

AOPC CONNECTED



Issue 1, 2024

In this issue

Read about the opening of the Supreme Court's new history center, the special ways county courts celebrated Adoption Day, how self-help centers are benefitting courts and litigants across the state, upcoming AOPC leadership transitions and more.

Supreme Court of Pennsylvania Unveils New History Center

Focused on preserving and celebrating the rich and distinguished history of the Court, the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania cut the ribbon on its new history center at the Pennsylvania Judicial Center in Harrisburg on Nov. 28.

The new center aims to provide an exclusive glimpse into the Supreme Court archives and will be offered as an additional tour location within the Capitol complex.

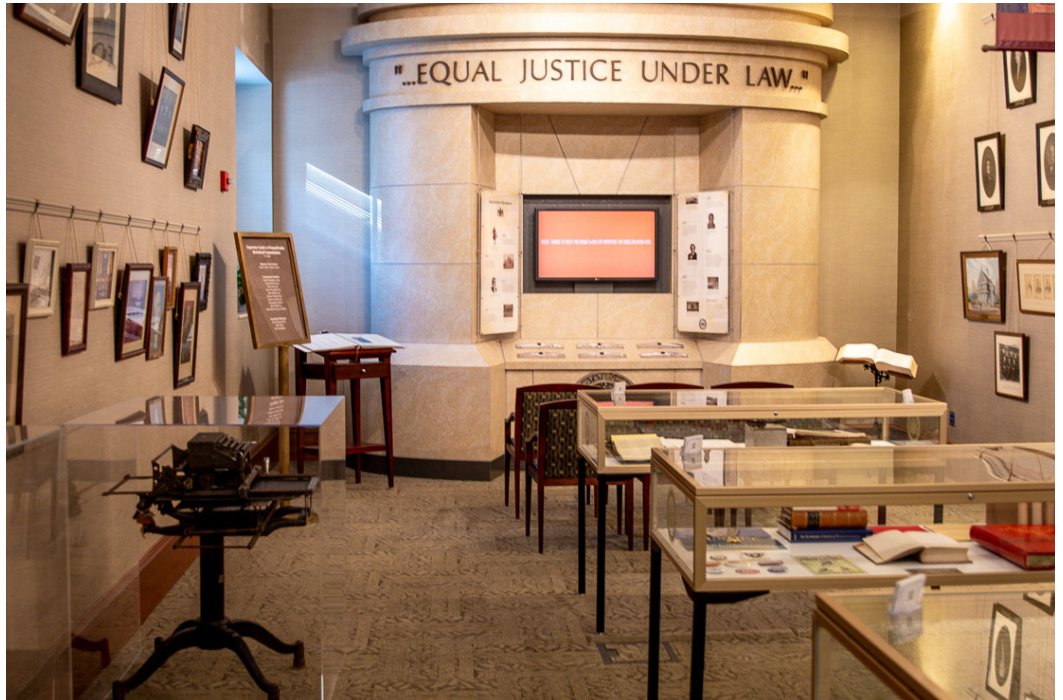
"Today is a momentous occasion to celebrate the Court and its history," Chief Justice **Debra Todd** said. "This new historical center will now become a space of inspiration and a place where future generations can gain a deeper understanding of the legal heritage and legacy of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court."

Visitors to the history center will have the opportunity to see original Supreme Court artifacts dating back to the 1600's while learning more about the history, work and role of the Court.

"The history center is a monument to our unwavering commitment to preserving our past," Justice **Sallie Updyke Mundy** said. "Within these walls the echoes of landmark decisions will reverberate, the wisdom of our esteemed justices will find new life, and



Members of the Supreme Court cut the ribbon to officially open the new history center. (l to r) Justice P. Kevin Brobson, Justice Sallie Updyke Mundy, Justice Kevin Dougherty, Chief Justice Debra Todd, Justice Christine Donohue, Justice David Wecht



New Supreme Court History Center

the poignant struggles for justice will resonate for generations to come."

"Through this new center, we will continue to collect, curate, and share the invaluable records, stories and artifacts that embody the history of our highest court. It will serve as a guardian of the past, an educator of the present and an inspiration for the

future."

The development of the history center was supported by the work of the Supreme Court Historical Commission. More information about the history center and its artifacts can be found here:

www.pasupremecourthistory.org.



Pennsylvania Supreme Court Honors Veterans

In recognition of Veterans Day, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court held a special ceremony at the Pennsylvania Judicial Center on Nov. 14 to honor veteran jurists and court staff who have served in the U.S. military.

“On behalf of the Court, this event is a small way to recognize and thank our judges and court staff who have honorably served and sacrificed for our country and who continue to pursue their steadfast commitment to public service,” said Chief Justice of Pennsylvania **Debra Todd**.

To open the ceremony, Cumberland County's Junior ROTC presented the colors and the Camp Hill School Ensemble performed the national anthem.

The keynote speaker was U.S. Marine Corps veteran, Corp. Brandon Rumbaugh, who shared his inspiring story of service and sacrifice after rushing to the aid of a fellow Marine and being wounded in a blast that took both his legs.

Later in the ceremony, Chief Justice Todd and Justice **P. Kevin Brobson** presented judges and staff in attendance who have served with special certificates and commemorative pins.



Pennsylvania Courts Celebrate National Adoption Day

In recognition of National Adoption Day, county courts across the state held special proceedings and family celebrations to honor adoptive families and bring community awareness to adoption and the importance of permanency in the life of a child.

Philadelphia County

On Nov. 17, Philadelphia Family Court, in conjunction with the Department of Human Services, finalized 14 adoptions. Judge **Jonathan Q. Irvine** presided over the adoptions, which were followed by a joyful celebration.

Adorned with balloons, gifts and a photo booth, the courthouse was filled with smiles as parents, siblings and grandparents all excitedly welcomed the newest additions to their families.



