



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

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Pennsylvania Courts reduce backlog of civil cases by 19 percent

AOPC also launches new data dashboards to show number, type and age of civil cases

HARRISBURG — A two-year data review by Pennsylvania’s courts has reduced the backlog of civil cases by 19 percent and has required that all civil cases in Pennsylvania courts be addressed and disposed of in a timely manner.

The overall guideline is that most civil cases should be disposed of within two years of filing as recommended by the American Bar Association, unless the case is highly complex or there are extenuating circumstances.

“Too many civil cases had been on the docket for too long,” said Chief Justice Castille. “Some of that was due to certain court rules that made it difficult for inactive cases to be purged, some of it was due to lack of a case management system that could help staff understand the gravity of how many very old cases were lingering on the docket and some was due to local culture that allowed attorneys to dictate the pace of litigation, not the court and its judicial officers.”

“Over the past two years the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts conducted a massive data clean-up so that court administrators and practitioners in the judicial districts have a true understanding of their civil dockets. And we’ve required that each judicial district craft a civil case management plan to control their civil dockets for long-term, not short-term fixes.”

The Pennsylvania Constitution requires that criminal cases be heard in a timely manner, and historically, civil cases that don’t have that same requirement move through the system more slowly or in some instances not tracked.

During this project the courts, by data analysis, found that counties that did not hold attorneys accountable to a timetable or case management plan from the time the case was filed were more likely to have a higher volume of civil cases that languished on the docket for years longer than would be expected. Some were found to be settled without notice to the courts.

“Courts must monitor and control their civil inventory in order to forecast the resources needed to try cases, identify opportunities to avoid wasted time and unnecessary expense for parties, and assure the effective and efficient use of court resources,” said Chief Justice Castille.

“A backlog of civil cases means that landlords and tenants are waiting for resolution of cases affecting people’s homes, small businesses are waiting for outcomes that affect their bottom line

and those involved in medical malpractice cases and accidents are waiting for decisions that affect their lives. That’s why it is important to keep these cases moving.”

To help courts track civil case loads, the chief justice also announced that the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts has launched a [new dashboard showing county-by-county civil case age data](#) in an easy-to-understand format.

The dashboard data shows that of the more than 150,000 civil cases pending in Pennsylvania courts in 2013:

- 22 percent, or more than 33,000, were mortgage foreclosure cases
- 13 percent, or 19,400 cases, related to personal injury or property damage resulting from auto accidents
- 11 percent, or 16,753 cases, were debt collection cases relating to credit cards
- 1 percent, or 1,545 cases, was medical malpractice.

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EDITORS NOTE: The [Statewide Report on Civil Court Inventory and Case Management Plans](#) is posted on the website.

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