the judicial branch.

By focusing on communication and outreach, the public has access to information about the key court programs, services and support available to them.

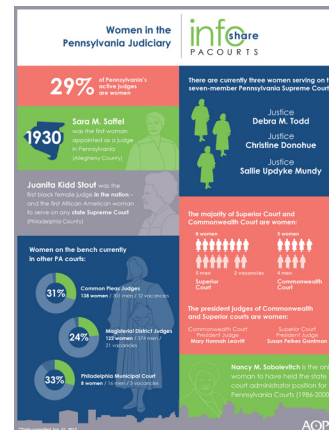
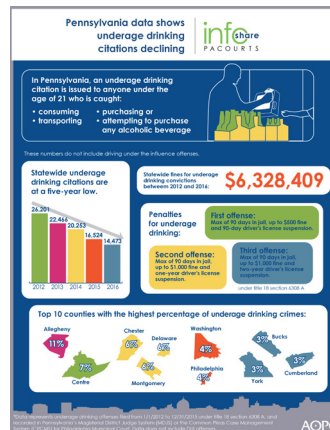
From educational videos to monthly infographics and an increased focus on the use of social media channels, case information, data and general information about the courts is more readily available and accessible to the public.

2017 HIGHLIGHTS:



By the end of 2017, the [@PACourts Twitter page](#) had nearly **7,000 followers** and generated nearly **1 million** tweet impressions.

Pennsylvania Courts InfoShare is a monthly educational campaign explaining common legal terms and showcasing data collected by the UJS computer systems. For more visit <http://www.pacourts.us/news-and-statistics/media-resources>



The [AOPC Vimeo page](#) showcases educational, instructional and promotional videos about the Unified Judicial System of Pennsylvania.



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