



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

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AOPC receives court statistics reporting excellence award

HARRISBURG — A special tool Pennsylvania uses to collect and manage information from hundreds of thousands of civil cases filed annually has won acclaim from a national court managers' organization.

The AOPC received the Court Statistics Project 2014 Reporting Excellence Award for its creation and use of a civil cover sheet that provides detailed case data in a way not previously available. The Conference of State Court Administrators Court Statistics Committee presented the award to Court Administrator of Pennsylvania Zygmunt A. Pines last weekend in Savannah, GA.

"We are thrilled to have other professionals from around the country recognize the work we are doing to manage our operations more efficiently and provide a high level of service Pennsylvanians have come to expect," Pines said. "Our civil cover sheets have helped not just the courts, but also our sister branches of government and others. For example, the cover sheets helped provide empirical data to help steer discussion about medical malpractice litigation concerns."

Pennsylvania was one of five states recognized this year with the reporting excellence award, which has been presented annually since 2009. Other states recognized this year included neighboring New Jersey as well as Georgia, South Carolina and Washington.

Committee members noted how use of the cover sheet has enhanced court operations by providing greater detail to determine how to manage cases and to draw meaningful comparisons with previous years to identify trends and issues. The data also helps court managers prioritize areas to allocate resources. A second phase of the cover sheet project concluded this year with a statewide Civil Inventory Project, which brought older data in line with new standards of accuracy. The action helped reduce civil case backlogs by identifying cases that parties had settled without reporting the action to the court.

The Supreme Court of Pennsylvania issued new rules in February 2010, requiring litigants to file the new form with prothonotaries in civil cases. Such cases include medical malpractice claims, zoning and tax assessment appeals and other types of property disputes. Exemptions were made for judicial districts with electronic filing systems — provided the districts could capture and transmit the desired data to the AOPC.

Although the AOPC had gathered aggregate caseload data for years, use of the cover sheet paved the way for the first statewide system for tracking the information by category. It also was part of a broader effort to enhance standardized practices and procedures within Pennsylvania's Unified Court System.

The AOPC has been invited for four consecutive years to participate in the National Center for State Courts Data Specialists Roundtable — a group that recommends national court statistics best standards and processes.

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Media contact: [Art Heinz](#), 717-231-3317

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