

AOPC CONNECTED



Issue 2, 2022

In this issue

Read about the upcoming celebration of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court's 300th anniversary and recent efforts to show support for Autism Acceptance Month, some of the early successes of the Guardianship Tracking System, county court highlights and more.

Pa. Supreme Court Creates Autism in the Courts Taskforce

Following the statewide Autism in the Courts listening tour, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court has created a taskforce focused on issues affecting justice-involved individuals with autism and intellectual disabilities.

Partnering with the Office of Children and Families in the Courts (OCFC) and led by Justice **Kevin Dougherty** on behalf of the Supreme Court, the taskforce will provide increased training opportunities for judges, help further identify gaps in the system for individuals with autism and create a local roadmap to resources and services.

“By creating a taskforce and partnering with the OCFC who work primarily with youth in the dependency court system, we’re positioning ourselves to better assist those who need it before they enter the court system,” Justice Dougherty said.

Led by Justice Dougherty, members of the taskforce include judges from different counties across the state, Children and Youth Services (CYS) county directors, hearing officers, state partners (including Juvenile Court Judges' Commission and Pa. Department of Human Services, etc.), as well as representatives from AOPC Communications and OCFC.

Judges on the Autism in the Courts Taskforce:

- Judge **Margaret T. Murphy**, Philadelphia
- Judge **Hugh McGough**, Allegheny
- Judge **Jennifer Rogers**, Luzerne
- Judge **Mitchell Shahen**, Beaver
- Judge **Ryan Tira**, Lycoming
- Judge **Linda Cordaro**, Fayette
- President Judge **Maureen Skerda**, Forest/ Warren
- Judge **Michael Sholley**, Snyder/Union
- President Judge **Stephen Minor**, Potter.

At the end of March, the group of nearly thirty members attended the first Pennsylvania Autism in the Dependency Court Taskforce Summit.

From doctors explaining neurodiversity and the opportunities it brings, to staff from state agencies describing the resources and services available to youth – the three-day summit covered a vast variety of topics and provided taskforce members with a range of different perspectives.

A particularly informative session featured a panel of parents who discussed the challenges and rewards in parenting a youth with autism or being a parent with



“Our goal is to bring together top thought leaders, advocates and practitioners from the courts, autism and intellectual disabilities communities, advocates and children and youth professionals so that we can continue working to develop a framework within the courts to assist those in need.”

Justice Kevin Dougherty

autism, and what things are important for courts to know and consider as they interact with children and parents.

In 2020, the Supreme Court first signaled its commitment to Pennsylvanians with autism by forming a first-of-its-kind partnership with the Pa. Department of Human Services to heighten the focus on helping judges better understand and communicate with individuals with autism. ▲

more information

For more information about the Autism in the Courts effort visit <https://www.pacourts.us/learn/autism-and-the-courts>.

Pa Courts Celebrate Autism Acceptance

The Supreme Court of Pennsylvania promoted Autism Acceptance Month throughout the court system, encouraging judges and court staff to join them in showing support for those with autism by wearing blue on April 12.





Pa. Supreme Court Celebrates 300th Anniversary

This May will mark the official 300th anniversary of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania.

To celebrate and commemorate the occasion, the Court will hold a series of events during the third week of the month aimed at highlighting the Court's unique role and how its decisions affect every Pennsylvanian.

"Created on May 22, 1722, the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania is older than the U.S. Supreme Court and has played an important role in the history of the Commonwealth beginning long before the Declaration of Independence was drafted here. The other justices and I very much look forward to participating in this historic milestone," Chief Justice **Max Baer** said.

The events will include a special Supreme Court Argument Session at Old City Hall in Philadelphia, as well as a two-day Symposium at the National Constitution Center – which will review key aspects of the Court's history, jurisprudence and role in today's society.

The panel members will include the Justices of the PA Supreme Court, the Chief Justices of South Carolina, Ohio and Rhode Island, the former Chief Judge of the Third Circuit Court of Appeals D. Brooks Smith, Pennsylvania Chief Justice Emeritus **Thomas G. Saylor**, and retired United States Supreme Court Justice Anthony M. Kennedy, as well as prominent legal scholars and members of the bar.

The symposium is eligible for Continuing Legal Education (CLE) and Continuing Judicial Education (CJE) credits for any lawyer or judge who attends and completes the registration process through AOPC/Judicial Education.

A special webpage dedicated to the Court's 300th anniversary has been created and hosts background and historical information about the Court and each justice, details for the upcoming events, 3D tours of the state's Supreme Courtrooms and more. ▲

Visit the page at <https://www.pacourts.us/learn/history/celebrating-300-years>.

Follow the **#Supreme300** campaign on Facebook [@PennsylvaniaCourts](#) and [Twitter @PACourts](#).

Editors

Stacey Witalec
Kim Bathgate

Writer

Casey Scheffler

Contributors

Patti Campbell
Rhonda Hocker
Stephen Baldwin

Graphic Design

Gretchen Smith

Photography

Kyle Kauffman

Court Administrator of PA

Geoff Moulton

Deputy Court Administrator of PA


Andrea B. Tuominen


All content is collected, written and edited by the AOPC Communications Office unless noted.


You may reach the office by calling: (717) 231-3300 or by emailing:


CommunicationsOffice@pacourts.us

For more information about Pennsylvania's courts, visit: www.pacourts.us

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Supreme Court of Pennsylvania

Max Baer

Chief Justice of Pennsylvania

Debra Todd

Justice

Christine Donohue

Justice

Kevin M. Dougherty

Justice

David N. Wecht

Justice

Sallie Updyke Mundy

Justice

P. Kevin Brobson

Justice

The Early Successes of GTS

Since the implementation of the Guardianship Tracking System (GTS), counties have seen the real-world impact it has had on some of the state's most vulnerable citizens.

Perhaps one of the most instrumental features of the GTS is its ability to provide information to courts in near real time when a guardian is removed from a case due to abuse, neglect or financial exploitation. The GTS also automatically flags potential concerns of loss and neglect on reports filed annually by the guardian(s). The flag logic promotes a uniform protocol for courts to review filed guardianship reports and enhance the ability to monitor guardianship cases.

There have been many success stories that have emerged from the field over the past couple of years in which the GTS has played a crucial role in protecting the lives of incapacitated Pennsylvanians.

In York County...

When a professional guardian who was appointed on guardianship cases in many counties was charged with crimes related to financial malfeasance, Orphans' Court Judge **Clyde Vetter** issued an alert in GTS, allowing the AOPC to work fast to notify the local courts in 16 counties.

"We were very quickly, literally within minutes, able to generate a comprehensive list of all the impacted guardianship cases, and we were able to follow up with counties until the guardian was removed (in compliance with the bail conditions) and a successor was appointed on each case," AOPC/IT Analyst Manager **Amy Whitworth** said. "This would have been very difficult, and may not have been possible at all, without the GTS."

In Dauphin County...

When the Office of Elder Justice in the Courts (OEJC) received information from a long-term care pharmacy company concerned that a guardian was not making regular payments for an incapacitated person's medication, the GTS again allowed for a quick response.

Once notified by the OEJC, court staff were able to quickly find the case and identify all other cases to which the guardian in question had been appointed.

