

Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts

The Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts, also called the Administrative Office and the AOPC, is the administrative arm of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. It was established in January 1969 following the Constitutional Convention of 1967-68, which defined the Supreme Court's authority for supervision and administration of all courts.

The Court Administrator of Pennsylvania has been empowered to carry out the Supreme Court's administrative duties and is responsible for assuring that the business of the courts is promptly and properly disposed.

The Administrative Office conducts business from offices in Philadelphia and the Harrisburg area with its seven operational units divided between each. In addition to the court administrator's office, the three units in Philadelphia include Policy Research and Statistics, Legal, and Judicial Services. The four departments in Mechanicsburg, just south of Harrisburg, are Administration, which includes Financial Systems, Payroll and Human Resources; the Judicial Computer System; Information Technology; and Communications/Legislative Affairs. Another department -- Judicial Programs (formerly "Court Management") -- awaits reestablishment.

The Administrative Office's supervisory, administrative and long-range planning duties include:

- reviewing practices, procedures and efficiency at all levels of the court system and in all related offices
- developing recommendations to the Supreme Court regarding improvement of the system and related offices
- representing the judicial system before legislative bodies
- examining administrative and business methods used by offices in or related to the court system
- collecting statistical data

- examining the state of the dockets and making recommendations for expediting litigation
- managing fiscal affairs, including budget preparation, disbursements approval and goods and services procurement
- supervising all administrative matters relating to offices engaged in clerical functions
- maintaining personnel records
- conducting education programs for system personnel
- receiving and responding to comments from the public
- publishing an annual report
- providing legal services to system personnel.

A brief description of each unit of the AOPC and its functions follows.

Office of the Court Administrator

In addition to supporting the work of the Court Administrator of Pennsylvania, staff in the office of the court administrator provide visiting judges to assist with court backlogs and cases involving recusals.

Policy Research and Statistics Department

The Administrative Office's Policy Research and Statistics Department analyzes and evaluates the operations of the Unified Judicial System's (UJS) various components. During any given year, the department conducts a variety of studies, ranging from caseload management reviews of individual trial courts to statewide surveys of the structure and functioning of judicial support agencies, e.g., offices of the prothonotary and clerk of courts.

A core function of the department is to systematically assemble data on the caseloads of county and local courts, including the numbers and types of new, disposed and pending cases, and, for certain case types, the ages of the cases awaiting adjudication. The statistical

information is reviewed and periodically verified through audits of county dockets. The Administrative Office annually publishes the data in the *Caseload Statistics of the Unified Judicial System of Pennsylvania*. This report is available from the AOPC page on the UJS Web site at www.courts.state.pa.us.

The Administrative Office uses the statistical information gathered for many purposes, including the monitoring of county court system operations and development of policy initiatives consistent with its mandate under the Rules of Judicial Administration.

Among the departmental projects recently completed or now in progress are:

- a study of post-conviction collateral relief (PCRA) petitions to assist the Criminal Procedural Rules Committee in its review of these procedures
- statewide review of local procedures for obtaining a Protection from Abuse (PFA) order
- analysis of trial court decisional delay based on the 1997 amendments to Rule of Judicial Administration 703, specifically examining cases awaiting decision over 12 months
- comparative analysis of civil filings at the state and national levels
- staff support to the Juvenile Court Rules Project, including a series of detailed surveys on local procedures in juvenile delinquency cases
- survey of judicial safety of the state's trial and special court judges
- analysis of transcripts fee schedules in the 60 judicial districts
- updating and refining the caseload statistical reporting system, including a breakdown of child dependency cases into abuse/neglect

and status offense categories, and an expanded reporting system for the reporting of child support cases in cooperation with PACSES.

Within the Policy Research and Statistics Department, the Docket Transcript Section receives, reviews and corrects data on misdemeanor, felony and escalating summary cases filed in the judicial districts. The information is submitted on paper forms and computer tapes. Staff send extracts of the data to the Pennsylvania State Police, where individual criminal histories, or rap sheets, are compiled. The AOPC and other state agencies also use the database for statistical research.

