



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

NEWS RELEASE

CONTACT:

Art Heinz, communications coordinator
(717) 795-2062

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

www.courts.state.pa.us

Oldest Court Tries Newest Way to Get Information to the Public

HARRISBURG, September 15, 1995 — The Pennsylvania Supreme Court's Administrative Office has been cited for being one of the first court systems in the United States to use the World Wide Web to make information available to the public.

Government Technology, the leading magazine in the United States covering technology applications in the public sector, in its September 1995 issue, recognizes the AOPC for being progressive and economical in utilizing technology to disseminate information concerning the courts.

"One of the oldest courts in the country tries out one of the newest ways to get information to the public," the article reports.

The article describes how the Administrative Office of the Pennsylvania Courts has helped set the pace in adopting World Wide Web to expand its service to the public and the media to help clarify and keep current happenings within the state court system. Available on Pennsylvania's page are:

- judicial system organizational and descriptive information
- press releases
- public access policies and procedures for Pennsylvania's statewide automated District Justice System, as well as other court data
- district justice office locations and unified judicial system statistics
- employment opportunities.

Additionally, the Web page efficiently provides users with large downloads of data on a recurring basis. Non-governmental users are charged a \$250 setup fee and a monthly rate based on processing time. Recurrent users utilize passwords and private keys to obtain and decrypt the data.

Future plans include providing synopses of Supreme Court cases and opinions on the Web page in an effort to make the cases more understandable and accessible, particularly to the media and the layman. Contrary to published reports, plans for putting entire case opinions on the Web page are still under study by court officials.

As many Pennsylvanians know, this is not the state Supreme Court's first venture into the electronic age. In 1992 the Court's Judicial Computer Project successfully computerized all 541 (now 550) district justice offices scattered throughout the state.

Despite an extensive two-year study, efforts to similarly computerize the state's trial court criminal divisions remain on the drawing board until fully funded. When completed, that phase of the Judicial Computer Project will link all criminal courts in 67 counties in a statewide network.

Completion of the JCP project is vital to insure accurate, timely recording and tracking of convictions if the Legislature, as expected, passes some form of "three-strike" legislation imposing mandatory prison sentences on repeat offenders.

Among other benefits, the JCP computer network will:

- improve timely processing of cases in the already overburdened court system
- assist in multi-county conflict-free scheduling
- assist in the location of prisoners for hearings and trials
- assist judges making bail determinations by providing them with the only statewide bail history file which will show a defendant's previous bail status assist judges by establishing a statewide file for outstanding criminal warrants so they may establish if the defendant before them is wanted in other counties for criminal offenses
- establish electronic links to criminal justice agencies, including the Pennsylvania State Police, the state Department of Corrections, county district attorneys, and jails to assist with scheduling, reporting and case management by initiating the flow of electronic information between the courts and criminal justice agencies
- improve court's financial accounting and collections processes for fines, fees and costs (building upon existing 90 percent plus collection practices using the Judicial Computer Project's [JCP] automated District Justice System)
- extend existing data transfer relationships between the JCP and state Executive Branch agencies, including the State Police, the Game Commission, and the Departments of Revenue, Transportation, Corrections, and Public Welfare to further eliminate duplication of efforts and to help make all branches of Pennsylvania government more responsive.

###