Orphans' Court Judge **John Cherry** issued a statewide alert, thereby immediately notifying every orphans' court in which the guardian had an active case(s).

In Luzerne County...

In Luzerne County, Orphans' Court Judge **Richard M. Hughes III** was alerted by the GTS that a guardian was overdue on mandatory annual reporting. After the guardian refused to respond to the court's order to file reports, Judge Hughes asked the police to conduct a wellness check on the incapacitated person. The



incapacitated person was found to be homeless because his guardian - his sister - had abandoned him in Wilkes-Barre's public square.

Thanks to Judge Hughes' action on information provided by the GTS, a potential tragedy was averted. He removed the sister as guardian and appointed a successor guardian who located services for the incapacitated person.

In Butler County...

A guardian in Butler County was caught transferring over \$134,000 in assets out of an incapacitated person's estate without proper authority.

Flagging the unauthorized gift expense, the GTS allowed for a quick response by the Clerk of the Orphans' Court **Sarah Edwards**, who immediately reported the concern to a judge.

Keys to success

As is the case with the AOPC's other statewide systems, the GTS has helped to unify court processing for guardianships. Counties have established or are working toward optimizing a report review protocol, and guardians who work across multiple counties now interact with all orphans' courts through a standard, electronic-filing platform and process.

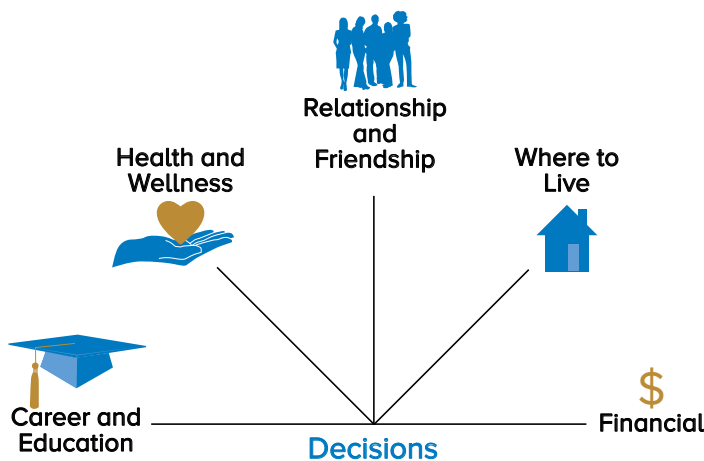
"The real success story of the GTS is the impact it has had in actively promoting a conversation around guardianship monitoring, shining a light on cases that may not have received much attention," Whitworth explained.

"Counties have become more actively engaged with guardians and improved their experiences and level of support while providing more oversight to better secure the well-being and financial assets of our Commonwealth's most vulnerable citizens." ▲

Supported Decision-Making: An Alternative to Guardianship

During their March meeting, the Office of Elder Justice in the Courts (OEJC) and Advisory Council on Elder Justice in the Courts (Advisory Council) heard from a guest speaker about an alternative to guardianship that has been gaining nationwide attention in recent years.

Nina Kohn, professor at Syracuse University College of Law, discussed the emerging practice of supported decision-making (SDM) as an option for judges and courts to consider in instances where individuals who might otherwise be unable to make their own decisions (due to cognitive impairments, etc.) do so with support from others.



How SDM works

SDM allows individuals in need of assistance to make choices about their own lives with support from a person or team of people they choose and trust. After identifying the areas in which assistance is needed, the individual chooses supporters and together they may execute a supported decision-making agreement.

The network of trusted supporters – who can be family members, co-workers, friends, past or present service providers, etc. – present the pros and cons of any decision to be made and help individuals understand the ramifications of their choices.

The role of the courts

Although Pennsylvania does not currently have a statute specifically recognizing the enforceability of a written supported decision-making agreement, the guardianship statute recognizes that individuals may not need a guardian when family or community support is available and adequate to assist them in making their own decisions.

Courts are required by statute to give serious consideration to whether family and community support can meet the needs of an incapacitated or partially incapacitated person without the need for guardianship.

The benefits of SDM

The SDM process not only helps enhance the rights of individuals who might otherwise have been subjected to a guardianship, but its use can also avoid numerous unnecessary court proceedings and save all parties time and money.

Certain judges and state courts, along with related agencies and organizations, have been instrumental in expanding the knowledge and use of SDM. Chief Justice Nathan Hecht of the Texas Supreme Court led the effort to pass the country's first SDM statute in 2015.

As SDM continues to attract interest and grow in use, the Advisory Council and OEJC are discussing efforts to promote it in Pennsylvania.

Upcoming

The Montgomery County Elder Access to Justice Roundtable, along with the AOPC, OEJC and the Advisory Council, will hold a hybrid roundtable event to explore SDM and other alternatives to guardianships.

The all-day event will be held on Friday, June 17 at the Villanova Conference Center and will be simultaneously livestreamed via Zoom.

Panels of experts and breakout sessions throughout the day will offer in-depth discussions on less restrictive alternatives to guardianship – including mediation, restorative justice, SDM, community supports and legal alternatives.

Continuing Legal Education credits (CLEs) will be available for Pennsylvania attorneys who attend, and social workers and certified guardians may receive Continuing Education Units (CEUs).

Register here:

<https://montcoelderjustice2022.eventbrite.com> ▲

Montgomery County Elder Access to Justice Roundtable presents

2022 CONFERENCE

"OOPS! I DID IT AGAIN": EXPLORING ALTERNATIVES TO GUARDIANSHIP

June 17, 2022 - The Inn at Villanova and Live on Zoom



(l) Dauphin County Judge William Tully presents Veterans Court graduate Christopher Hodges a plaque and challenge coin at the ceremony in March. (r) Justice P. Kevin Brobson at the Dauphin County Veterans Court graduation ceremony in March.

Dauphin County Veterans Courts Celebrates 10th Anniversary

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Dauphin County Veterans Treatment Court since the program first started in January 2012.

On March 4, the Court commemorated the occasion holding a ceremony at the Dauphin County courthouse to celebrate the graduation of two court participants.

Dauphin County Veterans Treatment Court Judge **William T. Tully** presided over the ceremony, attended by Pa. Supreme Court Justice **P. Kevin Brobson** who gave remarks on behalf of his colleagues on the Court.

Speaking to the graduates, Justice Brobson said, “Together, you’ve added important chapters to the stories

of your lives – moments which now provide hope for those still struggling.”

“Ten years from now you’ll look back on this moment and realize how far you’ve come, and I hope you’ll always remember the significance of your story and the people who got you to this point.”

Over the past ten years, 123 veterans have been admitted to Dauphin County Veterans Treatment Court and 82 have graduated. Veteran participants have included those from Vietnam, Persian Gulf, Operation Enduring Freedom/ Operation Iraqi Freedom, Grenada, the Korean War and others. ▲

Pa. Problem-Solving Courts Study Shows Reduction in Recidivism and Statewide Costs

According to a recent study, Pennsylvania’s Problem-Solving Courts programs have resulted in increased success for participants and significant cost savings to taxpayers.

