



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

NEWS RELEASE

CONTACT:

Art Heinz, communications coordinator
(717) 795-2062

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www.courts.state.pa.us

Judicial Computer Project Budget Program Statement

HARRISBURG, March 15, 1995 — PROGRAM STATEMENT Since December, 1992, the first phase of Pennsylvania's Judicial Computer Project (JCP) has dramatically improved the ability of the Commonwealth's 550 district justices to effectively and efficiently manage their caseloads, collect fines, fees and costs, and provide timely case disposition data.

Yet despite increased recognition that inter-agency cooperation in developing electronic data links is essential, particularly in the area of criminal history records, and despite system performance statistics like a greater than 90 percent current collection rate for fines, fees and costs, the momentum for additional forward strides to automate Pennsylvania's courts and further develop those inter-agency links ground to an unfortunate halt in June, 1994.

At that time, additional (non-tax revenue) funding was not available to continue planning toward development and implementation of the Judicial Computer Project's second phase, automation of the Commonwealth's Common Pleas Courts. Consequently, the overall Judicial Computer Project was forced to retrench by eliminating 24 positions (both current, filled complement and recently vacated positions) and focusing its limited resources on support of the automated District Justice System (DJS).

Completed on budget and on time, the automated District Justice System has more than met the needs

- of the judicial system as a whole,
- of district justices and their staff, and
- of other state agencies, some county governments, the media and citizens.

Today case flow management and financial record-keeping systems in district justice offices are more accountable and district justice staff are more efficient for one reason: the DJS has given district justices modern tools they have long needed to process the nearly 2 million cases filed and track the \$200 million collected in their offices each year. Further, for those few county agencies with sufficient computer resources, parking citations and criminal cases are electronically transferred to and from the DJS, saving those counties over \$.5 million in "keying" costs and eliminating delays.

And for state agencies like the Department of Revenue, the State Police and PennDOT, the automated District Justice System has finally facilitated state-of-the-art interchange of electronic data from Pennsylvania's entry level courts to those agencies. For instance, this means that

- criminal history records, at least in part, can finally move to the State Police repository in a timely manner;
- fines, fees, costs and audit data flow more quickly and efficiently to the state; and
- license suspensions, revocations and reinstatements aren't bogged down by strangulating paper forms and the necessity to "rekey" data.

We estimate that these data transfers save executive branch agencies \$5.5 million per year in data entry costs and -- in Fiscal Year 1994-95 -- are facilitating an additional month of revenue through faster posting.

This Fiscal Year 1995-96 spending plan contains funding for ongoing operations of the JCP's DJ System, including electronic data transfer to additional agencies and departments; debt service pursuant to financing agreements with IBM Credit Corporation; and a restart for Common Pleas System planning and development.

For this spending plan to be implemented, additional Judicial Computer Project funding sources are required and, unfortunately, delays occasioned by last year's failure to provide additional funds have almost inevitably increased overall Common Pleas System development costs.

As noted in last year's spending request, the Judiciary has developed a proposal to raise additional funds for CP System development which calls for raising fees established under Act 59-1990. Additionally, as was also noted last year, the Judiciary is seeking specific amendments to JCP funding statutes (Act 64-1987 and Act 59-1990) which would:

- *eliminate an automatic limitation on deposits into the JCP Augmentation Account created under terms of Act 64-1987.* The original statutory cap of \$25 million per year was automatically reduced to \$10 million per year as of July 1, 1994. Potential revenues from Acts 64 and 59, and expenses to continue operation of the DJ System, are currently projected to exceed that cap in Fiscal Year 1995-96. Without the cap's elimination, those revenues will conceivably be lost for JCP use, potentially causing periodic curtailment of district justice services and electronic data interchange.
- *eliminate a cap of \$80 million on the amount of money which can be deposited into the JCP Augmentation Account created under terms of Act 59-1990.* Since non-tax revenues are the sole funding sources for the JCP, it is inevitable that natural growth in ongoing operating expenses alone will exceed this cap in coming years.
- *formally eliminate or delay repayment of the initial \$2 million of General Fund monies advanced by the General Assembly to the Judiciary for Project start-up costs.*

(A strong argument can be made that more than \$2 million has already been repaid by the Judiciary to various units of state government since the legislature began eroding provisions of Act 64 subsequent to its original enactment in 1987. Specifically, \$969,214 was directly refunded to agencies exempted from Act 64's provisions and \$1,873,702 represents lost revenue due to those exemptions for the period Fiscal Years 1990-91--1993-94.)

(Exemption costs do not reflect the \$1,264,477 in total projected interest costs payable to IBM Credit Corporation to service debt incurred because of the inadequacy of Judicial Computer Project funding from the Project's inception to date.)

In summary, Pennsylvania's Judicial Computer Project continues to withstand every test in terms of successful project planning, development and implementation of the District Justice System despite a persistent struggle for financial stability.

Although valuable momentum and expertise from the successful DJS development has been lost due to that struggle for stability, the opportunity remains for Pennsylvania's trial courts, for other state agencies, and for the Commonwealth's citizens to benefit -- through computerization -- from the lessons already learned and experience gained in our past efforts. Additional resources and flexibility are essential, however, for that ever to occur.

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