



Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts

PRESS RELEASE

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Fee adjustment takes effect November 1 to fund automation and indigent services

HARRISBURG, October 11, 2002 — Court-related fees established in 1990 to help fund judicial automation will increase for the first time in 12 years on November 1, 2002.

The increased funding provided by the new fee levels will continue to provide funding for the Judicial Computer System. Part of the increase, however, will be channeled to the Pennsylvania Lawyer Trust Account Board to help provide civil legal services for indigent Pennsylvanians.

Under a bill recently passed by the General Assembly and signed into law by Gov. Mark Schweiker as Act 122 of 2002, current Judicial Computer System fees of \$1.50 and \$5 — depending on the court level — will become a uniform \$10. Those fees will be charged, as they have since 1990, on convictions in criminal courts, and civil court case filings. Additionally, Act 122 provides for imposition of the \$10 fee by Recorders of Deeds in transactions within their offices.

“The General Assembly’s leadership — notably Reps. Brett Feese and Kathy Manderino and more than 100 other cosponsors in the House — in passing this legislation will facilitate progress in judicial automation while also helping those Pennsylvanians in need of legal services,” Court Administrator of Pennsylvania Zygmunt A. Pines said. “Court automation has increased service to the public and made the administration of justice even more efficient by reducing costs, delays and labor-intensive paperwork.

“The fee adjustment will allow continued work toward automation of criminal courts, which is anticipated to be completed by January 2005. Completion of criminal court automation is not only important within the judicial system, but also to criminal justice system agencies such as the Pennsylvania State Police, the Department of Corrections and others that are part of the statewide Justice Network (J-NET).

Feese, prime sponsor of what will be known as “the Access to Justice Act,” said its enactment will provide a stable source of financing for automation and civil legal services to the needy.

“For every five poor people in search of needed legal services, Pennsylvania Legal Services is forced to turn away four of them because of a lack of funding,” Feese said. “The problem is especially acute in the area I represent, Lycoming and Clinton counties. There are just two full-time legal services attorneys. That’s two for 25,700 potential clients.

“Denying legal services to the indigent puts families, communities, businesses and the legal system itself at risk,” Feese added. “Local government officials and social service agencies become overburdened with people who are mired in legal problems with no recourse. This is a situation we must address.”