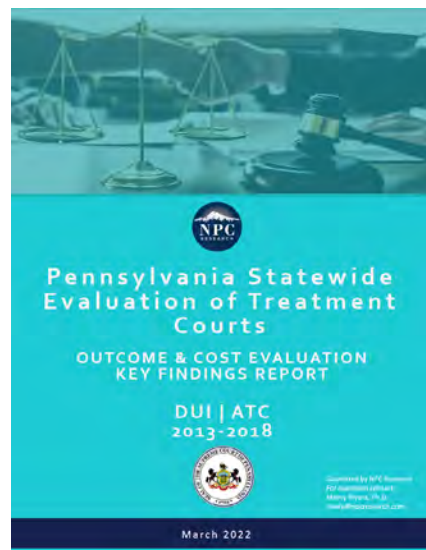
Supported in part by a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance, the AOPC worked with NPC Research to perform a statewide study of Pennsylvania’s Adult Drug Treatment Courts (ATCs) and Driving Under the Influence Courts (DUI) between 2013 and 2018.

In commissioning the study, the AOPC charged NPC Research with evaluating program costs and measuring outcomes including those related to participant recidivism.

According to the report all Pennsylvania DUI Courts showed reductions in recidivism for all charge types at three-year post entry, with the overall reduction in recidivism for DUI court participants at 36 percent.

Statewide, DUI courts saved more than \$8.5 million for the three years after program entry as a result of fewer rearrests, court cases and person and property victimization, according to the study results.

The study also found that a majority of Pennsylvania’s ATCs showed reductions in recidivism by more than 75 percent in some programs, with a majority demonstrating better results than comparison groups for all rearrests.



Like DUI Courts, ATCs have saved nearly \$50 million statewide over three years due to decreased arrests, fewer court dates, jail days saved and victimizations due to person or property crimes.

Read the full report [here](#). ▲



Legislative roundup

by Damian J. Wachter, Esq.

The following enactments and legislative action have occurred since mid-February. Because of the upcoming general primary election that will occur on May 17, both chambers have a limited session schedule the remainder of April and May. After the primary, the legislature will turn its attention to the budget in June.

Constitutional Amendments Supreme Court Rulemaking Prior Passage – None

[House Bill 1910](#) amends Article V, Section 10 (c), seeking to curb the rulemaking authority of the Supreme Court. While the Court would retain authority, the General Assembly could occupy a specific space of rulemaking if it were to pass and the governor signs legislation to that effect. The bill also repeals current language requiring that “laws shall be suspended to the extent that they are inconsistent with rules prescribed...”. The legislation was reported from the House Judiciary Committee on a 15-10 party line vote.

Appellate Court Operations

[House Bill 2066](#) amends the Administrative Code to require the AOPC to “transfer the operations of the Supreme Court, Commonwealth Court and Superior Court to the

Pennsylvania Judicial Center” no later than Mar. 1, 2023. “Operations” is not defined by the bill.

The legislation outlines the duties of the AOPC to facilitate the transfer, including terminating leases and selling any building used for the operation of the three courts, and other necessary action. The bill was reported from House State Government on a 15-10 party line vote.

Constitutional Amendments Redistricting by Court Prior Passage – None

[Senate Bill 1166](#) amends Article II, adding a section limiting the effect of a Congressional map “devised and drawn by a court or by a person directed by a court to devise the congressional map” to the election cycle for which the map was drawn. Reported from Senate State Government on a 7-4 party line vote.

Constitutional Amendments Spending Limits Prior Passage – None

[House Bill 71](#) amends Article VIII, adding a subsection requiring the spending limit for any fiscal year to be equal to the spending during the immediately prior fiscal year, adjusted by a formula outlined in the bill that would be enshrined in the constitution. Reported from House Appropriations on a 22-15 party line vote.

Determinate Sentences for Title 75 Summary Offenses

The legislation seeks to address Commonwealth v. Eid, 249 A.3d 1030 (Pa.2021), wherein the Supreme Court held that [75 Pa.C.S. § 1543](#) (b) (1.1)(i) is unconstitutionally vague.

[Senate Bill 1031](#) amends Titles 42 and 75, allowing a court to impose a determinate sentence for summary offenses under the Vehicle Code. The

legislation also modifies sentences for certain violations under Section 1543 – driving while operating privilege is suspended – so to set a determinative sentence. The bill was reported unanimously from the Senate Transportation Committee.

[House Bill 2106](#) is similar, though not identical to Senate Bill 1031. It was reported from the House Judiciary Committee 20-5.

Family Finding

[House Bill 1866](#) amends titles 42 and 67, requiring that during a permanency hearing, a court must determine whether transition planning and services are being provided and, for children 18 years of age, determine whether a suitable transition plan has been presented. In cases where the child will be placed in another planned permanency arrangement approved by the court, the county agency must identify at least two significant connections with supportive adults.

The bill clarifies the legislative intent of family finding to ensure that each child leaving foster care at 18 years of age and older is prepared for transition to successful adulthood and updates the definition of *family finding* to reflect current practice. It also defines the terms *permanency plan* and *transition plan*. The legislation provides for new statutory sections specifically governing permanency and transition plans and services and requires county agencies to submit data to DHS for a child 18 years of age and older at the time the court terminates jurisdiction over the child.

Crime Victims

[House Bill 2464](#) amends the Crime Victims Act (CVA), providing legal standing to a crime victim “to assert and enforce a right enumerated in the [CVA] or any other right afforded to the victim by law in a trial or appellate court or before an official body with jurisdiction over the victim’s case.” The bill is not intended to grant a victim party status, provide grounds for the accused to obtain

any form of relief in the proceeding in which the individual is accused, or create a cause of action for compensation or damages against the commonwealth, a political subdivision, officer, employee or agent of the commonwealth, a political subdivision or an officer or employee of a court. The commonwealth is prohibited from asserting a waiver on behalf of the victim in the absence of demonstrating the victim has knowingly agreed.

[House Bill 2525](#) amends Title 18, adding a subchapter to the Criminal History Record Information chapter to allow a crime victim or his/her legal representative to obtain *criminal history investigative information* for use in, or investigation of, an actual or potential civil action relating to the criminal history investigative information.

The bill outlines provisions governing access, including request, service, dissemination, and receipt of information, denial, and judicial review of denial, and limits the dissemination of otherwise privileged information. The legislation requires the promulgation of rules and regulations by the attorney general and the Supreme Court.

Concurrent Jurisdiction to Prosecute – Firearm Offenses

[House Bill 2275](#) amends Title 18, reauthorizing and extending the timeframe under which the attorney general has concurrent jurisdiction to prosecute certain firearm offenses in Philadelphia until Dec. 31, 2025. The legislation was reported from House Judiciary Committee on a 15-10 party line vote.

Legislative Expenses and Vehicles

[House Bill 2449](#) amends the Legislative Officers and Employees Law, requiring the chief clerks of the Senate and House to quarterly post a list of expenses on a publicly accessible Internet website. Covered expenses include per diems, travel allowances and reimbursements, meals and lodging, equipment and

furnishings, district and capitol office expenses, official expenses, and special expenses, miscellaneous expenses of standing and special committees.

Additional information required includes the member or individual for whom the expense was submitted, paid, and reimbursed, the date the expense was incurred, submitted, paid, and reimbursed, the legislative purpose for the expense, and the account from which the expense was paid or reimbursed. Reported from House State Government 25-0.

