



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

News for Immediate Release

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AOPC Seeks Input on Public Access Policy for Appellate and Trial Court Case Records

HARRISBURG — The Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC) is seeking comment on a proposed public access policy concerning case records of the appellate and trial courts.

“Balancing the public’s right of access to official records with an individual’s privacy interests is an important public policy issue,” said Court Administrator of Pennsylvania Zygmunt A. Pines. “This proposed policy attempts to maintain that balance as it simplifies and unifies the process by which people may access paper records in trial and appellate courts statewide.”

If ultimately adopted, the proposed policy for the first time establishes uniform standards for all appellate and trial courts in responding to requests from the public for case records. This includes how requests for access are to be handled, establishment of fees, which information is considered confidential and other pertinent recommendations. It also builds upon existing policies governing access to magisterial district court case records, electronic case records and financial records.

At the direction of the state court administrator, a working group was formed to study and develop a proposed policy for public comment. The group consisted of judges, appellate and local court administrators, representatives from the Pennsylvania Bar Association and the rules committees of the Supreme Court, and AOPC staff.

The working group:

- studied different types of records pertaining to criminal, domestic relations, civil, juvenile, orphans’ court and appellate matters filed in the courts
- considered existing legal authorities and other jurisdictions’ access policies on the release of data and documents
- evaluated practical considerations, such as what information should be safeguarded and how, and identified “best practices” to institute statewide.

The formal notice of this proposed policy is expected to appear in the *Pennsylvania Bulletin* on Saturday, Feb. 7, 2015. The AOPC will seek comment for a 60-day period, which ends on April

8. Public comment instructions and relevant documents are available on the judiciary’s website at www.pacourts.us.

Following the public comment period, the AOPC will submit a policy proposal to the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania for its consideration.

“I would like to thank all members of the working group for their dedication and hard work in crafting this proposal,” Pines said. “I am particularly grateful for the experienced and dedicated leadership of Commonwealth Court Judge Renée Cohn Jubelirer and Montgomery County Court of Common Pleas Judge Lois E. Murphy, under whose guidance the working group approached this task with an open mind and an aim to appropriately balance the competing interests at hand. We look forward to receiving public comment on this important initiative.”

[Public Comment Instructions](#) (PA Bulletin Notice)

[Policy](#)

[Explanatory Report](#)

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Editors’ Note: The Supreme Court of Pennsylvania has adopted other policies governing public access to Unified Judicial System case records:

1. [Electronic Case Record Public Access Policy of the Unified Judicial System of Pennsylvania](#) (provides for access to the statewide case management systems’ Web docket sheets and requests for bulk data)
2. [Public Access Policy of the Unified Judicial System of Pennsylvania: Official Case Records of the Magisterial District Courts](#) (provides access to the magisterial district courts case records in paper format)
3. [Rule of Judicial Administration 509](#) (provides access to financial records)

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