Another responsibility of the department lies in the design of the many forms used in the state court system. The development of new forms and the modification of existing forms require extensive consultation with system personnel, especially those using the forms on a daily basis.

Legal Department

The Legal Department provides advice and counsel to the Court Administrator of Pennsylvania and to the other units of the Unified Judicial System (UJS) while also assisting in various administrative areas.

Specifically, the chief counsel's staff represent UJS personnel -- including those of the various courts of the Commonwealth and judicial agencies, and the Pennsylvania Board of Law Examiners -- in state and federal litigation. Representation is not provided in criminal or disciplinary actions. Actions involving UJS personnel often include suits filed in the federal district courts that raise various civil rights and constitutional issues. Typical state court proceedings involving court personnel pertain to petitions for review of governmental actions, petitions to determine the rights and duties of public officials and appeals.

Other significant activities include:

- active participation in planning and implementing the Judicial Computer System and related statewide court automation programs
- reviewing and negotiating leases and contracts for appellate court offices and related offices, chambers and committees of the UJS
- providing legal and administrative assistance and advice to the Court Administrator of Pennsylvania
- assisting in procurement matters
- reviewing legislation affecting the judiciary.

Communications/Legislative Affairs

In its role as both legislative and media liaison, the Office of Communications and Legislative Affairs represents the AOPC before the state's executive and legislative branches of government, as well as to the media. As media liaison, staff field inquiries from reporters, draft press releases, publish the AOPC annual report, develop other publications and set up press conferences.

The office also monitors the progress of legislation in the General Assembly; compiles and publishes a legislative summary when the General Assembly is in session; and, when appropriate, comments on the effect legislation may have on the fiscal and administrative operations of the judicial system. With the computerization of district justice offices, staff also monitor and report on legislation that may necessitate changes to the district justice software programs.

Information Technology Department

The Information Technology Department provides staff and services for the JCS to bring automation to the courts of Pennsylvania. The department also provides electronic judicial information to other agencies; supports the AOPC payroll, financial, human resources and

administrative functions; supports both Web sites and servers for internal AOPC projects, intranet Commonwealth of Pennsylvania projects, and a public Web site; and supports the AOPC day-to-day office automation requirements. It is organized into a Software Development Unit and a Computer Operations Unit.

The AOPC IT Department was one of the few worldwide to recognize the pointless hysteria associated with the media-created Y2K crisis. Working within allocated budgets and with in-house programming talent, the department systematically reviewed code and made the few changes necessary. Testing and logic indicated that the "imbedded" chip problem did not and could not affect non-date-related devices. System software was installed as released by software manufacturers.

As predicted, no outages occurred, and a 3:00 pm December 31, 1999, check of the electricity in Queensland, New Zealand, via the Internet verified that disruption of services due to widespread power blackouts would not occur. As a result, AOPC IT systems were on-line and functioning through the 2000 change.

The director and staff of the IT Department participated in the following inter-governmental committees, providing technical review and requirement advice:

- Commonwealth Telecommunications Acquisition Technical subcommittee
- Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency Technology Committee
- Pennsylvania Coalition against Domestic Violence PFA Database Advisory Committee
- Justice Network (JNET) Steering Committee (Security, Technology and Outsourcing subcommittees)
- Pennsylvania State Police Criminal History Repository Redesign Committee.

As part of the implementation of the Judicial Council's Statewide Local Rules Project, the Information Technology Department has established the Statewide Local Rules Web page

(www.courts.state.pa.us/judicial-council/local-rules), on which are posted the local Rules of Court for each of the 60 judicial districts. Over 9,100 pages have been scanned and posted in Adobe PDF Image format.

Local rules sets are periodically resubmitted from each county and then reposted. As more and more sets are delivered to the AOPC electronically, they are posted in Adobe PDF searchable format. Fifty-nine percent of the rules documents are currently posted in this format.

Rule changes are posted weekly as published in the Pennsylvania Bulletin.

On average, over 800 files are downloaded from the Local Rules page each month.