Photo credit: Matthew Boncek

(continued)

Luzerne County

In celebration of National Adoption Day, dozens of children were adopted on Nov. 8 as Luzerne County held their annual adoption ceremony. Judge **Jennifer Rogers** participated and spoke at the event, where children enjoyed getting their faces painted and doing arts and crafts with their new families.

"Knowing that they're in a good home and that they have established permanency, it was just a great day in Luzerne County. It's something positive to celebrate," said Luzerne County Children and Youth Administrator Katrina Gownley.

More than 80 children have been adopted this year through Luzerne County Children and Youth.



Allegheny County

In Allegheny County, 41 children officially joined their forever families on Nov. 18.

At the Family Law Center, six judges participated in the adoption proceedings, which families were also given the option to attend virtually.

A National Adoption Day celebration was held afterwards, with appearances from balloon artists and princesses and superhero characters interacting with excited children and families.

Montgomery County

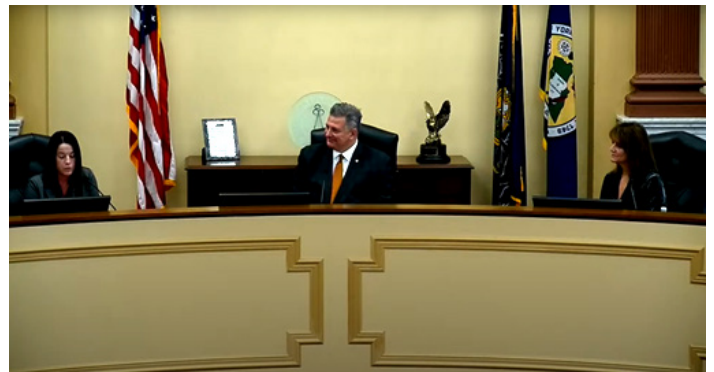
Montgomery County Orphans' Court Administration and the Office of Children and Youth sponsored a special day for the adoption finalizations of two local children from foster care on Nov. 17 in recognition of National Adoption Day.

County commissioners joined Orphans' Court Administrative Judge **Lois Murphy** and Orphans' Court Judge **Melissa Sterling**.

"I am delighted and honored to participate in a celebration of National Adoption Day this year. Adoptions are one of the most meaningful and important things that we do as a Court – helping children to find permanence in safe, secure and loving homes with their adoptive parents," said Judge Murphy.

York County

In York County, the Clerk of the Orphans' Court hosted their 4th Annual National Adoption Day celebration on Nov. 17. **Bryan Tate**, York County Register of Wills & Clerk of Orphans' Court, led the event at the York County Administrative Center.



(l to r) Tanya Stauffer, Bryan Tate, Tammy Contres Weimann

Following the keynote speaker (Tanya Stauffer, administrator of the York County Office of Children, Youth and Families), the York County Adoption

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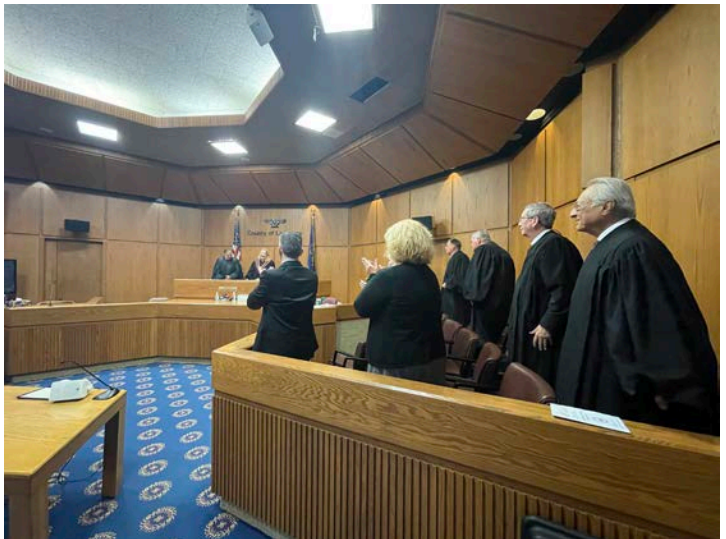
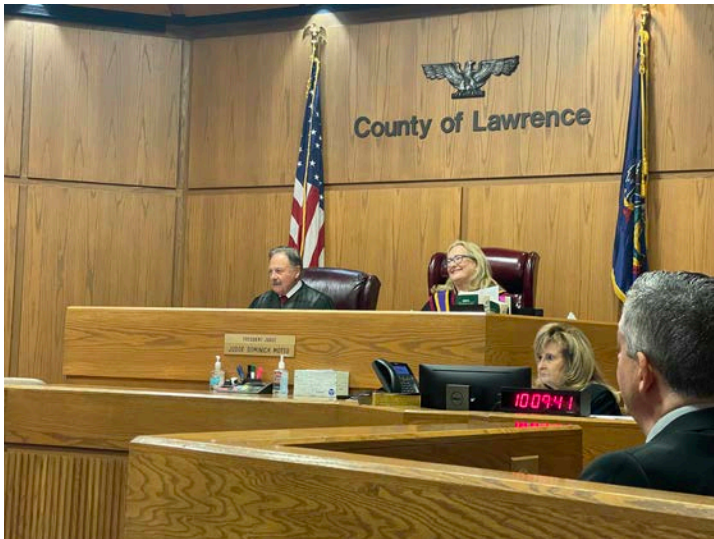
Advocate of the Year was named – an honor which has become an annual tradition beginning in 2020 paying tribute to members of the York County community who uplift foster care and adoption.

Tammy Contres Weimann, associate director of Permanency Programs at Children’s Home of York,

was named as this year’s Adoption Advocate of the Year.

In addition to being livestreamed on the county’s YouTube channel, the special program was also broadcasted on local television channels.

Lawrence County Treatment Court Receives Accreditation



Lawrence County President Judge **Dominick Motto** and Chief Justice **Debra Todd** presided over the ceremony.

