



Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts

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Pennsylvania Judiciary Web Site Certified Secure

HARRISBURG — Pennsylvania's Judicial Branch has become the first state agency in the nation to have its web site (<http://www.courts.state.pa.us>) certified secure from tampering and accidental destruction of data, Court Administrator of Pennsylvania Nancy M. Sobolevitch announced today.

The Judiciary's web site was developed in April, 1995 and is administered by the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts. It provides public access to a host of data, including decisions from the state's Supreme, Superior and Commonwealth courts. The web site also allows authorized users to download and print standardized forms, such as search warrant applications.

The year-long certification process was initiated by the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts to ensure that the expanding web site is protected from unauthorized access, viruses and the accidental or intentional destruction of information.

International Computer Security Association Inc., a worldwide firm that specializes in Internet security, certified the judicial site earlier this month. Company officials said the web site certification is a first for a state agency.

"This certification shows we not only have a good system, but a secure system," Sobolevitch said. "It creates an atmosphere of certainty that the information we provide to judicial employees, other agencies and the public will not be compromised."

This is not the first time the Judiciary's automation has earned praise. In addition to administering the Judiciary's web site, the AOPC also developed and operates the automated District Justice System — an internal computer network that links 549 district justice offices across Pennsylvania. A 10-month state Legislative Budget and Finance Committee study in 1997 found the District Justice System exceptionally well-managed and cost-effective as compared to peer groups.

(More)

The DJS replaced manual procedures used to collect fines, issue citations and warrants and manage caseloads and calendars. Plans call for creating a similar automated system for the Criminal Division of the state's county trial courts.

The certification process assesses the configuration of Internet-connected security devices, also known as "firewalls," through periodic spot checks and on-site audits. The work identifies weak spots and reduces future risks by encouraging ongoing security practices.

"The Internet allows greater public accessibility to a large amount of information, but it does bring risks," said John Davenport, director of information technology for the AOPC. "If you're going to be providing this kind of service, you need to make sure it's a reliable service."

State court systems around the country operate web sites. Only Florida's state court system had one earlier (by a week) than Pennsylvania's courts. The number of visits or "hits" to Pennsylvania's web site surpassed 1.7 million last year — more than double the number in the previous year.

The AOPC was established in 1969 to provide financial, technical and personnel support services for nearly 1,600 state employees of Pennsylvania's judicial branch of government. Legislative action is pending to transfer Pennsylvania's county court personnel into one statewide unified judiciary.

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