[House Bill 746](#) creates the State-Owned Vehicle Assignment Act, prohibiting the assigning of a state-owned vehicle to a state official or the expenditure of Commonwealth funds to lease a vehicle on behalf of a state official. The term state official is narrowly tailored in the bill to include only members of the General Assembly. Passed the House 183-16.

Term Limits – District Attorney (DA) in Philadelphia

[House Bill 2238](#) amends the First-Class City Home Rule Act, limiting the Philadelphia DA to two, four-year terms. The language makes the current DA, who is currently in his second term, ineligible for an additional term. Reported from the House Judiciary Committee on a 14-11 generally party line vote. ▲



{Damian Wachter, Esq. is the acting director of Legislative Affairs.}

New Interpreter Program Director



Following the retirement of **Osvaldo Aviles** as director of the AOPC's Interpreter Certification Program (ICP) in March, Interpreter Program Coordinator **Natalia Petrova** assumed the role of director on April 4.

Natalia has been an instrumental member of the ICP since joining the AOPC in 2012.

A state court certified interpreter in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, she has diverse experience as an interpreter, translator and interpreter trainer.

Natalia is also a certified Russian medical interpreter.

Among her many responsibilities with the ICP, Natalia coordinates interpreter orientation workshops, written and oral exams each year. As part of the ICP's continued efforts to recruit potential candidates, she plans and conducts outreach events and trainings. She is a go-to on all interpreter-related questions.

In her spare time, she loves hiking, cross-country skiing and volunteering as a reforester at a local nature preserve. She is an active member of the American Translators Association and on the Board of Directors at Delaware Valley Translators Association.

Please join us in congratulating Natalia and welcoming her into this new role! ▲

Berks Bar Association Helps Prepare Future Court Interpreters



This past fall, the Berks County Bar Association once again sponsored an interpreting skills training program for individuals in the process of becoming a certified court interpreter.

The program consists of 14 evening training sessions held in the greater Reading area.

In December, Interpreter Program Coordinator **Natalia Petrova** delivered the last session along with a mock exam tailored to prepare candidates for the oral proficiency exams.

One of the six participants who went on to take the Interpreter Certification Program (ICP) exam has recently become fully certified in Spanish. ▲

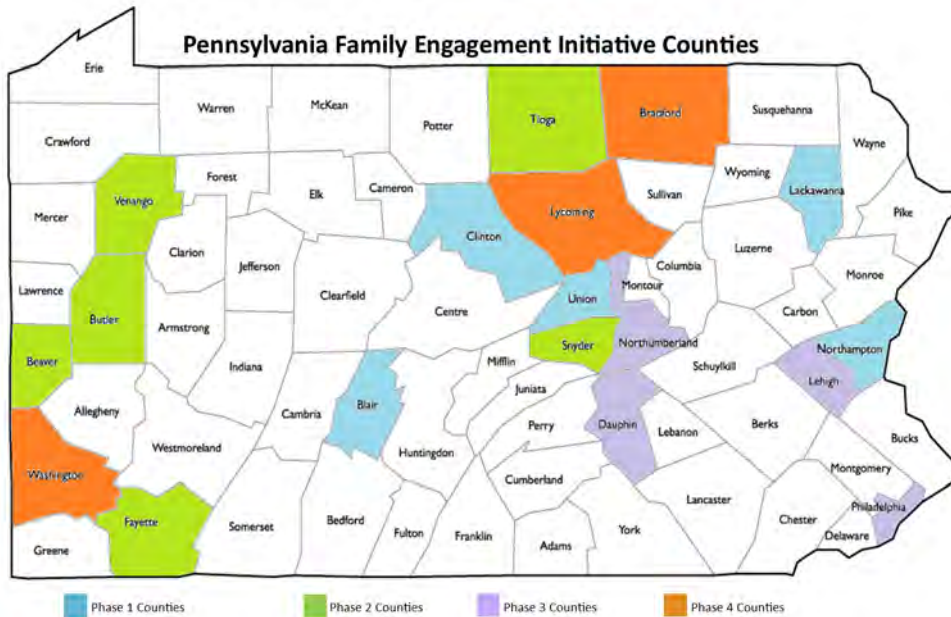
(l to r) Natalia Petrova and Berks County Bar program participant/recently certified Pennsylvania court interpreter, Arturo Bobea



more INFORMATION

For more info about the Interpreter Certification Program, visit <https://www.pacourts.us/judicial-administration/court-programs/interpreter-program>.

OCFC Expands Family Engagement Initiative; Develops New Judicial Resources



Revised: January 2022

Continuing its efforts to enhance meaningful family involvement in Pennsylvania’s child dependency system, the Office of Children and Families in the Courts (OCFC) recently developed and released new online resources for attorneys and judges navigating the system.

Family Engagement Initiative – Phase 4

Established by the Pennsylvania State Roundtable in 2017, Pennsylvania’s Family Engagement Initiative (FEI) is designed to assist select counties in furthering collaborative efforts between the judiciary and child welfare agency.

Earlier this year, three more counties joined the expanding initiative – Bradford, Lycoming and Washington – bringing the current total number of participating counties to 18.

The long-term goal of the initiative is to increase the likelihood that children will safely remain in their own home or will be placed with family if out-of-home placement is necessary.

All participating FEI counties must have demonstrated strong court/child welfare agency collaboration and a desire to enhance family engagement strategies to produce the best possible outcomes for children and families in the child welfare system.

Online Training for Attorneys

Core One: An Attorney’s Introduction to Pennsylvania’s Dependency System

OCFC developed this online training session for attorneys practicing in dependency court—guardians ad litem, child counsel, parent attorneys and solicitors.

The session provides information that can help attorneys understand common issues and better advocate for clients. Issues like trauma, safety, visitation, child development, family finding and family group decision making are not topics taught in law school, but attorneys need to understand when participating in dependency court.

Benchbook Resource Companion

In February, the second edition of the Pennsylvania [Benchbook Resource Companion](#) was released.

The new resource companion contains an updated collection of social science resources and three new topic sections – Autism, Implicit Bias and Reasonable Efforts.

Revised by the Pennsylvania Dependency Benchbook Committee, a group of seasoned trial court judges overseeing dependency proceedings, the resource companion is intended to provide judges with a compilation of social science resources, pertinent to their work in dependency court, that can be easily accessed.

While this resource was created by judges for judges, all of those involved in Pennsylvania’s child dependency system are encouraged to access and utilize this resource.