The Lawrence County Treatment Court celebrated the accreditation of their program in a ceremony on Oct. 26. The program was recognized for its use of best practices in the field of problem-solving courts and awarded accreditation by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court.

Chief Justice **Debra Todd** spoke at the ceremony on behalf of the Court, thanking the treatment

court team for their hard work and congratulating them on this endorsement.

The county’s Treatment Court, which first started as a Drug Court in 2012, added a Mental Health Court in 2015 and a Veterans Track in 2022.

The journey to accreditation involved a rigorous 10-step process designed to evaluate the

Treatment Court's adherence to the 10 Key Components of Drug Courts, as defined by the National Association of Drug Court Professionals. Accreditation offers benefits that include receiving letters of support for grant applications, helping courts seeking sustainability funding and providing context for sentencing data.

Have a photo or story idea?

We are always looking for story ideas or photos of staff and judges out and about in the community. Send us an email with the scoop! CommunicationsOffice@pacourts.us



Miss an issue?

Check out our [newsletter archive!](#)

Accessing Justice: Self-help Centers in the Courts

Navigating the court system can be an intimidating experience for many individuals – especially when self-represented and faced with complex legal procedures or unfamiliar paperwork.

In addition to eliminating barriers that might otherwise hinder individuals from seeking legal remedies or understanding their rights, the establishment of self-help centers in courthouses can help streamline internal filing processes, prevent stalled proceedings caused by incomplete filings/unprepared litigants and contribute to overall judicial efficiency.

In Pennsylvania, at least seventeen counties (sixteen judicial districts) currently operate self-help centers.*

These centers come in a range of models and serve as hubs where individuals involved in legal proceedings can access information and seek guidance on navigating the legal process.

The services and amount of legal assistance offered by these self-help centers vary among counties and states, but the primary function of all self-help centers is to make the courthouse, and the judicial process, more accessible and easily understandable for court users.

What Services Do Self-help Centers Offer?

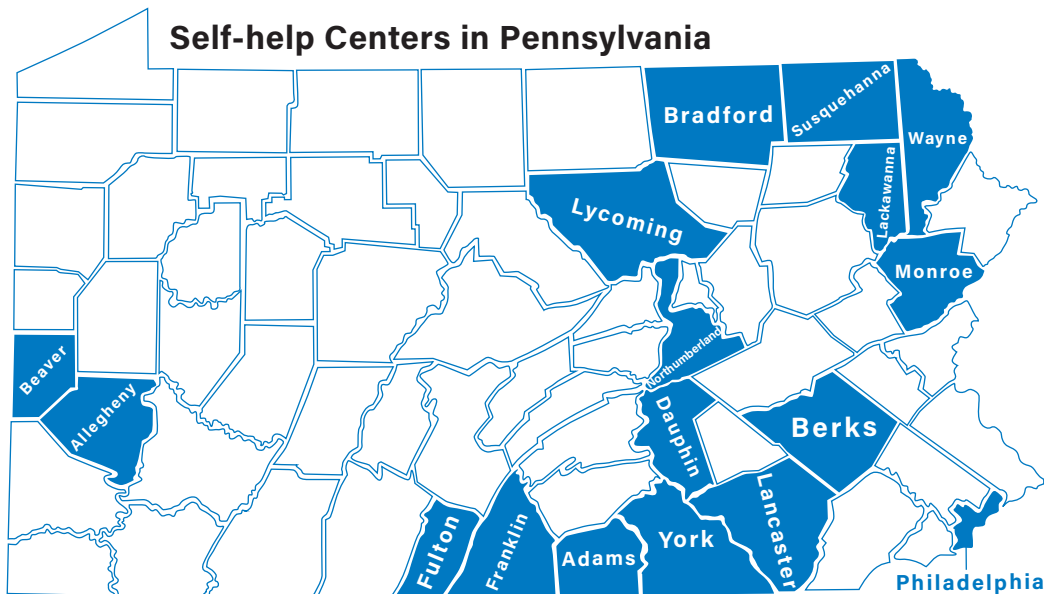
- 1. Guidance on Legal Procedures:** Self-help centers offer guidance on navigating the court system, including explaining court rules and procedures. Whether it's filing paperwork for divorce, landlord-tenant disputes, custody matters or small claims, staff can help users understand the steps involved in their legal proceedings and provide clarity on their rights and obligations.
- 2. Assistance with Court Forms:** Self-help centers assist litigants with filling out forms accurately, with staff available to walk them through the necessary paperwork and helping to avoid potential errors or complications.
- 3. Information and Education:** Individuals visiting self-help centers can access valuable legal information, educational materials and other relevant resources aimed at empowering them with the knowledge necessary to make informed decisions about their legal matters.
- 4. Referral Services:** While self-help centers can often provide support, they also offer referrals to other legal aid organizations or services for matters that may require more extensive legal representation or expertise beyond their scope.

While some centers have volunteer attorneys or law students available to assist litigants, others operate with court staff, law librarians, social workers and legal aid providers. Although court staff cannot offer legal advice, they can provide valuable assistance with court rules and procedures.

Often, self-help centers will partner with law libraries to offer information for self-represented litigants. Both Lycoming and Dauphin County's self-help centers are housed within their law libraries, whereas Lancaster County has a dedicated space for its center – all of which are overseen by law librarians.

Some centers, like the Family Court Help Center in Philadelphia, are able to partner with legal aid organizations who already have relationships with local court staff and a familiarity with the courthouse. Through grant

(continued)



**According to a survey conducted in March 2023 by AOPC/Judicial Operations and Programs*

funding, Philadelphia Legal Assistance runs and staffs the center with designated paralegals in the custody and domestic violence filing units, as well as a supervising attorney available for questions.