Software Development Unit

Statewide District Justice Automation System

One thousand eight hundred thirty-eight software service requests were worked in 1999. These resulted in 449 changes implemented through the change management process. Two hundred eighty staff hours of cross-training were given in the new object-oriented technologies during an intensive on-site training class in October.

Administrative Support Application Project (ASAP)

The development phase of the Administrative Support Application Project (Payroll, Human Resources, Finance and Central Purchasing functions of AOPC) was completed in December 1999, bringing about the agency's first implementation of a mission-critical application in a three-tier client server architecture.

The three-tier architecture consists of a Visual Basic/Crystal Reports-based client

software for the user interfaces and reports, the Microsoft Transaction Server for the management of the business processes and rules, and the Microsoft SQL Server for the management of the application's databases. The ASAP development process led to the introduction and usage of new high productivity software development tools such as case modeling and version control tools as well as Web development project management tools.

Electronic Data Interchange and Public Access

The Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) and Public Access (PA) section coordinates and manages public access to DJS data and the electronic interchange of this data with other county or state government agencies. In addition, this unit develops and maintains several small pc-based systems, oversees the JNET functions at AOPC, performs Web site development and maintenance and develops knowledge transfer courses to keep employees abreast of new technology.

Currently, 51 counties or their contractors are set up to use District Justice System data as input to their systems. This includes not only Common Pleas Courts, but also probation, prison and warrant management systems as well. Enhancements to our Web site allow us to store five days of historical data to the end-user and to limit what the user may access.

In addition, the department has developed methods to e-mail DJ system management reports, which saves time, paper and postage. EDIIN, the e-filing effort established in 1993, continues to offer savings. In 1999 seven police and/or parking authorities filed citations electronically. These citations were filed with 15 district justices and accounted for over 75,000 citations.

Since the establishment of a public access policy in 1994, formal requests for data have more than quintupled. The EDI/PA Section received and responded to 167 requests for

information. Of these 143 were from other state and local agencies; three were from media; and 21 were from the public. The department also supports 24 recurring users by providing information via the Internet on a regular basis.

EDI activities continue to save other state and local agencies millions of dollars per year by eliminating redundant keying and assisting in the automation of manual functions.

The AOPC set up its own public Internet Web server in-house in order to enhance the Pennsylvania Unified Judicial System site. The project was completed in 1999. With the new site, the AOPC is able to provide site hosting for several other court-related agencies, including the Judicial Ethics Committee of the Pennsylvania Conference of State Trial Judges, Carbon County Common Pleas Court, the Pennsylvania Interest on Lawyers Trust Accounts Board and the Pennsylvania Appellate Court Management System project.

Additionally, the site was fully indexed, which affords the user search capabilities of all content, including Supreme Court and Commonwealth Court opinions since 1997 and Superior Court opinions since 1998. A link was added that provides tools for visually impaired users to access court opinions. The site receives an average of 33,200 hits per month.

JNET

The Justice Network, a coordinated effort of state agencies and the judiciary, is now online. When fully functional JNET will provide registered users with data from a variety of agencies such as criminal history information from the state police and warrant and bail information from the district courts.

JNET has had a major impact on the EDI Section. Currently, the AOPC is receiving Case File Transfer messages, which contain the NATMS fingerprint data. This data is used to build the OTN/SID cross-reference table for JNET

and eventually will be used to start the criminal case at the district justice office.

Work continues on the Common Pleas and district justice disposition project LivePost. LivePost is a reporting system that will allow the counties to report criminal case dispositions to the Pennsylvania State Police in a more timely and efficient manner using electronic messaging as opposed to batch tape transfers. The flexibility of the system allows both legacy or existing systems as well as new applications to use it, including a Web-based interface known as WebPost, which will remove the burden of paper copy submissions from the clerks of courts. In addition, disposition data can be made available to other state agencies, such as the Department of Corrections, the Department of Public Welfare and the Sentencing Commission without additional impact to the AOPC.