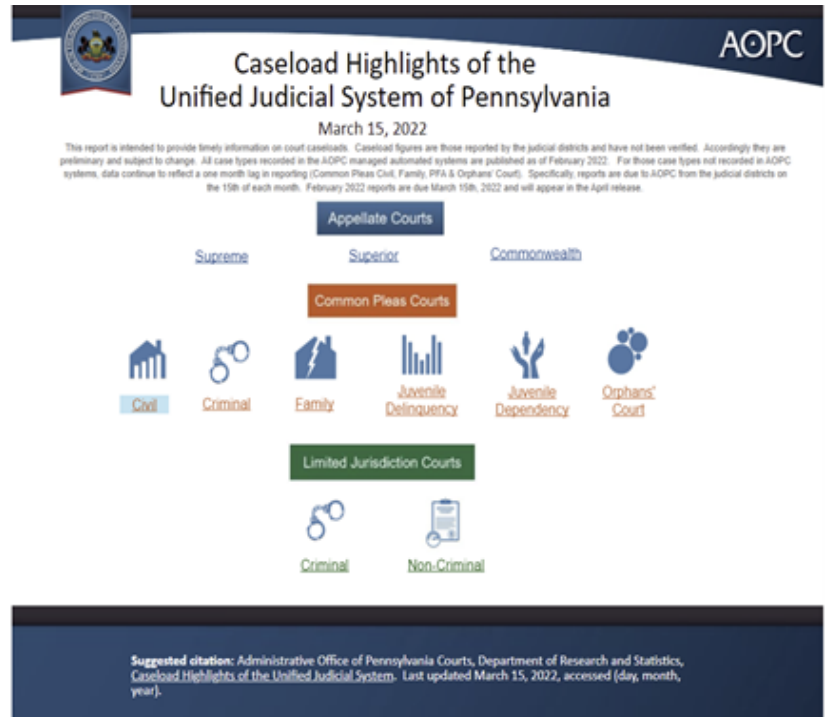


Caseload highlights during the pandemic

For the past two years, the AOPC/ Research and Statistics department has monitored and reported monthly caseload statistics for all levels of court in Pennsylvania via the AOPC Caseload Highlights Report.

What began as a monthly update to state and county leadership has led to an interactive, publicly available data dashboard that is the definitive source of information on Pennsylvania court caseloads from pre-pandemic, “baseline” years to the present.

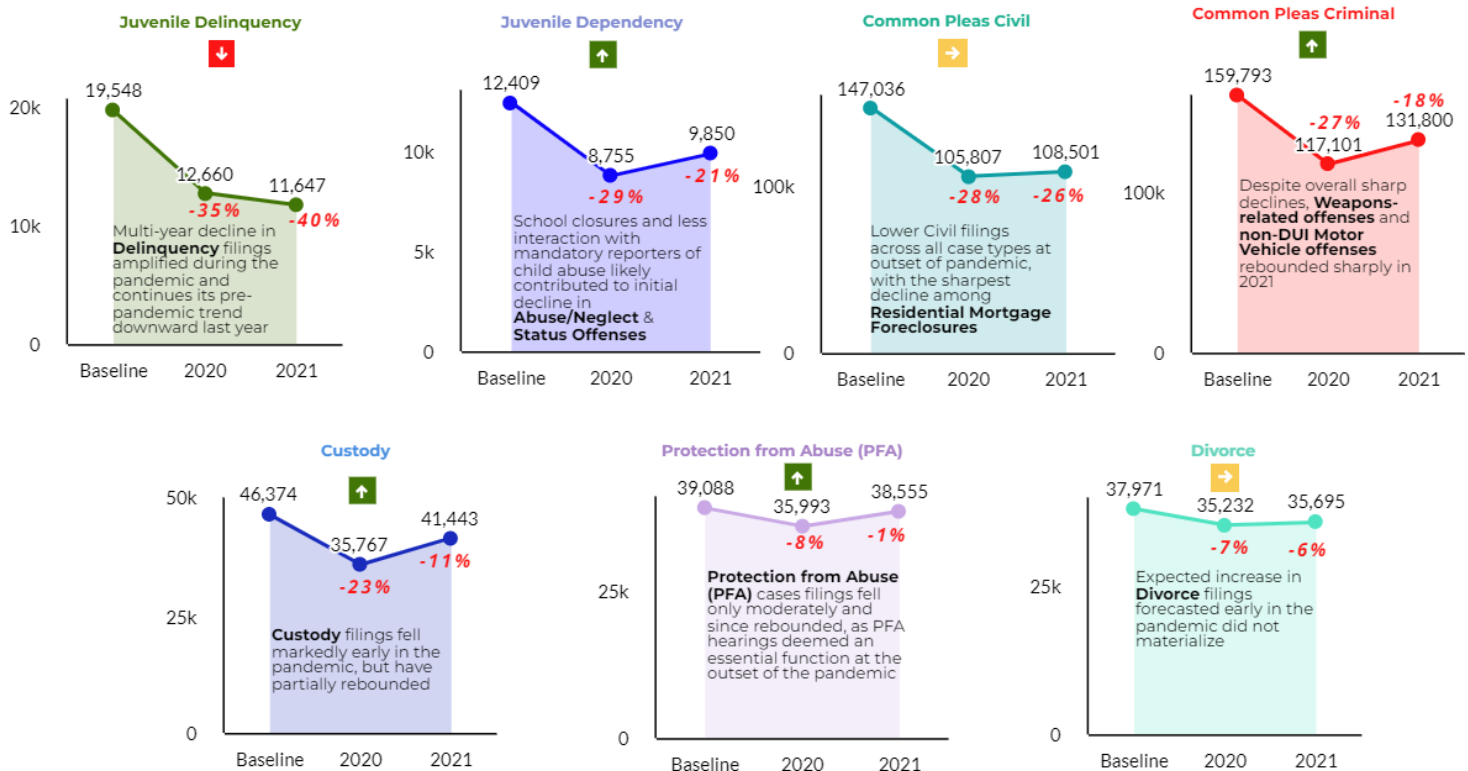
The [report](#) is a collaboration between AOPC/Research, AOPC/IT, the appellate court prothonotaries, district court administrators, the county prothonotaries, clerks of court and Orphans’ Court and Philadelphia Municipal Court.



While the statistics are preliminary, they provide an accurate representation of the direction and magnitude of changes in monthly caseloads. The report also serves as an “early warning” of developing case backlogs by displaying changes in pending caseloads and case clearance rates (a.k.a., the number of existing cases going out as compared to the number of new cases coming in.)

Common Pleas Courts

Caseload Directions: Rising ↑ Stabilizing → Decreasing ↓



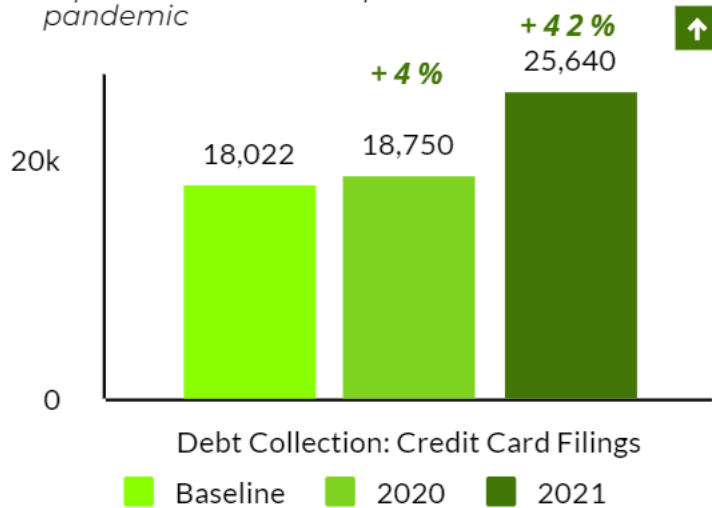
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The first edition was released in June 2020. With very few exceptions, case filings declined during the early months of the pandemic – some moderately, others sharply. In Common Pleas Courts, criminal filings immediately dropped by over 80 percent, while civil filings fell by more than 70 percent. In the lower courts, traffic filings decreased over 80 percent, while landlord/tenant filings were 97 percent lower than pre-pandemic, baseline levels.