Others have been able to staff their self-help centers with volunteer attorneys through relationships with their local bar association or interested law firms or law schools. Allegheny County’s Court Client Services Center began through a volunteer program with the family law section of the Bar Association and later partnered with the University of Pittsburgh School of Law.

Another way to improve accessibility is by simplifying court forms to remove or explain legal jargon so that pro-se litigants don’t require as much help from staff in the first place.

The Elder Justice & Civil Resource Center in Philadelphia, for example, has improved the self-

represented litigant experience by translating commonly used, complex legal forms into plain language.

Beyond improving accessibility, self-help centers can empower litigants to navigate the legal system by educating them about common legal procedures and problems. Classes, videos and other informational handouts, available online or in the community, can provide further help.

Aside from in-person self-help centers offering one-on-one assistance for litigants, many courts offer online versions of self-help centers.

Whether it’s Lehigh County with a dedicated Self-help Center webpage, Northampton County offering online instructional packets or handbooks, or Crawford County producing a video series on the custody process – county courts across Pennsylvania continue to find ways to expand access to justice.

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Legislative Roundup

by Damian J. Wachter, Esq.

While the 2023-24 General Appropriations Act was signed into law in August, action was still required on separate legislation to reauthorize statutory surcharges to provide for the remaining – and significant – portion of the judicial budget.

Known collectively as “Act 49,” two surcharges (\$11.25 and \$10) are levied on court filings enumerated in statute. Resulting revenue is appropriated for the operation of the judicial branch. Legislative authorization to collect the surcharges expired on July 31. Additionally, current law annually diverting \$15 million from the Judicial Computer System Augmentation Account needed to be addressed.

Both issues were finalized with the signing of [Act 22 of 2023](#), budget implementation provisions adopted amending the Administrative Code. Act 22 reauthorized the collection of Act 49 surcharges through July 31, 2025, expanded the Act 49 base to levy the \$11.25 surcharge on summary traffic matters and suspended the \$15 million diversion for the fiscal year.

Several other issues of interest were considered during a marathon session the week of Dec. 11. In all, 33 bills were sent to the governor for his consideration and numerous others were acted upon, though not completed, by the chambers.

Clean Slate Expansion

[Act 36 of 2023](#) amends Title 18, expanding limited access and Clean Slate to certain offenses, reducing time frames for eligibility for limited access and Clean Slate and loosening exceptions. The act also provides for expungement in specific criminal proceedings when an individual has been granted an unconditional pardon and automatic expungement. The expungement (Section 9122) and Clean Slate (Section 9122.2) provisions are effective on June 11, 2024.

Indigent Defense

Act 34 of 2023, enacted from [House Bill 1300](#), an omnibus Fiscal Code bill containing a number of budget implementation items includes an article governing indigent defense – legal representation of “adult defendants and juvenile respondents through ... a public defender or contracted or conflict counsel.”

The act establishes the Indigent Defense Advisory Committee (Committee) within the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, comprised of *ex officio*/non-voting members, judicial, legislative and executive appointments.

The act enumerates a number of duties of the committee.

Common Pleas Complement

Act 58 of 2023, enacted from [Senate Bill 361](#), amends Title 42, adding a Common Pleas Court seat in Northumberland (8th), Luzerne (11th), Dauphin (12th) Chester (15th), Huntingdon (20th), Columbia/Montour (26th), Lehigh (31st), Montgomery – two seats (28th), Sullivan/Wyoming (44th) and Butler (50th).

The Chester, Huntingdon and Columbia/Montour seats are vacancies immediately upon enactment that may be filled by the governor with Senate consent to serve until Jan. 5, 2026. The Northumberland, Luzerne, Dauphin, Lehigh, Sullivan/Wyoming and Butler seats are established on Jan. 5, 2026, and filled in the 2025 municipal election. The Montgomery seats are established on Jan. 3, 2028, and filled in the 2027 municipal election.

Probation Reform

Act 44 of 2023, enacted from [Senate Bill 838](#) amends Title 42, providing for reform of the probation system. A brief sketch of the provisions is outlined below – the act is comprehensive and provides for changes to how probation cases will be handled. To provide for adequate time for education and other efforts, the act is not effective until June 11, 2024.

The act requires statutory probation conditions to be assessed based on individualized circumstances and modifies several of the conditions. Under the act, a presumption against total confinement for technical violations exists – total confinement is limited to situations outlined in the act and sentences of total confinement are based on the number of violations.

Act 44 adds a new section governing probation review conferences, directing that immediately following the probation review conference, the court must terminate probation unless it finds: (1) by clear and convincing evidence that the conduct of the defendant while on probation created an identifiable threat to public safety, including consideration of active PFAs, (2) by a preponderance of the evidence that the defendant has not successfully completed all treatment or other programs required as a condition of probation, and termination would either prevent the defendant from continuing in the court-

mandated treatment or programming that the court determines is still necessary to aid in the defendant's rehabilitation or would create a substantial likelihood that the defendant would discontinue the treatment or programs, or (3) by a preponderance of the evidence that the defendant has failed to pay the total restitution owed.

The act prohibits termination of probation under certain circumstances, including if the defendant was convicted of certain offenses committed while incarcerated or serving probation. It also prohibits review conferences and early termination for certain enumerated offenses. Act 44 clarifies that waiver of review conferences and/or termination of probation – when appropriate – can occur even if the probation, sentence or guilty plea was the result of an agreement between the Commonwealth and the defendant.

Importantly, several technical provisions are included in the underlying legislation. While these will be a part of the unconsolidated Act 44 once in print, the language will not be part of what is ultimately codified in Title 42. Consequently, readers are encouraged to review the technical provisions in Sections 5-9 on pages 17-21 of the bill.

Guardianship Reform

Act 61 of 2023, enacted from [Senate Bill 506](#), amends Title 20, providing for comprehensive changes to aspects of the guardianship law, including items advanced by the Advisory Council on Elder Justice in the Courts. The act requires courts to appoint counsel to represent an alleged incapacitated person (AIP) in any matter for which counsel has not been retained for all initial proceedings and subsequent proceedings to consider, modify or terminate a guardianship, regardless of the ability of the AIP to pay.

