



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

EDITORS NOTE: An informational graphic regarding this topic is available on the Judiciary's [media resources web page](#).

News for Immediate Release

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Aggressive efforts by court officials keep collections near record levels despite declining case filings **Pennsylvania Courts Collect \$469 million in 2012**

HARRISBURG, PA—Magisterial district and Common Pleas criminal courts throughout Pennsylvania collected and disbursed to the state, counties, municipalities and victims a total of \$469 million in fees, fines, costs and restitution last year, according to latest reports released today by the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania.

“Although the judiciary’s fundamental function is the delivery of fair, timely and accessible justice, the collection of court-ordered financial sanctions is important, not just in terms of dollars but also in restoring victims’ lives and in enforcing the rule of law,” said Chief Justice of Pennsylvania Ronald D. Castille.

“Once again, the judiciary collected and disbursed far more in court-ordered payments than it receives in state funds to operate courts throughout the Commonwealth,” Chief Justice Castille said. “Of the \$469 million collected, little flows back directly to the courts.”

More than \$211 million, or 45 percent, of the total collected was distributed to the state; \$165 million, or 35 percent, to counties; \$52 million, or 11 percent, to municipalities; and \$36 million, or 8 percent, was paid to crime victims for restitution. A small portion of the collections were distributed to various entities such as schools, libraries and tax agencies. ([See annual state disbursement table](#))

Most court collections disbursed to the state are deposited into specific funds, such as the state’s motor license fund. A small portion of the funds collected for the state, such as those derived from an \$8 fee levied on traffic citations, is deposited into the Judicial Computer System Account to support court statewide automation. Court collections disbursed to counties and municipalities support local government programs.

Court case filings dropped 4 percent last year, and over the last five years, filings have tumbled nearly 13 percent from more than 3 million to 2.6 million. Approximately two-thirds of this decline was due to a significant drop in the number of traffic citations issued throughout the state. This drop in citations has reduced funding to a number of state and local programs, and contributed to an 18 percent decline in funds deposited into the Judicial Computer System Account. However, total court collections over this same five-year period increased slightly. ([See county case filing and disbursement tables](#))

The judiciary's county-based magisterial district and Common Pleas case management systems provide several features to improve collections, and over the years local court officials have become more adept at using them. Among those features is the ability to generate customized court payment delinquency letters and to share information with PennDOT for suspension of driver's licenses of defendants failing to pay court costs related to traffic violations.

In addition, the state's judicial automation staff has been assisting 37 counties with the use of outside collection agencies by sharing case financial data from the Common Pleas and the magisterial district judge case management systems with those agencies.

"E-pay," an application that allows defendants to conveniently make payments via the Internet with a debit or credit card, is also credited with improving collections. Nearly \$50 million in court fees were paid online in 2012.

"By providing an easy way to settle these court-ordered costs, defendants can avoid facing arrest, contempt of court proceedings, driver-license suspensions and/or additional collection agencies' fees," Chief Justice Castille said.

Court officials note that many defendants are on monthly payment plans to settle court-ordered financial sanctions over a period of many years. Large court penalties, particularly large restitution assessments, for example, may not be paid in full for 10, 15 or 20 years. Court collection levels also are affected by significant other factors, such as a defendant's inability to pay and the fact that 23 percent of the defendants assessed are incarcerated, making restitution difficult, if not impossible.

The Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts has determined that after four and one-half years, 95 percent of all the magisterial district assessments and 42 percent of Common Pleas court assessments were collected.

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EDITORS' NOTE: The court disbursements include court fees, fines, costs and restitution collected by 535 magisterial district courts and the criminal divisions of the 60 Common Pleas court judicial districts and Philadelphia Municipal Court. They exclude payments for civil cases processed by Pennsylvania's Common Pleas courts and cases processed by the Philadelphia Traffic Court, for which integrated statewide case management systems do not exist.

In 2004 the Pennsylvania Supreme Court implemented a Uniform Disbursement Schedule directing the disbursement of all fines, fees, costs, reparation, penalties and restitution. The statewide case management systems automatically disburse all payments in accordance with this schedule, based on legislation that places a high priority on the payments to victims.