



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

NEWS RELEASE

CONTACT:

James Koval, communications manager
(717) 795-2062

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

www.courts.state.pa.us

Supreme Court Safety/Preparedness Committee
**State Assesses County Court Security;
Plans Upgrades**

HARRISBURG, December 28, 2004 — After an 18-month effort and with significant support from the Commonwealth's counties, Pennsylvania's Judiciary has fashioned the framework for security enhancements in the state court system for the public, litigants, staff and jurists.

As part of the ongoing statewide collaboration, the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts today announced the following key elements have emerged from the initiative:

- Implementation of a \$4.4 million fully state-funded program is underway to specifically enhance security in Pennsylvania's more than 550 district justice offices and Philadelphia courts; and
- Completion and dissemination to county president judges and county commission chairs (or similar officials) of facility assessment reports to help evaluate long-term county court security needs.

Both efforts result from the work of the state Supreme Court's Judicial Council Committee on Safety and Preparedness, chaired by Justice Sandra Schultz Newman. Committee members include county commissioners, sheriffs, judges, district justices, court administrators, representatives of county court row officers and probation and domestic relations staffs and others. (*A copy of the committee's membership is attached to this release.*) The collaborative working group has been reviewing court-related safety issues since its first formal meeting in June 2003.

"One of the biggest challenges facing state courts today lies in developing a healthy balance of public accessibility while ensuring the safety of people, facilities and information," Justice Newman said. "We feel it is important that county officials be directly involved in all aspects of addressing security issues with us. The confidential facility assessments we are forwarding to counties, along with the physical security improvements we are announcing, are the results of 18 months of concerted effort by the Judicial Security Committee and its county-based members."

Justice Newman praised Gov. Edward Rendell and members of the state Senate and House, as well as Chief Justice of Pennsylvania Ralph J. Cappy and her Supreme Court colleagues, for support of the initiatives through the state Fiscal Year 2004-2005 appropriations process, and expressed hope for similar support in the upcoming fiscal year.

(MORE)

The \$4.4 million in state funding to enhance security mainly in district justice offices will be targeted at four specific areas identified by the state Judicial Safety Committee: means of fully securing in-custody defendants; shatterproof glass to protect jurists and staff at transaction counters; duress alarms; and installation of closed-circuit video monitoring systems. Using a combination of competitive, cost-effective statewide contracts and local vendors, implementation of these security improvements in counties should be underway early next year. A similar program is in the early stages for the Commonwealth's trial courts, with a review of security issues and efforts to secure the necessary funding to start in early 2005.

The facility assessment reports sent last week to president judges and county executives both summarize findings on a statewide basis and provide assessments of existing court security measures in groups of counties based on population classifications. County court security committees, which have recently been established at the request of the state Judicial Security and Preparedness Committee, may use the information as a baseline to evaluate strengths and weaknesses in helping to secure individual county court facilities, litigants, staff and officials. The assessment reports also provide the state committee with information that will help it identify long-term needs that can be more effectively addressed on a statewide basis.

The facility assessments were conducted by volunteer teams from the state court system, sheriffs, county commissioners and others who underwent training to ensure a uniform approach to the county-to-county assessments. During site visits, the teams assembled the data that was subsequently analyzed by Policy Studies, Inc., consultants to the state Judicial Safety Committee.

Significantly, the reports also recognize that most counties already had implemented significant security measures in trial court facilities prior to the completion of the assessment process in February 2004.

While the physical security enhancements and security assessments implemented this year will significantly improve overall court security, so too will security and preparedness training for state and local court staff scheduled to begin in the first half of calendar year 2005. Competitive proposals to train district justice court staff currently are under review by the AOPC.

Additional training, based in part on a security manual developed by the state Judicial Safety and Preparedness Committee, will be conducted in calendar years 2005 and 2006. It will recognize that physical security improvements and plans are only as effective as those who implement and use them are knowledgeable about planned preparedness.

###

Supreme Court of Pennsylvania
Judicial Council Committee on Judicial Safety and Preparedness

The Hon. Sandra Schultz Newman, Pennsylvania Supreme Court justice, chair

Daniel J. Ackerman, Westmoreland County President Judge
William B. Berndt, Lehigh County Deputy District Court Administrator
Aileen Bowers, Beaver County Assistant Court Administrator
Erick J. Coolidge, Tioga County Commissioner
Thomas B. Darr, Deputy Court Administrator of Pennsylvania
M. Kay DuBree, District Justice, Bucks County
Michael E. Dunlavey, Erie County Court
Steve Evans, Bradford County Sheriff
Stephen E. Farina, Dauphin County Prothonotary
Robert A. Freedberg, Northampton County President Judge
Nancy Galvach, Allegheny County District Justice Courts Manager
Joseph F. Giles, Erie County Councilman
Don Harris, AOPC Policy, Research and Statistics Department Director
James T. Hazen, Pennsylvania Sheriffs' Association executive director
Mark K. Keller, former Perry County Commissioner
Todd F. Kelly, District Justice, Altoona
Frank Lalley, AOPC Judicial Security Administrator
David Lawrence, Philadelphia County Chief Deputy Court Administrator
Victoria Masek, Domestic Relations Association of Pennsylvania, York
Frederica Massiah-Jackson, Philadelphia County President Judge
Robert McCullough, County Chief Adult Probation and Parole Officers Association president, Williamsport
Dennis Nau, Centre County Sheriff
Zygmunt A. Pines, Esq., Court Administrator of Pennsylvania
Roger Reis, former Lehigh County Commissioner
John Sallade, County Commissioners' Association of Pennsylvania managing director of insurance programs
Henry J. Schireson, District Justice, Montgomery County
Steve Spangenberg, Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, Harrisburg
H. William White Jr., Venango County President Judge
William E. Vandrew, Franklin County Clerk of Courts

###