The act requires individuals seeking guardianship of three or more incapacitated persons to be certified and provide proof thereof. The Supreme Court, through rules, will prescribe procedures and forms necessary to effectuate the certification. The act further requires that during a determination of incapacity, the court must consider and make specific findings of fact concerning less restrictive alternatives. Act 61 repeals the current law allowance of a review hearing in favor of an automatic review hearing. The act is effective on June 11, 2024.

Potential Kinship Care Resource

Act 48 of 2023, enacted from [House Bill 1058](#), amends Title 42, defining the term potential kinship care resource as individuals meeting “the requirements to be an emergency caregiver [who] has expressed a willingness to be a kinship caregiver for a dependent child.” The act requires courts to provide the resource the right to be heard during a scheduled hearing under [42 Pa.C.S. § 6336.1](#) or separate dispositional hearing, but only on his/her qualifications to provide kinship care. The act takes effect on Feb. 12, 2024.

Overtaking a School Bus and Side Arm Cameras

Acts 19 and 38 of 2023 amend Title 75, making comprehensive changes to law governing automated enforcement of failure to stop for school bus with flashing red lights. Essentially, the acts seek to make automated enforcement through school bus arm cameras like other automated enforcement statutes.

Under the acts, upon certification that a violation has occurred, a school entity or a system administrator initiates an action by sending a notice of violation to the registered owner of the motor vehicle. Owners may request a hearing before a hearing officer to contest liability. The owner of the motor vehicle may appeal the decision by filing the notice of violation and supporting documents in the MDJ office for the district in which the violation occurred.

The acts require the MDJ to hear and decide the matter de novo and limits to finding an owner liable or not liable for the violation. The MDJ cannot assign damages to an owner or otherwise impose penalties on primary police departments, police officers, school entities, system administrators or other persons involved in the appeal process, except as otherwise provided under [42 Pa.C.S. § 1726](#), which may only be assessed to the school entity or system administrator.



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is the director of
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Supreme Court of Pennsylvania

Debra Todd

Chief Justice of Pennsylvania

Christine Donohue

Justice

Kevin M. Dougherty

Justice

David N. Wecht

Justice

Sallie Updyke Mundy

Justice

P. Kevin Brobson

Justice

Daniel D. McCaffery

Justice

AOPC Leadership Transitions



Joe Mittleman



Geri St. Joseph



Dave Jones



Frank Antonucci

After more than 27 years of service with the judiciary, Director of Judicial District Operations and Programs (JDOP) **Joe Mittleman** retired at the end of December.

Mittleman has been in his current role since 2000, after previously serving as executive administrator for the Superior Court from 1996-1999 and in the Delaware County District Attorney's Office for 11 years prior to that. During the course of his career, he also worked as an adjunct professor at Villanova University for 22 years.

"I'm enormously proud of the fact that I began as a one-member department and have grown the endeavor to a department of 19 skilled professionals providing assistance and advice to the judicial districts," Mittleman said.

As for his retirement plans, Mittleman said he is looking forward to catching up on his reading, exploring a few hobbies, and looking for his next adventure.

Taking his place will be **Geri St. Joseph**, who has served as AOPC legal counsel for more than 20 years.

"Geri will use her years of expertise within the judiciary to lead the JDOP team and support

the judicial districts with respect to court operations. She will do so in partnership with Assistant Director **Christy Beane**, who has provided guidance and expert counsel to local court leadership on a wide range of issues for more than 7 years," said Court Administrator **Andrea Tuominen**.

"In my new role, I look forward to continuing to work closely with district court administrators and president judges, alongside a dedicated and experienced staff, and contributing to the important work of the courts albeit in a different capacity," Geri said.

Dave Jones, director of Administrative Services, also announced his retirement effective at the end of 2023.

Jones has been with the AOPC since 2014, with a strong focus on providing service to AOPC/IT and maintaining the data center.

"We are grateful to Dave for his many years of distinguished service to the AOPC, especially during the pandemic where he worked diligently to keep the AOPC operational and safe for all of us during such an uncertain time," Tuominen said.

Replacing him, **Frank Antonucci**

assumed the role of director of Administrative Services effective Dec. 30.

"Frank is a familiar face around the AOPC, having been with our administrative services department for more than 30 years, he has been a driving force behind the scenes in making sure the AOPC runs efficiently and effectively no matter the challenges we face," Tuominen said.

"Dave Jones has been a positive influence within the department. My objective is to continue in that role, work with my fellow colleagues and support them in a positive and productive manner," Antonucci said.

In addition to being involved in the Pennsylvania Judicial Center construction project, Antonucci said another high point throughout his years with the AOPC has been the working relationships with his fellow colleagues.

In addition to wishing Joe and Dave well in their retirements and thanking them for all that they've done in support of the AOPC and PJC, please join us in congratulating Frank and Geri and welcoming them into their new roles.



(l to r) Executive Deputy Secretary Andrew Barnes – Department of Human Services, AOPC Problem-Solving Courts Administrator Angela Lowry, Executive Director Rachel Maurer – Office of the Majority Caucus Chair State Rep. Mike Schlossberg, Pa. State Senator Art Haywood, Human Services and Criminal Justice Policy Director Melanie Gordon – CCAP, Laura Spicer – MA, Allegheny County Pretrial Services, Judge Steven Leifman – Eleventh Judicial Circuit Court of Florida Miami-Dade, Deputy Commissioner Dr. Jean Wright II – Philadelphia Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual Disability Services, Senior Judge Marsha Neifield – Philadelphia Municipal Court, Judge Joffie Pittman III – Philadelphia Municipal Court, President Judge Patrick Dugan – Philadelphia Municipal Court, AOPC Behavioral Health Administrator Michael Harper, Deputy General Counsel Jonathan Koltash – Governor’s Office of General Counsel, Director of Problem-Solving Courts Lesha Sanders – First Judicial District.

