



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

NEWS RELEASE

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North America's Oldest Court Opens a New Window on the Future

HARRISBURG, May 4, 1995 — Pennsylvania's courts have established a World Wide Web (WWW) "home page" on the Internet making public access to information from and about the courts more readily available, Court Administrator of Pennsylvania Nancy M. Sobolevitch announced today.

"Pennsylvania has been credited as having the oldest, formally-established court in North America, dating to 1722 with even earlier antecedents," said Sobolevitch. "It's appropriate then that our Judiciary continues to lead even in this technological age."

"We believe we are only the second court system in the nation, to establish a "home page" on the Internet. While those achievements are significant, being among the first is less important than the value of the information which will now be more easily open to public use."

Information expected to be available on Pennsylvania's home page will include:

- court calendars of some local and appellate courts
- statistical information
- press releases
- legislative testimony
- additional information about court operations

In addition to increased access for the public and the media, electronic information transfer via the Internet will also improve the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts' (AOPC) ability to transfer information to other units of state and local governments.

Since the successful state-wide automation of Pennsylvania's district justice courts, the AOPC has increasingly provided information from that automated system for both public and private purposes. In government, these information transfers by magnetic tape have cut costs by reducing data input requirements and increased revenues by facilitating faster revenue collections.

"Our transfer of electronic information to state agencies by magnetic tape has been quite successful. It has allowed the Department of Revenue, for example, to pick up one full month's additional revenue from the automated district justice system during this fiscal year," said AOPC Data Processing Director John Davenport. "Electronic data transfers from Judiciary computers should also have significantly reduced manual data input requirements at both the Revenue and Transportation Departments."

"But continuing to rely on data transfer via magnetic tape is neither cost nor time effective. The infrastructure in place with the Internet allows us to solve some of the basic information exchange problems at both very low cost and minimal extra effort."

Rather than buying additional communications lines and modems to accommodate the growing information exchange requests, the AOPC is using a single connection during off-peak hours to transfer information to a central World Wide Web (WWW) server located on the Internet. There are currently thousands of WWW servers on the Internet.

Access to the Pennsylvania courts' home page is attained by a connection with an on-line service or an Internet access provider.

"On-line services like Compuserve, America-on-Line and Prodigy are beginning to offer Internet WWW access for under \$10 per month," said Davenport. "These services make electronic access to court information very cost effective. Many communities are also served by a type of business called Internet access providers. These businesses provide a local telephone number that they connect to the Internet and typically charge from \$20 to \$50 per month."

Although conventional wisdom casts the Internet as an inherent security problem, its use for making "public" information more easily available is managed by using "read only" WWW servers which make modification of the actual AOPC data bases impossible. Critical information bound for electronic exchange with official agencies is encrypted, authenticated, and in some cases isolated for transfer over "private" portions of the Internet.

"Our studies of the trial courts in Pennsylvania over the past three years indicate that court professionals, lawyers, and law enforcement agencies spend a major portion of their time just trying to find out from each other public information on schedules, court dockets, and case status," said C. Sue Willoughby, director of statewide automation in Pennsylvania's Judiciary. "If we can ultimately make this information more easily available at all levels of the judicial process, including the trial courts, we will save those involved both time and money and improve courts efficiency at the same time."

Presentations are planned to help county courts, legislators and legislative staff, state agencies, and the media, connect to the Pennsylvania Courts' home page. For those with access to the Internet, the World Wide Web reference is:

<http://www.courts.state.pa.us>

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