



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

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**BROADCAST EDITORS NOTE:** For audio actualities from the Chief Justice click [here](#).

## **PA Courts Expand Use of Video Conferencing, Saving \$21 Million Annually in Defendant Transportation Costs**

**HARRISBURG, PA, June 7, 2011**—A survey released today by the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania reveals that a day in court for many individuals charged with a crime no longer means a trip to a courtroom. Instead, defendants often remain in a correctional facility or booking center as judges increasingly use video conferencing technology to conduct preliminary arraignments and other court proceedings, saving taxpayers an estimated \$21 million annually.

“The use of video conferencing enhances security by reducing the risk of defendant escape or assault on transport officers, judges and anyone in the courtroom; improves court efficiency; and saves tax dollars by reducing court costs associated with defendant transportation,” said Chief Justice Ronald D. Castille. The Supreme Court’s criminal procedural rules were amended in 2003 to allow videoconferencing in court procedures not involving a defendant’s constitutional rights to confront witnesses.

The survey, conducted by the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts’ (AOPC) Office of Judicial Security, found that on average more than 15,700 proceedings are held via video conferencing each month, saving the state’s magisterial district and Common Pleas courts an estimated \$1.7 million monthly or a cumulative cost savings of more than \$21 million annually. Philadelphia and Delaware counties reported the highest monthly savings of \$550,000 and \$271,000, respectively. Fifty-six of the state’s 60 judicial districts responded to the survey (see attached results).

Of the total projected annual savings, 43 percent, or more than \$9 million, is a direct result of the 488 video conferencing units installed by the AOPC over the last three years at a cost of \$4.2 million from a budget appropriations item.

“Counties particularly are getting a great return on the investment of state tax dollars by saving tens of millions of dollars at the local level,” Chief Justice Castille said. The cost to transport defendants to and from Pennsylvania’s court is paid for by counties.

Of the more than 15,700 monthly court proceedings conducted via video conferencing, more than half, or 9,500, were preliminary arraignments. Others included warrant proceedings, bail and sentencing hearings. The court proceedings are conducted with defendants located in state correctional institutions, county and local prisons, booking centers, State Police barracks and other facilities such as juvenile detention centers, shelters and state hospitals. The survey found that on average it cost courts \$73 to transport a defendant to and from a local facility and \$588 to transport a defendant to and from a state correctional institution.

“Technology is changing the way courts do business, and court officials and judges use video technology when available and appropriate,” Chief Justice Castille said. “As video conferencing technology becomes more prevalent throughout the judicial system, we can expect to save even more tax dollars through a further reduction of defendant transportation costs.”

Efforts to provide training, install hardware and promote the use of video conference technology began in 2008 as part of the Supreme Court’s comprehensive statewide effort to improve court security, which began in the early 2000s. Those efforts were a collaboration between the legislative and executive branches of state government with the state judiciary and, in turn, with county commissioners, judges and staff within local police departments, jails, central booking centers, state police and state correctional institutions.

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**Average Monthly Cost Savings Derived Through Video Conferencing Court Proceedings**  
Survey conducted March, 2011