Decriminalizing Mental Health: Lessons from Miami and Beyond

The Pennsylvania Courts continue to focus on their response to court-involved individuals with mental health issues and have been looking at Miami-Dade County court as a model for these efforts.

“The Pennsylvania delegates trip to Miami was instrumental in forging collaborative relationships with the other two branches of government and County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania, and in gaining a deeper understanding of recovery supports and improved court processes – including crisis infrastructure, peer support embedded in law enforcement, and deflection and diversion strategies,” said AOPC Behavior

Health Administrator **Michael Harper**.

Encouraging signs of progress have been observed as a result of these trips, particularly in Philadelphia, Allegheny and Montgomery County, showcasing the promise these initiatives hold for our state’s future.

The Miami trips are just one facet of the extensive efforts underway. The AOPC is actively engaged in establishing workgroups and collaborating with organizations such as the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, the Juvenile Court Judges’ Commission, the Attorney General Office’s Pennsylvania Reentry Council, the National

Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Keystone, several peer support agencies and others.

This multidimensional approach aims to integrate a comprehensive strategy to address mental health challenges within the legal system and underscores a commitment to continuous learning and the integration of successful models into Pennsylvania’s judicial framework.

The intent behind these efforts is clear – to drive positive change and promote a more compassionate, effective and supportive legal environment for individuals and families facing mental health challenges.

New Court Data Now Available

Over the last several months, [the interactive data dashboards](#) were updated to reflect verified 2022 statewide caseload statistics. For anyone interested in a quick look at statewide or county court data, these dashboards can be a helpful tool.

Also released this past month was the [2021 Annual Report](#), providing an organizational overview of the AOPC and statewide court programs, data and operations. With the recent release of 2022 court data, AOPC/ Communications is now in the process of completing the 2022 Annual Report, which is targeted to be released in the spring.

Data Dashboards

Caseload Statistics

Data dashboards, also known as data visualizations, identify court trends and can serve as a valuable resource. These dashboards offer the chance to compare, analyze and download court data – from court caseload statistics to protection from abuse, juvenile delinquency, problem-solving courts and financial data.



CIVIL CASELOAD

- Caseload data by type of case (e.g. contracts, property, tort, civil appeals, etc.)
- Medical malpractice
- Mortgage foreclosure
- Statewide and county-level comparisons



CRIMINAL CASELOAD

- Caseload data by type of crime (e.g. person, property, drugs, weapons, DUI, motor vehicle, etc.)
- Statewide and county-level comparisons



CIVIL INVENTORY PROJECT

- An ongoing, statewide civil case management initiative
- Tracks the size and age of each county's civil inventory over time
- Classifies each county's type of civil case management system



MAGISTERIAL DISTRICT COURT CASELOAD

- Cases by docket type (e.g. civil, criminal, landlord/tenant, non-traffic, private criminal, private summary, traffic)
- Statewide and county-level comparisons

WHO WE ARE By the numbers



Pennsylvania's problem-solving courts had a **70% combined successful graduation rate.**



Pennsylvania courts collected over **\$403 million** in fees, fines, costs and restitution.



30% of Pennsylvania's active judges were women.



1,882,897 million new cases were filed in magisterial district courts.



38,765 protection from abuse (PFA) orders were filed.



74% of children who were under court supervision and left the system were reunited with family or relatives.



104 million docket sheets were viewed for free on our website.



13,785 written allegations, and **12,290** dispositions representing **10,655** juveniles.*



25,454 jurors were impaneled or sworn.



Facilitated **36,231** requests for interpreters.



More than **10,500** followers on Twitter @PACourts.



Trial and appellate judges completed more than **34,000** hours of continuing education.

Free Online Privacy Protection for Common Pleas and Magisterial District Judges

To further encourage the safety and security of judicial officials, AOPC's Office of Judicial District Security has partnered with 360Civic to offer enhanced online privacy services through its IronWall360 program.

Interested common pleas and magisterial district judges may scan the QR code below to enroll in this voluntary service, or contact Judicial District Security with any questions.



No-Cost Online Privacy Protection for Pennsylvania Judges

At a time when threats against judges have increased, protecting your home address from falling into the wrong hands has never been more critical. It should not be possible to find a judge's home address and phone number online with a quick Google search. That's where IronWall360 comes in.

About IronWall360

Since 2011, our team has scanned the internet to find the personal information of judges, social workers, LEOs, and other public servants under our protection. When we find ANY instance of a home address online, we make sure it's removed.

The 360 Difference

Other companies only scan a select number of data-sharing sites, which are monitored as rarely as once a year. We conduct ongoing searches across a full range of internet sites, as well as social media, and we will remove your information wherever we find it.

Official Provider for Pennsylvania Judges

The AOPC Office of Judicial District Security and IronWall360 have partnered together to provide judges in Pennsylvania with complimentary online privacy protection.

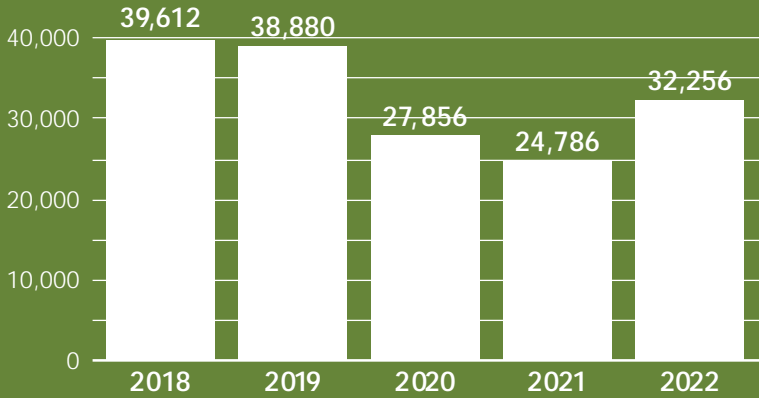
Start Receiving Protection



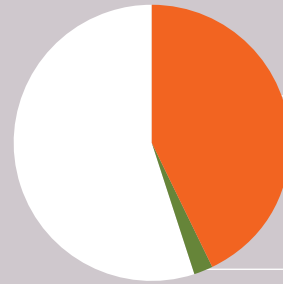
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Pennsylvania sees a recent increase in retail theft offenses after years in decline

