



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2013, Pennsylvania began a statewide judicial needs assessment – an evidence-based study to calculate how many Common Pleas Court judges are needed to handle the workload in each judicial district. Studies of this kind are also known as weighted caseload studies since they measure not only the number of cases handled by each court, but also the amount of a judge’s time needed to perform the various tasks related to a case.

In April 2014, the Court asked every common pleas judge in the state to participate in a time study to create that measure. With more than 99% of the judges in the state participating, a set of case weights was established. Applying the case weight to the caseload of each judicial district established a utilization rate; the rate at which each judge in the district would need to work to meet their caseload demand. A number greater than one indicates that the judges in that district need to work more than average to meet their caseload. Depending on the utilization rate and additional factors including caseload fluctuations, budgetary constraints and administrative considerations, the resources to address this judicial need may include assigning senior judges, masters or hearing officers.

To ensure utilization rates were not skewed by an unusually heavy or light caseload in a given district in a given year, the study used a three-year average of calendar years 2013, 2014, and 2015.

The study presents the following key points:

- A judicial needs assessment is not a simple metric that indicates whether a judicial district has the right amount of judges, too many or too few. This snapshot is really the beginning of the analysis and discussion for each judicial district to decide what combination of the three sources of judicial resources – commissioned judges, senior judges, and quasi-judicial officials must be used to meet the need.
- Most of the judicial districts in the state have the correct number of judges needed to handle their caseload.
- By itself, the measure is limited because it does not account for the influence local practices, customs and other unique circumstances have on a judicial district’s



ability to meet its judicial workload, such as the relative tenure of judges in a judicial district, where experience affects efficiency.

- The study provides an objective measure to assess filling judicial vacancies and/or creating new judgeships. The report lends support to judicial districts that are pursuing additional judgeships or in filling vacancies.
- Using utilization rate as a criterion for senior judge assignments will prioritize judicial districts with the greatest need.
- Eighty percent (80%) of judicial districts have a utilization rate that falls within the standard deviation of the state average of 1.28. Fifty-five percent (55%) of those judicial districts are below 1.22.
- By assigning judges to divisions within their court or by case type to assign work more evenly, president judges will have an objective measure of how many judicial resources are required to handle each type of case.
- President judges can use the data to demonstrate the value of funding quasi-judicial officials to offset a higher utilization rate, and ease some of the workload burden on the commissioned judges, noting that this cannot fully replace the work of a common pleas judge.
- The judicial needs assessment model should be recalculated annually using annual case filings, judge complement, judge vacancies and senior judge use from the previous year. Case weights are valid for five to eight years; with a new study recommended after such time or when factors affecting the study change significantly.

The report details key components of the study and includes data for each judicial district in the appendix. Additionally, the report includes more information on the application of and limitations to the study.