County	Avg. Costs to Transport Defendant from a Local Facility	Avg. Cost to Transport Defendant from a State Correctional Institution	# of VC proceedings with defendants in local facility	# of VC proceedings with defendants in State Correctional Institution	Monthly Local Transportation Cost Savings	Monthly State Correctional Institution Transportation Cost Savings	Total Monthly Cost Savings
Allegheny			1995	20	\$146,213.55	\$11,756.60	\$157,970.15
Adams	\$90.00	\$ 225.00	21	5	\$1,890.00	\$1,125.00	\$3,015.00
Armstrong	\$55.52	\$ 221.56	37	0	\$2,054.24		\$2,054.24
Beaver	\$60.00	\$1,000.00	239	6	\$14,340.00	\$6,000.00	\$20,340.00
Bedford			27	27	\$1,978.83	\$15,871.41	\$17,850.24
Berks	\$100.00	\$200.00	587	0	\$58,700.00		\$58,700.00
Blair		\$263.00	189	6	\$13,851.81	\$1,578.00	\$15,429.81
Bradford	\$12.50		19	0	\$237.50	\$	\$ 237.50
Bucks	\$50.00	\$3,500.00	259	14	\$12,950.00	\$49,000.00	\$61,950.00
Butler			292	15	\$21,400.68	\$8,817.45	\$30,218.13
Cambria	\$350.00	\$800.00	40	0	\$14,000.00		\$14,000.00
Cameron/Elk			2	2	\$146.58	\$1,175.66	\$1,322.24
Carbon	\$25.44		38	1	\$966.72	\$587.83	\$1,554.55
Centre	\$150.00	\$150.00	27	11	\$4,050.00	\$1,650.00	\$ 5,700.00
Chester	\$145.00		117	20	\$16,965.00	\$11,756.60	\$28,721.60
Clarion	\$40.00		16	0	\$640.00		\$640.00
Clearfield	\$20.00	\$153.50	31	10	\$620.00	\$1,535.00	\$ 2,155.00
Clinton	\$20.00		50	0	\$1,000.00		\$ 1,000.00
Columbia/ Montour	\$10.00	\$ 50.00	185	2	\$1,850.00	\$100.00	\$1,950.00
Crawford	\$45.88	\$ 544.04	41	7	\$1,881.08	\$3,808.28	\$5,689.36
Cumberland		\$600.00	128	5	\$9,381.12	\$3,000.00	\$12,381.12
Dauphin	\$25.00	\$145.00	48	5	\$1,200.00	\$725.00	\$1,925.00
Delaware	\$95.00	\$1,600.00	719	127	\$68,305.00	\$203,200.00	\$271,505.00
Erie			14	10	\$1,026.06	\$5,878.30	\$6,904.36
Fayette	\$53.00	\$250.00	323	17	\$17,119.00	\$4,250.00	\$21,369.00
Forest/ Warren			17	0	\$1,245.93		\$1,245.93
Franklin/ Fulton	\$61.12	\$516.00	100	18	\$6,112.00	\$9,288.00	\$15,400.00
Huntingdon	\$35.00	\$350.00	0	18		\$6,300.00	\$6,300.00
Indiana	\$50.00	\$750.00	79	4	\$3,950.00	\$3,000.00	\$6,950.00
Jefferson	\$122.00	\$890.00	29	0	\$3,538.00		\$3,538.00
Lackawanna			394	0	\$28,876.26		\$28,876.26
Lancaster	\$72.02	\$269.48	27	27	\$1,944.54	\$7,275.96	\$9,220.50
Lawrence	\$30.00	\$600.00	21	9	\$630.00	\$5,400.00	\$6,030.00
Lebanon	\$42.00		108	25	\$4,536.00	\$14,695.75	\$19,231.75
Lehigh		\$300.00	161	0	\$11,799.69		\$11,799.69
Luzerne	\$100.00	\$831.00	66	71	\$6,600.00	\$59,001.00	\$65,601.00
Mercer	\$50.00	\$ 500.00	3	1	\$150.00	\$500.00	\$650.00