Retail theft offenses over the past 5 years:



Of the 163,390 retail theft offenses committed from 2018-2022:

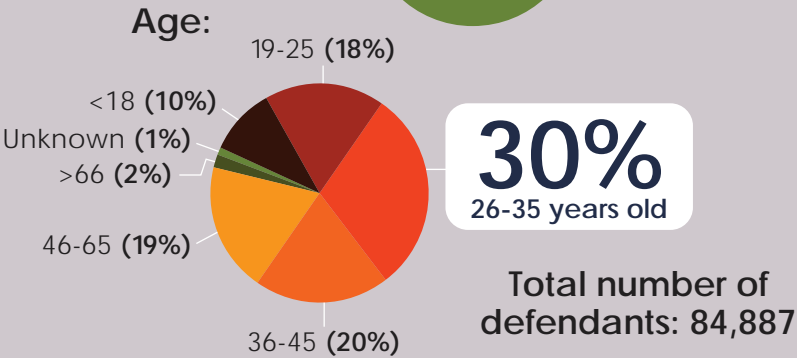
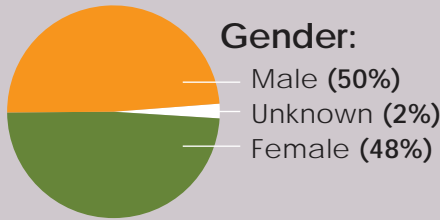


43%
resulted in convictions

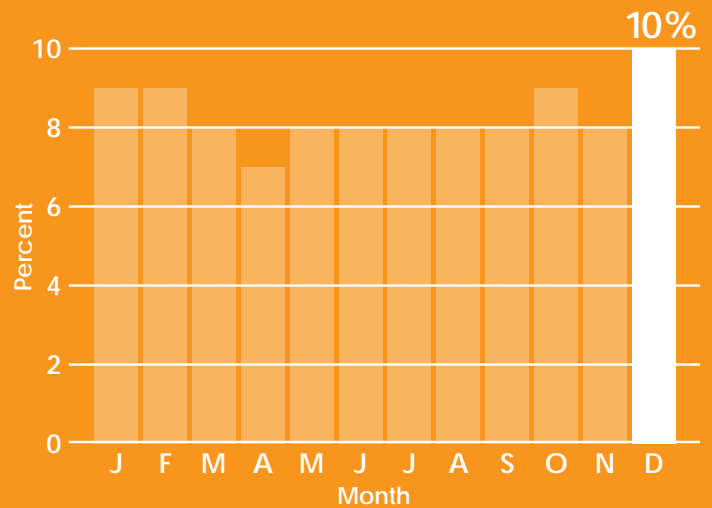
2% resulted in Accelerated Rehabilitative Disposition (ARD).*

*Usually for first time offenders, the ARD program is intended to encourage offenders to make a fresh start and offers them the possibility of dismissal of charges and the expungement of the offender's arrest record upon completion of the rehabilitative program.

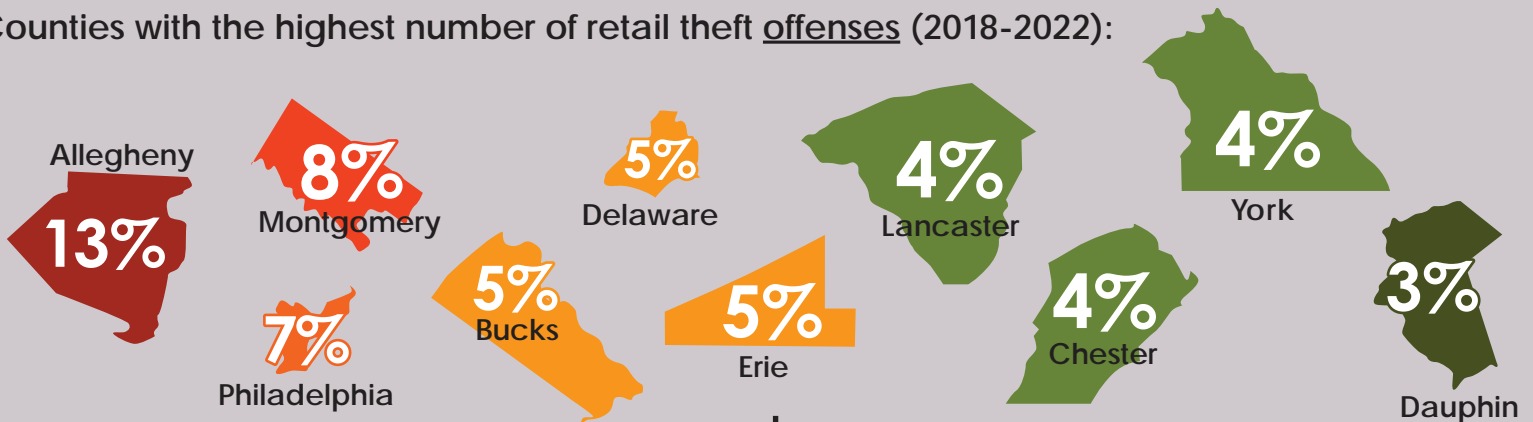
Demographics of retail theft defendants (2018-2022):



Retail theft offenses by month (2018-2022):



Counties with the highest number of retail theft offenses (2018-2022):



*** Data refers to cases and offenses filed from 1/1/2018 – 12/31/2022 for Title 18 – Section 3929, 3929.1, 3929.2 and 3929.3.

