



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

NEWS RELEASE

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PA Supreme Court Upgrades Security at County Courthouses; Expands Nation's First Court-initiated Automated Security Incident Reporting System

HARRISBURG, Sept. 25, 2007 – As part of the Supreme Court's ongoing efforts to improve court security, X-ray machines, magnetometers, duress alarms and card key entry systems have been installed, and an automated security incident reporting system implemented, in county courthouses throughout Pennsylvania, Chief Justice of Pennsylvania Ralph J. Cappy announced today.

"Troubling, but true," Chief Justice Cappy said, "that statistics show that every week there are several security incidents in Pennsylvania courts. The security equipment and the automated security incident reporting system will be important tools to increase the safety and security of the general public, judges, court staff and all who have business in Courts of Common Pleas. Our efforts are focused on securing court facilities for the people who use them."

Fifty-seventy counties are participating in the court's reimbursement program for the security equipment. More than \$2.2 million will be reimbursed for 25 magnetometers, 35 X-ray machines, 23 card key entry systems and 43 duress alarms. In addition to these hardware security measures, the automated security incident reporting system, known as Pennsylvania's Judicial Incident Reporting System, (PAJIRS), was implemented in all 67 counties through the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC) on August 31.

PAJIRS, previously implemented in the state's 548 magisterial district courts (MDJ courts), was the first court-initiated electronic security incident reporting system in the nation. Since its inception in July 2005, 442 court security incidents have been reported.

"Now PAJIRS will enable Common Pleas judges, court administrators, sheriffs and other designated users to create, review, and respond to security incident reports," said Court Administrator of Pennsylvania Zygmunt A. Pines. "The system will provide vital information on actual or potential threats and, as we collect more data, will enable us to monitor security incident trends and direct resources for security improvements consistent with our continuing efforts to assist counties with court security needs."

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A security incident is defined as “an event that has the potential to cause, or has in fact caused, personal injury or property loss.” Incidents include: attempted or actual acts of violence to persons or property of the court, verbal or written threats of further violence, and/or conduct or patterns of conduct which cause concern about the possibility of future violence.

Each reported incident is reviewed by a member of the AOPC’s Office of Judicial Security. Follow-up calls are made to ensure that law enforcement has been contacted where appropriate, and to provide guidance to local court staff.

“Pennsylvania's security incident form is playing an important role in test-piloting a national effort to encourage all states to implement such a security practice,” Pines added. “The hope is that the systematic collection of security information will be helpful to local, state and federal law enforcement.” Pines co-chairs the Security and Emergency Preparedness Committee of the Conference of State Court Administrators and Conference of Chief Justices. The committee is undertaking the security initiative on a national level.

PAJIRS and the funding of security equipment are among several of the statewide court security initiatives undertaken by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court Judicial Council’s Committee on Judicial Safety and Preparedness. Other initiatives include creation of the Unified Judicial System of Pennsylvania Court Safety and Security Manual and related Guidebook; the creation of local court security committees; local court security committee workshops in 2005, 2006 and 2007; and the newly-released Unified Judicial System of Pennsylvania Judicial Safety Handbook.

Last year, 553 MDJ courts and central booking and night court facilities in Pennsylvania were equipped with \$4.4 million in electronic security equipment, a major step in better securing those court facilities. The total project, funded by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, included the installation of 750 digital cameras, 1,400 duress alarms, shatterproof safety glass and better restraints for in-custody defendants. In addition to the physical security improvements, MDJ courts staff received training in personal security and safety, focusing on how to effectively deal with verbally and physically disruptive litigants.

The Supreme Court’s Judicial Council’s Committee on Judicial Safety and Preparedness is comprised of approximately 30 local and state officials, including sheriffs, county commissioners, judges, county row officers and court administrators. Since 2003, the committee, along with staff of the AOPC’s Office of Judicial Security, has devised a variety of means to increase security in court facilities across the Commonwealth. Those enhancements have significantly focused on low-cost, practical approaches to better security—including better planning, greater awareness, and increased education as to risks.

These efforts to improve court security join other recent programs of the Supreme Court designed to modernize and improve the court system throughout Pennsylvania. Those initiatives include, among others, programs that are designed to provide trained court interpreters; assist in the establishment of specialty—or problem-solving—courts, such drug and DUI courts; assist children and families in the courts; and train judges in general and specialized areas of jurisprudence, using the most advanced educational techniques available.

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