Computer Operations Unit

In the summer of 1999, the AOPC completed a statewide upgrade of the DJS AS/400 operating system to Version 4, Release 4. The upgrade provided additional enhancements for Transmission Control Protocol over Internet Protocol (TCP/IP) functionality.

The Computer Operations Unit continued to make strides in the conversion of the DJS network from Systems Network Architecture (SNA) to TCP/IP by installing and cutting over to a frame relay backbone. The result was a significant reduction in transmission times for remote site database change journals, allowing the unit to increase the frequency from three times per day to five times per day, thereby making the entire system more real-time.

In April the unit began its planning and selection phase of the statewide rollout to thin client technology, due to begin in August 2000.

In preparation for implementation of Citrix Systems technology, not only in the DJS, but for ASAP as well, LAN Department section

management has divided into focused groups whose main thrust is to support this specialized technology. The use of Citrix technology not only reduces the cost of ownership, but simplifies maintenance and change management by centralizing servers and limiting software distribution.

In addition, LAN staff migrated the AOPC Web site from an off-site hosting service to in-house servers, allowing the AOPC to develop applications that enhanced the usefulness of the UJS site to the public.

A number of network security enhancements were made during the recertification of the UJS's Web site from the International Computer Security Association. The on-going refinement of the IT Security Policy, coupled with the implementation of "McAfee Secure Cast" virus updates, can be credited for the AOPC's lack of infection from the viruses that plagued much of the IT community in 1999.

Judicial Computer Support Department

The Judicial Computer Support Department provides training, responds to requests for equipment and provides help desk support for users of the JCS. The Director of Statewide Automation, who supervises the Judicial Computer Support Department, also serves as senior project manager or contract administrator for most AOPC information technology projects.

Administrative Unit

Staff provide clerical and administrative services for all personnel units under the Judicial Computer Department, including processing mass mailings, filing, copying, research, accounts payable and receivable, and various scheduling of meetings and overnight reservations as needed. Clerical staff also provide relief for the main receptionist during lunch breaks and scheduled vacations.

Contract Administration and Project Management

The staff assigned to these tasks research and compile necessary information to draft Requests for Proposals for information technology consulting services for the AOPC. They play a major role in vendor selection, contract negotiations and the subsequent contract administration and project management following the awarding of a contract.

Training Unit

In 1999 unit personnel trained 160 district justices, district justice staff, court administrators and employees. In addition, trainers conducted workshops and spoke to approximately 1,000 district justice staff about office accounting, reports, LiveScan technology, JNET, thin client, upcoming Program Change Requests (PCR) and Y2K.

The Training Department was also involved with ASAP. Trainers user-tested the payroll module; wrote documents for the payroll, finance and human resources modules; and trained payroll and finance users.

Training specialists were active in designing and/or testing thin client, multiple restitution, truancy referral, facsimile signature and Y2K PCRs. Trainers also analyzed 304 suggestion calls and tested 109 changes that were released to the users.

The new District Justice Automated Office Clerical Procedures Manuals were completed and distributed. A training specialist carefully scrutinizes each change to the DJS so that the manual can be immediately updated. During the year trainers wrote 46 laser faxes for district justice offices, explaining changes to the DJS and instructing the users where to insert the fax in the manual until they receive a permanent replacement page.

Other documentation by the Training Department included writing help text, instructional material for thin client and Microsoft training programs and responses to auditor general reports.

Asset Coordinators Unit

The Asset Coordinator Unit is responsible for monitoring the maintenance contract to ensure that any malfunctioning DJS equipment is repaired within the specified time periods established in the maintenance contract. This is done so that each district office is able to maintain an efficient operation at all times. In 1999 approximately 2,058 calls were received, dispatched, monitored and closed under the provisions of this contract.

This unit also authorizes or denies installation of usage kits by reviewing configuration pages on specific printers in a district justice office. This ensures that the printer is in need of a special procedure and a kit is not installed arbitrarily.

All statewide requests for additional hardware, to move hardware within an office or to relocate an entire office are coordinated through this unit. Such requests may involve a cabling vendor and a telecommunications company. In 1999 the unit processed 90 such requests.