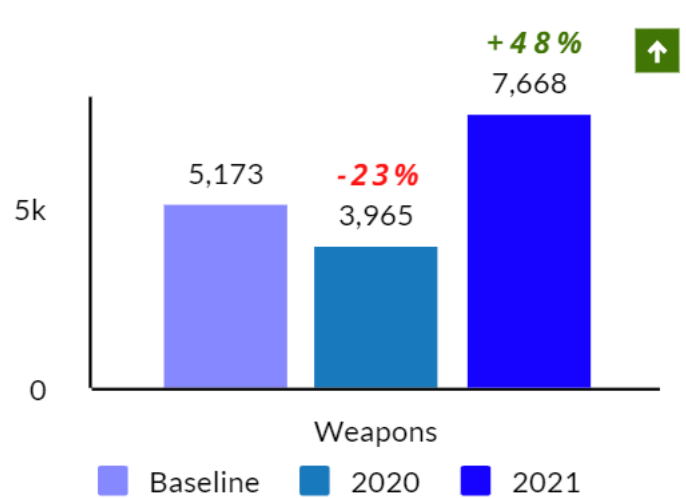
Some case types have partially rebounded or stabilized compared to pre-pandemic levels, while others continue to decrease.

Ongoing monitoring of caseload patterns detected particular increases in Common Pleas credit card debt collection cases and criminal weapons offenses.

Credit Card Debt Collection filings were higher than pre-pandemic levels in 2021 due, in part, to a statutory change in counting petitions and, in part, to the expected economic impact of the pandemic



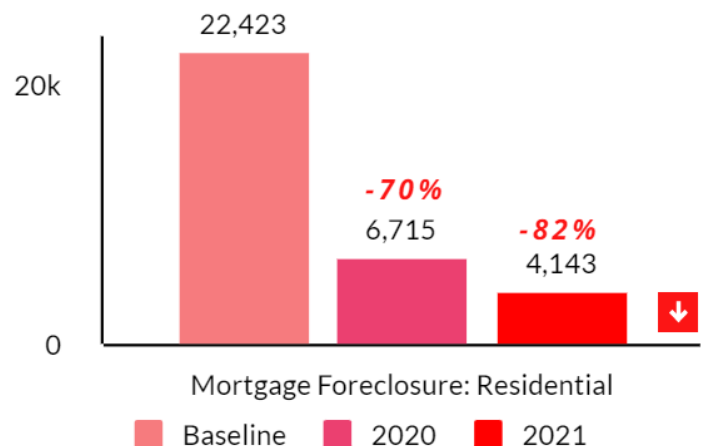
Criminal Weapons Offense filings surged in Pennsylvania in 2021, concurrent with an estimated 30% nationwide increase in gun-related violence during the pandemic



Also observed was a steep drop in residential mortgage foreclosure filings, which persists today.

Sharp declines in **Residential Mortgage Foreclosure** filings concurrent with the federal foreclosure moratorium (FHA mortgages) and a variety of forbearance initiatives

Building on the model developed for the Caseload Highlights Report, in mid-2021 the AOPC/Research and Statistics department began producing a weekly [AOPC Landlord-Tenant Report](#) in order to track eviction filings, dispositions and cases pending following the expiration of federal and state eviction moratoria. Published as a data dashboard, this report serves as a tool for MDJs in the monitoring and management of landlord/tenant matters.



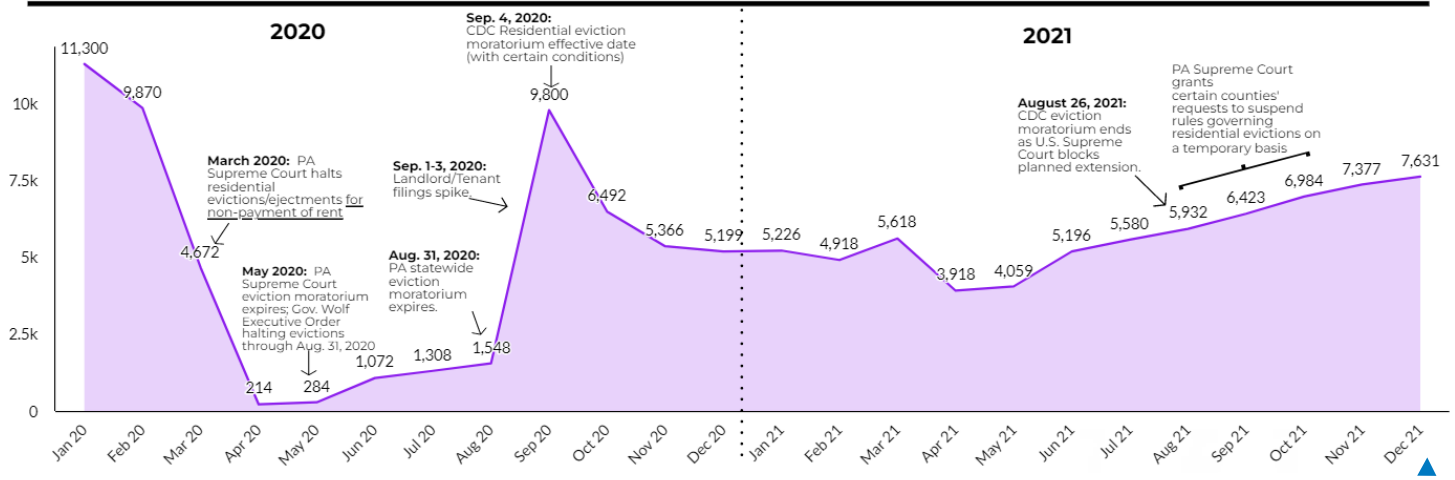
The annotated chart on the next page illustrates the sharp decline in monthly landlord/tenant filings early in the pandemic and the partial “rebound” that occurred in late 2021 (Magisterial District Courts and Philadelphia Municipal Court).

(continued)

Producing these reports has strengthened AOPC’s partnerships with judicial district administration and county row office personnel, who have shared interest in obtaining timely caseload statistics to inform decision making.

State and federal eviction moratoria precipitated sharp decreases in Landlord/Tenant filings early in the pandemic; however, statewide filings gradually rose in late 2021...

NOTE: Monthly filings include both Magisterial District Courts and Philadelphia Municipal Court...



Employee Burnout: How It Happens and What You Can Do to Help

Written by Life Advantages - Author Dr. Delvina Miremadi ©2022
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Employee burnout happens in every workplace. Workers may start the job as enthusiastic employees, and then turn into problem people who show up late or don't show up at all. If you know of workers who have lost motivation for their jobs and show signs of apathy, they may be experiencing employee burnout.

A worker can experience burnout due to a great amount of stress; this stress can be job-related, but it can also be a result of great levels of stress at home. The important thing to remember is that employee burnout can be reversed and there are things managers and employers can do to help an employee get back on track.

How Does Burnout Happen?

Burnout occurs when a person is placed under stress for a long time. Oftentimes, the person is physically and/or emotionally exhausted, and no longer functions like he or she used to. If an employee has been placed in a demanding situation at work or at home, the person may

suffer symptoms of burnout as a result, especially if the stress is persistent and ongoing.

