



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

Public Information Office

Securing Pennsylvania's Courts

The goal of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court is to provide for the safety of judges, jurors, witnesses, crime victims and all others in every courthouse and every courtroom in Pennsylvania. To this end, the Supreme Court's Judicial Council in 2002 established the Committee on Judicial Safety and Preparedness to develop ways to improve court safety.

Initial efforts of the committee have been aimed at approximately 550 magisterial district judge courts around the state where minor civil and criminal cases are heard. A series of initiatives, recommended by the committee and carried out by the Office of Judicial Security in the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC), has provided for:

- Installation of duress alarms and surveillance cameras in magisterial district judge courts as well as shatterproof glass at transaction counters and improved methods for securing defendants in custody.
- Development of a "Court Safety and Security Manual" that outlines recommended security practices, procedures and guidelines for courts.
- Training for staff in magisterial district judge courts in "best practices" to ensure court security and personal safety, and to control and resolve conflicts when they arise inside court facilities.
- Formation of local committees to address local court security issues.

Another innovation is a statewide incident reporting system that enables the AOPC to monitor security problems in the offices of all magisterial district judges around the state.

When a security incident occurs, it is reported electronically to the AOPC and to the court administrator in the county where it occurs. These reports enable AOPC staff to spot trends and to identify ways to better address problems.

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Plans are being developed to expand the incident reporting system to the Common Pleas Courts.

The AOPC has provided funding for security improvements in many Courts of Common Pleas, including metal detectors, wireless duress alarms, employee identification badge systems and X-ray inspection machines.

The effort to improve court security depends on the collaboration of many people in the justice system. Accordingly, the membership of the Committee on Judicial Safety and Preparedness includes representatives of the County Commissioners Association, the Domestic Relations Association, the Sheriffs Association, the County Probation and Parole Officers Association, president judges, magisterial district judges, court administrators and the staff of the AOPC.