



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

NEWS RELEASE

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Public Hearing Set to Gather Further Input on Proposed Court Records Public Access Policy

HARRISBURG, February 10, 2006 — Ongoing efforts by Pennsylvania's unified court system to gather citizen input about access to electronic case records continues with a public hearing scheduled for next month.

The hearing on the proposed Public Access Policy Governing Electronic Case Records of the Unified Judicial System is set for 9 a.m. March 2 in Courtroom 1 of the Commonwealth Court of Pennsylvania, Irvis Office Building, 5th floor, in Harrisburg's Capitol Complex. The session is open to the public, however, those interested in offering testimony must register by Feb. 22. To register, e-mail publicaccesscomments@pacourts.us or call Cynthia Screen at (215) 560-6300.

Businesses, public-interest groups and government officials are among those who already have responded to the proposed policy since it first was published in September for a 60-day comment period. In a notice of the hearing that is to appear tomorrow in the Pennsylvania Bulletin, the AOPC committee developing a recommended plan expresses a desire to extend the public comment period to learn more about how the policy should address pre-conviction case records; full dates of birth — rather than just a birth year — for purposes of correctly identifying a party; and procedures to correct errors in electronic case records.

“Public input is helping us determine how to achieve an equitable balance between providing public access to electronic case records — including those posted on web docket sheets on the Internet while safeguarding the privacy and safety of Pennsylvania's citizens,” Court Administrator of Pennsylvania Zygmunt A. Pines said. “We are diligently gathering as much information as possible from interested individuals and groups in deciding how to carefully craft this proposal.”

Court records of the Unified Judicial System traditionally have been open for inspection and photocopying upon request in a reasonable manner unless otherwise sealed by a judge or restricted pursuant to state or federal law. The current proposal does not change that tradition. Rather, the proposal deals only with new issues created by the ease of access to electronic court records, especially those available over the Internet. Inspection of original paper files at courthouse clerk offices *will not* be affected by the policy.

Information about court cases is currently available through the Pennsylvania Judiciary's Web site for all of the appellate and magisterial district court levels. Records of all criminal trial courts are expected to be online by the end of the year as a result of the Unified Judicial System's ongoing statewide efforts to develop and maintain integrated automated systems for all of Pennsylvania's courts.

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