An employee may experience burnout if he or she was passed over for a promotion or overworked without recognition, or if there is continual change in a department. An internal inability to set appropriate boundaries may also contribute to burnout. For instance, employees might bring too much work home with them.

Recognizing Employee Burnout

Burnout symptoms are:

- A change in work habit or attitude
- Loss of enthusiasm or motivation
- Absenteeism or tardiness
- Negative reactions or comments
- Emotional outbursts
- Health problems
- Drug or alcohol use

Additionally, as an employer or supervisor, there are steps that can be taken to help avoid employee burnout affecting the workplace:

- If your company is downsizing, readjust workloads in creative ways. Ask employees for input, and see which tasks they would prefer to do and which tasks they would like to avoid.
- Give ample notice about changes in positions or tasks. If downsizing has occurred, firm up schedules to give a sense of routine and continuity.
- Redistribute workloads if employees seem overwhelmed.
- Listen to employees and try to counsel them the best you can.
- Pay attention to what motivates each individual employee and utilize that when assigning projects.
- Understand your personality style and be aware of how that can play a role with individual employee communication.
- Schedule after-work events to boost employees' spirits.
- Refer employees to resources provided by your Employee Assistance Program (EAP). ▲

Pa. Judges Address Civic Engagement During Black History Month

In recognition of Black History Month, the Pennsylvania Courts hosted a one-hour Facebook Live event on Feb. 23 with a diverse panel of judges to discuss the importance of civic engagement.

Moderated by Pa. House Rep. Jordan Harris, judges described how opportunities to interact with the community can help empower youth and/or those transitioning from the court system.

Participant judges included Superior Court Judge **Carolyn Nichols**, Allegheny County President Judge **Kim Berkeley Clark**, Allegheny County Common Pleas Court Judge **Nicola Henry-Taylor**, Monroe County MDJ **Michael Muth** and Philadelphia Municipal Court Judge **Charles Hayden**.

For anyone interested in watching, the event was recorded and available on the [PA Courts YouTube page](#).

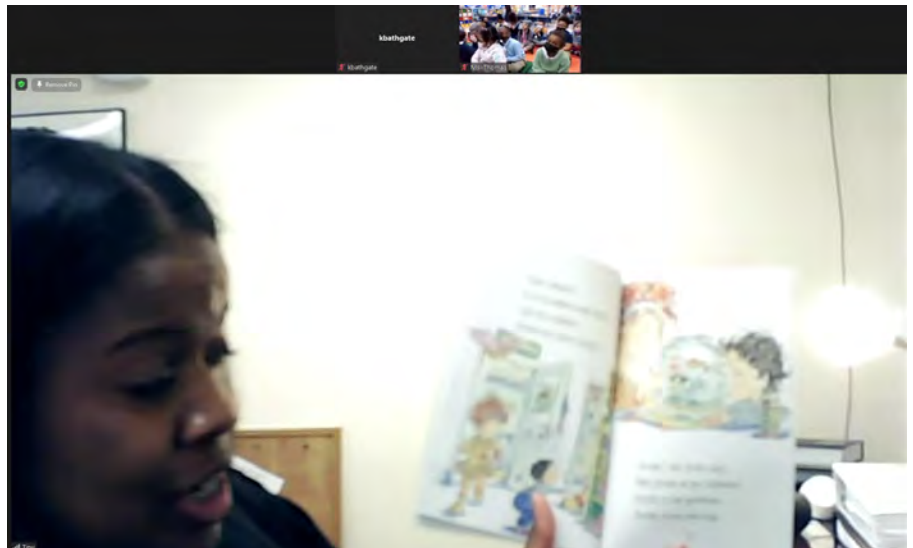


Screenshot from PA Courts: An Important Discussion on Civic Engagement via FB Live

Some judges like Delaware County Common Pleas Judge **Tinu Moss** exemplified the message of civic engagement, taking to the classroom to engage directly with children in her community.

Participating in Read Across America Day in early March, she read to students at Ardmore Avenue, Bell Avenue and Walnut Elementary Schools.

Judge Moss, as with every judge who is active in their community, is allowing children to see themselves represented in positions of power at a young age – and that can make a world of difference. ▲



Screenshot of Judge Moss reading to students

Women Helping Women

When asked by a friend to join her on a mission to help under-privileged women, AOPC/IT Manager **Soumya Krishnamurthi** did not hesitate to say yes.

Professional Women and Women Entrepreneurs (POWER) is a nonprofit dedicated to helping fellow women reach their goals. Soumya and a group of her friends, including the now founder and chairman of POWER, continue to carry through that mission today.

“POWER creates an environment and platform for South Asian and American women to come together and provide information, guidance and opportunities to help achieve each other’s goals,” Soumya said.

“Not all Asian and American women have the means to explore and get proper insight into education, business, jobs, political and social opportunities. POWER provides that opportunity and support to women to help them grow into self-driven educators and providers in the community.”

Soumya has served in various roles since the organization’s inception in 2018 – including as secretary of POWER for two years, and now in both advisory and public relations roles.

As secretary, she was responsible for planning and hosting POWER’s many annual charity events.

“Every year, as part of our International Women’s Day celebration, we pick a theme based on world events and/or current affairs, invite speakers who are experts in that field to speak at the event, and donate funds raised to an organization that is associated with the theme. As an example, the theme for 2020 was Autism and Parkinson’s awareness, primarily because not many Asian Indian families feel comfortable opening-up about their kids being on the autistic spectrum,” Soumya said.

“The purpose of the event was to get them to feel comfortable about it and connect them to the right people. Funds raised were donated to the Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) in PA Initiative and the American Parkinson Disease Association.”



Soumya Krishnamurthi pictured on far right.

“As an immigrant woman I am well aware of the difficulties women face on a daily basis here. I was fortunate enough to grow up in a well-educated, affluent family and did not have to struggle through each step of life. Not everyone is as fortunate. POWER’s mission aligns with how I feel about giving back to society and helping women.”

Soumya Krishnamurthi

While some annual events like the International Women’s Day dinner and the Mother’s Day Walk/Run offer a fun way to raise funds, POWER also organizes events that administer direct aid to communities. Each October, the organization sets up a medical camp for refugees and the under-privileged – an event coordinated by Soumya.

Most recently, Soumya spearheaded and coordinated an event to introduce girls to the STEM field and encourage them to try their hand at coding, partnering with a local women-owned small business called Code Ninjas. ▲

more information: To learn more about POWER visit <http://power-women.org/>

Pa. Courts Celebrate Women's History Month



In recognition of Women's History Month in March, AOPC/ Communications produced a short video featuring many of the inspiring women that make up our courts. ▲

<https://vimeo.com/688956177/1ab66af950>

Men on Mission



The Pa. Courts recently released a video highlighting the “Men on Mission” program at Penn Wood High School that allows community leaders like Delaware County Magisterial District Judge **W. Keith Williams II** to lend advice, support and guidance to the younger generation. ▲

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TzzME_NkHal

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De-escalation of Volatile Encounters



The experience of going to court is daunting and frustrating for many individuals, and when exacerbated by issues related to mental health, trauma or stress – a situation may become volatile.