Help Desk Unit

The help desk responded to 45,372 calls in 1999. This included calls concerning program changes, new legislation, technical questions and various user suggestions. Accounting problems, hardware failure and queries were among the majority of the calls entered.

The Help Desk Unit assists in reviewing the design of new programs by responding to

questions from programmers on user procedures. Staff also review laser faxes prior to their release to evaluate the impact on user operations. In addition, the help desk is responsible for compiling and maintaining documentation sent in by users for second-level analysis and use by other departments.

The help desk also performs all deletions and expungements. This involves reviewing documents to verify validity of court-mandated orders and then eliminating each specific case from the DJS.

Legal Services Unit

The staff attorney assigned to the DJS has specific knowledge and expertise in legal issues related to the operation of the automated system. The attorney provides legal consultation to the programming and training staff on program design and provides an interface with the Civil and Criminal Procedural Rules Committees.

Administration Department

The Administration Department, with staff in both Harrisburg and Philadelphia, is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the AOPC, providing support and services to other units of the Administrative Office, the appellate courts and the Unified Judicial System as a whole. It includes Human Resources, Financial Systems, Administrative Services and Payroll.

Human Resources Unit

Human Resources is responsible for:

- monitoring and ensuring UJS compliance with state and federal employment statutes such as the Fair Labor Standards Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Family and Medical Leave Act, the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act, the Civil Rights Act of

1964 and the State Employees' Retirement Code

- maintaining the UJS's fringe benefits programs and counseling judiciary personnel regarding their provisions and use. These programs include a variety of medical and life insurance plans, long-term disability insurance, long-term care insurance, work-related disability and accidental death insurance programs for judiciary personnel. In addition, the Office of Human Resources is responsible for administering the UJS's paid leave program and the judiciary's Unemployment Compensation and Workers Compensation programs.
- developing and administering the personnel policies that govern the personnel operations of the UJS and assisting supervisors and employees in the proper implementation of these policies
- developing and administering new hire orientation programs, performing exit interviews with terminating employees, and assisting incoming and departing employees regarding questions and concerns related to their judiciary employment.
- maintaining the judiciary's Retiree and Survivor Medical Insurance Programs that provide medical insurance coverage to retirees of the judiciary and surviving spouses of deceased judiciary personnel
- developing, implementing and maintaining a standardized classification and pay plan for judiciary personnel, including the development and/or maintenance of appropriate class specifications and job descriptions designed to establish a logical and consistent means of determining the relative value of one job to another
- maintaining the UJS complement of staff and judicial positions and processing personnel transactions to effect changes in employee pay and employment status

- developing and administering AOPC hiring procedures and assisting managers in the recruiting, interviewing and hiring of new staff. This includes designing position advertisements, reviewing candidate resumes, scheduling and/or conducting interviews, and completing background and reference checks on candidates.
- developing training curriculum as well as training policies and procedures and implementing training programs for judiciary personnel.

In addition to these ongoing duties, the AOPC Office of Human Resources played an integral role in the transition of senior district court management personnel from county service to state service. This involved the transfer of personnel from all 60 judicial districts of the UJS and required the development of comprehensive transition policies and procedures, legislative action, major revisions to the UJS personnel policies and the development of completely new compensation plans for district personnel of the UJS.

During 1999 the AOPC Office of Human Resources, working with the AOPC Payroll Office and Office of Financial Management, also continued ongoing efforts to design and develop a fully integrated payroll, personnel and financial management system intended to more fully automate these interrelated functions well into the twenty-first century.

