



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

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News for Immediate Release

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Chief Justice to serve on National Institute of Justice Workgroup

HARRISBURG—Chief Justice of Pennsylvania Ronald D. Castille has been invited by the U.S. Department of Justice to serve as part of an eight-member expert workgroup, formed by the National Institute of Justice, to develop best practices and guidelines for the use of videoconferencing technology in state and local courts.

The workgroup's first meeting is being held today in Washington, D.C.

"Pennsylvania's court system is recognized as a leader in the use of videoconferencing technology," Chief Justice Castille said. "Since 2008, our courts have been applying this technology, most importantly to enhance security by reducing the risk of defendant escape or assault on transport officers, judges and persons in the courtroom, and as a secondary benefit to significantly cut costs associated with transporting prisoners."

The workgroup, consisting of jurists, judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, jail administrators, court administrators and court technology staff from around the country, plans to review Pennsylvania's experience to develop protocols in state and local courts for post-arraignment release hearings to maximize the return on investment in videoconferencing and reduce jail detention or overcrowding.

Based on a 2011 survey, Pennsylvania's courts conduct approximately 15,000 proceedings via videoconferencing each month. Approximately 62 percent of these proceedings are preliminary arraignments; others include warrant proceedings and bail and sentencing hearings. Videoconferences are conducted with defendants located in state correctional institutions, county and local prisons, booking centers and Pennsylvania State Police stations. The practice is estimated to save \$21 million annually in prisoner transportation costs by eliminating an estimated \$73 to transport a defendant from a local facility and an estimated \$588 to transport a defendant from a state correctional institution.

Chief Justice Castille said the return on investment in videoconferencing technology is significant. In 2008 about half the Common Pleas courts in Pennsylvania had the technology. The Supreme Court used \$4.2 million in state budget appropriations between 2008 and 2010 to

install 488 videoconferencing units in Common Pleas and magisterial courts that had yet to implement it. Based on the survey, those 488 video units accounted for \$9 million of the total \$21 million in estimated savings annually through videoconferencing.

The workgroup's project is jointly supported by the National Institute of Justice's Office of Research and Evaluation and Office of Science and Technology within the U.S. Department of Justice in Washington D.C.

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Contact: [Steve Schell](#), Communications Coordinator 717-231-3331

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