For this reason, the AOPC/Judicial District Security developed a training program via WebEx on “Effective De-Escalation Strategies for Volatile Encounters.”

The one-hour program is designed specifically for judges, district court administrators and court personnel.

Led by AOPC/Judicial Security Administrator **Rob Granzow** and Assistant Director **Kyle Ramberger**, the webinar provides judges and court staff with basic strategies for preventing volatile encounters and effective techniques for de-escalating those situations should they arise.

The program describes common behaviors and conditions associated with volatile encounters and equips participants with tools for handling these interactions both in person, and via phone or email.

Throughout the webinar, Granzow uses his own experience to illustrate the progression of a hostile encounter and how to strategically avoid specific language and behaviors that might inflame an already distressed individual.

When dealing with a court user who appears frustrated or distraught, absolute attentiveness and active listening are essential attributes in order to prevent the possible perception of insincerity that might further aggravate them.

Some tips for dealing with agitated individuals:

- Patience and resolute professionalism are key.
- Maintain eye contact and professional facial expressions.
- Keep a low and calm voice.

In addition to providing some ways to calm down a tense situation, the training offers some techniques for court staff to adopt that may help to prevent a volatile encounter from occurring in the first place.

For example, extending a courteous and sincere greeting to all court users can set a favorable tone for ensuing interactions.

AOPC/Judicial Security hosts this WebEx several times every year. Judicial districts may request a presentation by contacting the office at JudicialSecurity@pacourts.us. ▲

Continuing Judicial Education (CJE) credits are now being offered to judges who attend this training.

Distracted Driving Citations in Pennsylvania

(Data pulled from PA Courts case management systems and Philadelphia Municipal Court traffic division eTIMS system)

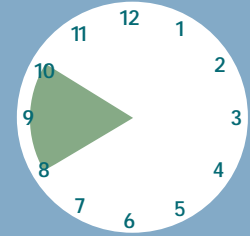


In Pennsylvania, distracted driving means:

- wearing or using headphones while driving
- texting while driving which includes sending, reading or writing a text-based message.
- using a handheld device while driving (commercial vehicle)

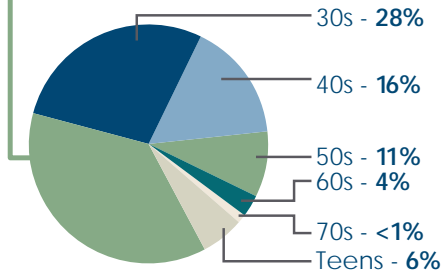


*Title 75, Section 3316

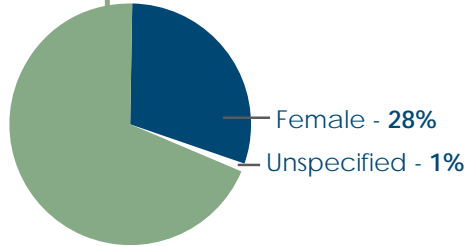


The greatest number of citations are given between 8 a.m. and 10 a.m.

33% of people cited were in their 20s



71% of people cited were male



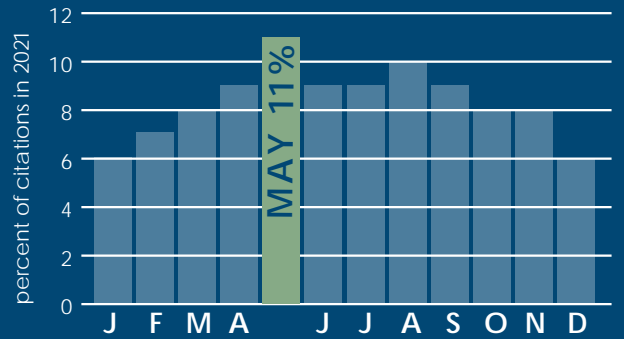
59% of citations were issued by Pennsylvania State Police



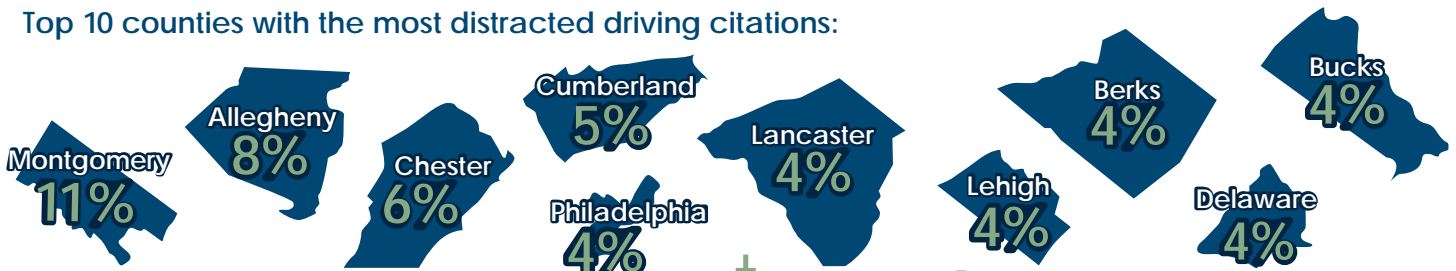
Distracted driving citations from 2017-2021.



Most citations were given during May.



Top 10 counties with the most distracted driving citations:



Data provided represents percentages from 1/1/2017 – 12/31/2021 (unless noted) based on the following state law: Title 75, sections 1621, 1622, 3314, 3316.



STUDY FINDS REMOTE HEARINGS TAKE LONGER, BUT IMPROVE ACCESS

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Remote proceedings take about a third longer than in-person hearings largely due to technology-related issues and lack of preparation by participants, according to an NCSC exploratory study of Texas courts. But the study also found that remote proceedings take longer because they increase access to justice, as litigants can more easily attend and participate in hearings.

This first national review of data confirms what judges have anecdotally shared about remote hearings before and during the pandemic. The 12-month study analyzed both 1.25 million minutes of judicial data and focus group feedback from judges and court leaders in eight counties across Texas.

David Slayton, former Texas state court administrator and NCSC vice president for Court Consulting Services, said the study's findings mostly confirmed what Texas court leaders thought to be true. However, he was somewhat surprised that remote hearings take longer across all case types. That, he said, points to technology being an issue for all courts to address.

Both he and the report suggest that courts can reduce the length of hearings by hiring “technology bailiffs,” who can better prepare remote hearing participants for their hearings and handle technology glitches that occur during hearings.

Other recommendations include:

- Creating guidelines to determine which hearings should be in-person or remote.
- Scheduling hearings efficiently while also considering litigant participation.
- Ensuring paperwork is completed before hearings begin.
- Providing easily accessible systems for participant use.
- Encouraging judges to take breaks between hearings.

“We have already begun working on how to implement some of the recommendations from the report,” said Jeffrey Tsunekawa, director of research and court services for the Texas Office of Court Administration. “For instance, there is a need for template instructions and expectations for virtual hearings. Often, valuable hearing time is spent verbally communicating these instructions when they could have been relayed in writing prior to the hearing. We are working to collect samples from across the state to share with other courts. We are also reaching out to courts to collect best practices and suggested practices now that courts have had two years of experience with remote hearings.”

Learn more about the findings and recommendations of this State Justice Institute-funded study [here](#).