Financial Systems Unit

Financial Systems is responsible for managing all budgets, accounting and the accounting system for the Unified Judicial System. It serves as the primary resource to the various components comprising the UJS regarding financial matters. The Financial Systems unit fulfills its responsibility through the following activities:

- developing necessary policies and procedures on accounting and budget issues and training staff at all levels in their use
- monitoring and preparing the budget for 35 UJS line items in the Commonwealth's annual budget. These line item appropriations include not only the funding for the Administrative Office, but for all of the state-funded courts; most Supreme Court advisory procedural rules committees and a special commission; juror cost reimbursements; and county court reimbursements. Financial systems staff develop budget materials for the justices and Court Administrator of Pennsylvania, including briefing materials used for hearings before the legislative appropriations committees. Staff monitor budget trends, maintain communications and regular reporting to the various legislative and executive branch agencies as required by law and tradition, and participate in budget hearings as required.
- managing \$226.6 million in annual appropriations, including \$33.3 million in grants to counties
- participating in the annual financial audit of the UJS. This includes preparing and providing the necessary financial records and information and responding to questions; reviewing the audit results; drafting footnotes to statements; and approving the draft that is submitted to and voted upon by the Judicial Audit Agency (JAA). Staff also participate in the JAA and make recommendations to the JAA regarding accounting policies and procedures.
- serving as the central clearinghouse for all financial transactions impacting the judiciary
- overseeing the finances of the First Judicial District/AOPC Procurement Unit (approximately \$22.2 million), including recommending investment and banking strategy. The procurement unit, created by and operating

under an agreement between the Administrative Office and Philadelphia City government, was established to improve the procurement function in Philadelphia's three courts, including purchases, service contracts and reconciliation. Since the agreement was put into effect, the First Judicial District has realized significant savings through efficiencies in its procurement function.

- undertaking special projects, as requested and upon its own initiative, to develop financial information regarding cost trends, comparative analyses, and the like. Such information includes analyses of legislation for fiscal impact routinely requested by the both the legislative and executive branches.
- responding to questions and providing information on the judiciary's financial operations as needed to the legislature, the executive branch, other judiciary employees and the public.

In addition to these functions, Financial Systems has been participating on a "need" basis in the development of an updated automated accounting system to serve the UJS to ensure that it fulfills accounting and budgeting needs and requirements. In this process staff have been working to identify and assist in the resolution of incorrect processes and formats. Staff have also been working to establish procedures for the use of the automated system and train users.

Administrative Services Unit

Administrative Services oversees a variety of administrative-related tasks, including procurement for the Administrative Office and for Philadelphia courts under the First Judicial District/AOPC Procurement Unit. It also handles all issues relating to the operation of AOPC office buildings and provides support to many UJS agencies in a variety of ways.

Payroll Unit

The Payroll Unit administers the monthly, biweekly and supplemental payrolls for more than 1,600 jurists and staff. Together with the Human Resources Unit, it also orients and answers any questions new employees may have as the employees become members of the judiciary staff.

Judicial Services Department

The Judicial Services Department plans, coordinates, administers and provides staff support for an extensive schedule of educational conferences, seminars and meetings for the Supreme Court, the Administrative Office and affiliated groups.

In 1999 the department coordinated nine conferences:

- *Pennsylvania Conference of State Trial Judges Mid-Annual Conference*
February 25-28, 1999
- *Habeus Corpus Workshop*
March 28-30, 1999
- *Corporate and Commercial Law Program*
April 28-30, 1999
- *President Judges/Pennsylvania Association of Court Management Annual Conference*
June 6-9, 1999
- *Pennsylvania Conference of State Trial Judges Annual Conference*
July 22-25, 1999
- *Pennsylvania Association of Court Management*
November 7-9, 1999

Through aggressive negotiation and detailed knowledge of Pennsylvania's hospitality industry, the Judicial Services Department

is able to ensure that multi-day conferences proceed effectively under terms which are favorable to the Commonwealth.

Judicial Services also negotiates office space for judicial offices across the Commonwealth, subject to final legal review by the chief counsel's legal staff, maintains and updates all Pennsylvania state department lists, handles the filing of financial disclosures and

disseminates news clippings of interest statewide for the Pennsylvania judiciary.

Judicial Services' other functions include publishing *Jurisprudence*, a judicial newsletter linking Pennsylvania's trial judges across the state; working with the Joint Task Force to insure Gender Fairness in the Courts and the Joint Task Force to insure Racial & Ethnic Fairness in the Courts; and acting as liaison to the Minor Judiciary Education Board. 