Leveraging National Open Data Standards to Strengthen Civil and Family Court Data

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The State Justice Institute Civil & Family Data Pilot Advisory Group met in October at the Pennsylvania Judicial Center, preceding a series of statewide regional trainings scheduled for the Spring.

The Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC) is applying the technical and business definitions of the National Open Data Standards (NODS) to resolve enduring, and common, obstacles to collecting good civil and family court data. Developed by the Conference of State Court Administrators and the National Center for State Courts (NCSC), NODS is intended to facilitate sharing and integration of court data by specifying (1) logical business standards that define the variables to be included in court datasets; and (2) technical standards that will define the data structure, variable formats, and values.

Nationally, many states struggle to coordinate multiple system vendors in place of a statewide case management system. State trial courts retrieve court metrics from mismatched, local systems that are differently programmed, managed, and updated and, as a result, deliver different data results. For example, Pennsylvania's statewide civil and family court data are compiled from data

reported out of nineteen different local systems.

This is not uncommon. But communicating data standards to multiple vendors can quickly become a garbled exchange as variable local practices, state and national data specifications, and vendor protocols shape the availability, accuracy, and reliability of court data.

What if states could skip "middleman" conversations and directly apply NODS language to source data? Pennsylvania has partnered with one of its largest vendors to find out. The Administrative Office's Research and IT staff negotiated access to the vendor system's source data, built an extraction tool and began creating NODS data products with its own personnel and software resources. The source data feeds AOPC statistical reports and data dashboards that display a sharper picture of civil and family caseloads for local court personnel and state judicial leadership. Through this pilot, Pennsylvania has found that:

- Translating source data into a NODS framework provides a uniform schematic applicable to multiple vendors;
- Direct access to the source data obviates any need to translate vendor programming language or other interpretive guesswork;
- At their source, data errors are fully visible for correction, and shared insights help the vendor improve its product;
- Vendors who participate have a competitive benefit to offer clients, specifically state-supported, no cost data products; and,
- Data access and updates are not dependent on vendor schedules and pricing.

Regardless of any system view, the NODS output is a uniform data portal for all judicial leadership, policymakers, funders, and data users to retrieve information, monitor caseloads and make comparisons critical to efficient case and court management.

Around the Judiciary

In October, Court Administrator **Andrea Tuominen** and Deputy Court Administrator **David Price** held 'Meet and Greets' at both the PJC and Ritter Road offices, offering AOPC employees the opportunity to drop-in and introduce themselves to the new court administration duo.



Members of the Advisory Council on Elder Justice in the Courts are pictured together at their meeting in Hershey, Pa. on Nov. 16.



Holiday Cheer at the AOPC

This year, the AOPC celebrated Halloween by holding a trick-or-treat trail and office decorating contest at the PJC and Ritter Road offices. In addition to being invited to set up candy stations in their workspaces to share treats with colleagues around the building, employees had fun participating in an office/cubicle decorating contest.



PJC winners (l to r) 1st place – Office of Disciplinary Counsel, 2nd place – Disciplinary Board of Pennsylvania, 3rd place – Beth Schneider, Human Resources.



Ritter Road winners (l to r) 1st place – Chris Dandro, 2nd place – Turquoise Walls, 3rd place – Sam Justis

PENNSYLVANIA JUDICIAL CENTER HOLIDAY COOKIE Exchange

The PJC held a Cookie Exchange on Dec. 13 where employees were invited to bake and share their favorite holiday cookies with each other.



The PJC and Ritter Road Offices held their annual holiday parties in December where staff gathered to enjoy a luncheon with colleagues while getting into the holiday spirit.





NCSC expands data capabilities to position courts for the future

NCSC has built a Data Analytics and Forecasting team dedicated to turning data into useful, actionable information. The expansion of data capacity is anchored in NCSC's [Transforming Justice: 2022-2025 Strategic Campaign](#), which identifies data quality, governance, and analysis as a key pillar to better prepare courts for the future.

"NCSC has set up cutting-edge analytical services to handle all kinds of court data, including case-level data that will enable more refined and timely analytics that are responsive to and informative of public policy decisions impacting the state courts," said Nicole Waters, NCSC's director of Research and Design.

A growing initiative by NCSC and the Conference of State Court Administrators is the [National Open Data Standards](#) (NODS) project, which developed business and technical court data standards to improve a court's ability to respond to data requests even when staff and resources are constrained. The standards also help reduce inaccurate interpretation of court data by non-court organizations. One-third of the states have begun mapping their data to NODS.

A new NCSC forum, [Data Dives](#), helps courts dive deeper into data analytics, exploring ChatGPT, Web scraping, and more to gain valuable insights to help solve data problems. According to NCSC data scientist Andre Assumpcao, there's an

eagerness among court staff to learn more about data beyond caseload statistics. Data Storytelling: Another Tool in the Research Toolbox, the third session in the series, is soon to be released. The forum discussions support the strategic, future-ready court-planning initiative outlined in NCSC's [Just Horizons](#).

The [Court Statistics Project](#) (CSP) continues to grow and includes [State Court Structure charts](#), [State Court Organization](#) (SCO), and the [annual caseload statistics](#) data collection. Work has begun on another project, the Census of State Courts, funded by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, that will complement the work of SCO by expanding information about local and limited jurisdiction courts.

To further support courts striving to embrace a data-driven mindset, NCSC has embarked on another exciting project to identify "legal deserts" within a state. The map uses access-to-justice risk factors such as the limited number of attorneys in the area, distance to a courthouse, poverty rates, and more to help courts make informed decisions about the needs of court users. NCSC is also revising its data literacy curriculum to offer a national curriculum for court staff and leaders to use and present data in a way that informs and improves business operations. These initiatives will be available soon.