



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

## NEWS RELEASE

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### Easy-to-Use Search Warrants Result from Collaborative Revisions

**HARRISBURG, October 21, 1998** -- The Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts is issuing new search warrant forms that are easier to access, use, and update.

Beginning Oct. 24, the new applications will replace ones in use since 1980 and be available to authorized users statewide for the first time on the Internet through the state Judiciary's Web Site (at <http://www.courts.state.pa.us>). The forms also will be available to authorized users through Pennsylvania's Automated District Justice System (DJS), a statewide computer network linking 549 minor court judges.

The changes were made to separate, but related, forms that police use to request and conduct a search. They include the actual application for permission to search a building or person in addition to a sworn statement outlining the circumstances for the search — or affidavit of probable cause — and an inventory of seized property.

Thanks to technological advances made possible by the DJS and the Judiciary's extensive use of the Internet, law enforcement officials will be able to print out copies of the forms in the office, or in the field on a laptop computer with Internet access. Authorities also can download and save a blank form to a personal computer, fill out the information while the saved form is on the computer screen and then take the completed application to a judge for approval.

If future changes are needed to the forms, the new computer format allows the revisions to be made quicker and easier than the previous paper-only version.

To safeguard against unauthorized use, authorities must enter a special numerical code to access the forms. An estimated 3,000-plus search warrants were authorized last year in Pennsylvania.

The new forms were devised over several months with ideas and suggestions from police officers, prosecutors, criminal defense lawyers and judges incorporated into the changes.

"The process used in developing these forms will serve as a model for further review and modernization of existing forms used in or by the Judiciary," said Nancy M. Sobolevitch, Court Administrator of Pennsylvania. "After extensive collaboration with the Supreme Court's Criminal Procedural Rules Committee and other representatives of the criminal justice community, we have developed a user-friendly form. The collaborative effort of those interested in updating the search warrants was equally as exciting as the technological advances that will ease distribution of the new forms."

In addition to the new distribution methods, several layout changes made to the forms will make paperwork more efficient and accurate. For example, previous forms required law enforcement officials to write information on both sides of paper and reverse the carbon paper. The revised versions use only one side of a page. Numbering on previous inventory forms was eliminated to provide a less cumbersome way for law enforcement officials to list seized items.