

To: The Honorable Chief Justice of Pennsylvania and Honorable Justices of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania and to the Citizens of the Commonwealth

I am pleased to present this Report of the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts for 1999. Our goal is to provide a general reference document that reflects the dedicated service of the Administrative Office and the boards and committees of the Supreme Court.

Within this report we have attempted to outline an array of programs and services that provide the framework of our effective judicial system. The report also serves to highlight enhancements in the administration of justice that took place during the year and other noteworthy events.

The Judiciary continued to move in the direction of improving service, access and justice for all Pennsylvanians in 1999 by embracing the latest technologies and enhancing public participation in the court system. This was done with an eye toward the Judiciary's rich historical legacy and the need to adapt to societal change.

The year also set the stage – both legislatively and administratively – for the efficient transition of 175 district court managers to the state court fold.

On a personal note, the year also marked the end of a 13-year term of service for former State Court Administrator of Pennsylvania Nancy M. Sobolevitch, the first female non-lawyer appointed to the post, who retired on January 1, 2000.

Making local court rules available electronically to Internet users for the first time was one example of how the state court system made significant strides during the year in both service and accessibility. Since going online January 1, 1999, local court rules quickly became one of the most popular areas on Pennsylvania's Judiciary Web Site, assisting scores of attorneys, litigants and others.

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The posting of the rules came about as a result of a recommendation from the Judicial Council, whose members serve as an advisory panel to the Supreme Court. Its members include representatives from all three government branches and citizens-at-large who help the court strengthen and expand its relationship with those outside the judicial branch.

In the same month the local rules went online, Pennsylvania's Judiciary became the first state agency in the nation to have its Web site certified secure from tampering and accidental destruction of data. The year-long certification process was initiated by the AOPC to ensure that the growing lists of information from the state's Supreme, Superior and Commonwealth Courts are protected from unauthorized access, viruses and unintentional destruction.

Later in the year, a six-member delegation from Pennsylvania was chosen by Chief Justice of Pennsylvania John P. Flaherty to participate in the first National Conference on Building Public Trust and Confidence in the Justice System, in Washington, D.C.

Participation in the May 1999 session underscored the Judiciary's belief in the importance of maintaining public trust and confidence in the American justice system and its desire to help identify strategies that can be used to address common concerns.

The delegation relied, in part, on work already undertaken by the Pennsylvania Futures Commission, which is examining the Judiciary's present and foreseeable needs in adapting to changes in society and technology.

The year also saw the Supreme Court create a committee to study and evaluate racial and gender bias within Pennsylvania's court system. The advisory committee has a broad-based membership of distinguished members of the bench and bar, educators and citizen activists. Its members bring diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds to the group.

A strong collaborative effort during the year that included members of all three branches of state government paved the way for the implementation of state funding for the transfer of district court administrators and their key deputies to the state judicial system. The collective government decision-making set the stage for the smooth transition on January 1, 2000.

The year ended by marking the retirement of Mrs. Sobolevitch, who had served as Court Administrator of Pennsylvania since March 31, 1986. Under her stewardship as overseer of the business of the Commonwealth's Judiciary, Pennsylvania's landmark efforts at statewide, integrated computerization of court processes were begun. New, modern facilities for the AOPC were acquired while a concerted

to fully professionalize the staff and the AOPC's business processes were undertaken with her support.

Nancy's previous tenure in both the legislative and executive branches and her knack for building interpersonal relationships stood the judicial branch in good stead as we worked to further develop positive intra- and inter-branch relations.

As the longest-serving state court administrator in the history of the Pennsylvania judicial system, Nancy's mark on the Administrative Office and the judiciary serves as a clear guide for our future efforts.

In looking back to the many important steps made during the year, we feel the Judiciary can be proud of continuing its high quality of service and efficient administration of justice. We feel even more confident that this report demonstrates the judiciary's desire to move in the right direction to continue to meet the needs of all Pennsylvanians in the new millennium.

Sincerely,



ZYGMONT A. PINES

Acting Court Administrator of Pennsylvania

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