Mifflin	\$64.00	\$100.00	37	36	\$2,368.00	\$3,600.00	\$5,968.00
Monroe	\$50.00	\$1,370.00	32	22	\$1,600.00	\$30,140.00	\$31,740.00
Montgomery	\$193.40	\$1,500.00	386	20	\$74,652.40	\$30,000.00	\$104,652.40
Northampton	\$125.00	\$500.00	493	26	\$61,625.00	\$13,000.00	\$74,625.00
Northumberland	\$60.00	\$250.00	6	18	\$360.00	\$4,500.00	\$4,860.00
Philadelphia	\$79.00	\$350.00	6760	44	\$534,040.00	\$15,400.00	\$549,440.00
Pike	\$150.00	\$500.00	85	0	\$12,750.00		\$12,750.00
Potter			9	0	\$659.61		\$659.61
Schuylkill		\$580.00	69	4	\$5,057.01	\$2,320.00	\$7,377.01
Snyder	\$60.00	\$450.00	4	0	\$240.00		\$240.00
Sullivan/ Wyoming		\$390.00	1	0	\$73.29		\$73.29
Tioga	\$50.00	\$350.00	0	4		\$1,400.00	\$1,400.00
Union			0	0			
Venango	\$15.00	\$201.00	5	24	\$75.00	\$4,824.00	\$4,899.00
Washington			43	6	\$3,151.47	\$3,526.98	\$6,678.45
Wayne			53	3	\$3,884.37	\$1,763.49	\$5,647.86
Westmoreland			45	5	\$3,298.05	\$2,939.15	\$6,237.20
York	\$29.00	\$500.00	605	0	\$17,545.00		\$17,545.00
Monthly Avg./Totals	<b>Avg. \$73.29</b>	<b>Avg. \$587.83</b>	<b>15,082</b>	<b>695</b>	<b>\$1,203,528.79</b>	<b>\$550,689.46</b>	<b>\$1,754,218.25</b>
<b>Total Estimated Annual Savings</b>					<b>\$14,442,345.48</b>	<b>\$6,608,273.52</b>	<b>\$21,050,619.00</b>

**NOTE: When counties reported only the number of court proceedings held via video conference, the average costs to transport defendants from a state correctional institution or local facility was used to calculate total savings.**

***Photo attached: Magisterial District Judge William G. Reuter of Mount Joy, Pennsylvania demonstrates video conferencing.***

## **BACKGROUND: Details of the Supreme Court's video conferencing efforts**

*With careful planning over the last several years, the AOPC has carried out the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania's comprehensive plan to beef up security in and around courts throughout the state.*

*These efforts first focused on magisterial district courts that had often lacked the security hardware of county courthouses. The AOPC equipped 550 magisterial district courts and night court facilities with a total of 750 digital cameras, 1,400 duress alarms, shatterproof safety glass and restraints for in-custody defendants.*

*Subsequently, the AOPC developed a statewide automated security incident reporting system to provide vital information on actual or potential threats to anyone with business in the courts, and the training of court staff in personal security and safety, focusing on how to effectively deal with verbally and physically disruptive litigants.*

*Security hardware was later upgraded at Common Pleas courts. The AOPC reimbursed 57 counties for the installation of a total of 25 magnetometers, 35 X-ray machines, 23 card key entry systems and 43 duress alarms. The AOPC has also reimbursed many counties for the purchase of closed circuit TVs (CCTVs) generally installed at courthouse entry points and other vulnerable locations; exterior lighting to provide safety zones around courthouses.*

*In 2008, the AOPC began a three-year initiative to provide related training and video conferencing equipment throughout Pennsylvania's courts. The first step was to install video conferencing equipment in more than 155 district courts without such technology. Next the AOPC provided video conferencing equipment in 25 Common Pleas courts without such technology and replaced outdated video conferencing equipment in 170 magisterial district and Common Pleas courts.*

*In 2010, the AOPC provided video conferencing equipment in 138 magisterial district courts that were using Web cams, completing the final phase of the initiative, ensuring that all courts in Pennsylvania had the ability to conduct court proceeding via video conference.*

*Video conferencing in the courts reduces the number of transports of in-custody defendants to courts, thereby reducing the risk of assault on deputy sheriffs and other transport officers, judges, and anyone in the courtroom. This practice also significantly reduces the costs associated with the transportation of defendants.*

*The Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency estimated a potential cost savings of \$25,000 per video conference site. The video conferencing units also enable courts to carry out essential functions in response to a pandemic, manmade or natural disaster or public emergency. The court's security program is strengthening communication among local courts, court staff, county officials and law enforcement in order to respond effectively to such emergencies.*

