Official newsletter of the
Pennsylvania Judicial System

AOPCONNECTED



Issue 3, 2026

In this issue

In this issue, read about work being done in Pa around trauma-informed courts, recent treatment courts that have received certification from the Supreme Court, appellate courts holding special sessions across the state, as well as a continued focus on civics education, outreach and engagement.

Beyond Compliance: How Union County Probation Operationalizes Trauma-Informed Supervision

By: Union County Chief Probation Officer, Scott Kersetter

In alignment with the Supreme Court's Behavioral Health in the Courts initiative, Union County Probation has worked to implement trauma-informed supervision for justice-involved individuals. This transformation represents a shift away from traditional practices, setting a new standard for the county.

> The philosophy pivots on a critical question:
> ***Instead of asking, "What is wrong with you?" officers ask, "What happened to you?"***



Accountability Through Healing

Union County Probation houses both the adult and juvenile departments. The move to a more trauma-informed approach is an ongoing, department-wide initiative, with juvenile officers using the child trauma screen.

> A **child trauma screen** in trauma-informed juvenile probation is used to quickly identify youth who have experienced traumatic events and are showing active stress symptoms so they can be referred for specialized mental health treatment.

Through a partnership with Transitions of PA, the adult department utilizes a trauma checklist to assist officers in identifying individuals with trauma in their background. The tools used by officers help identify traumatic events, like abuse, dysfunction and neglect, and staff are better equipped to identify trauma-based survival responses.

This lens is vital for handling technical violations. Instead of resorting to more punitive sanctions for technical violations, officers use graduated responses in combination with cognitive-based interventions such as interactive journaling to help individuals develop effective regulation and coping skills.

> **Interactive journaling** is used as an evidence-based cognitive-behavioral tool to help justice-involved individuals, regulate their emotions and map out positive behavior changes without feeling interrogated or re-traumatized.

True accountability can't exist in a vacuum that ignores lived experiences. A trauma-informed approach creates a partnership between officers and those they serve that encourages healing while maintaining public safety and identifying the root causes of destructive behavior.

Supporting the Front Lines

An understanding of trauma is critical to supporting officers in their work. Department leadership uses 'reflective supervision' frameworks that emphasize regular, consistent interaction with staff and create an atmosphere that supports officers' expression of how their work is affecting them, particularly regarding trauma.

Partnering with agencies for support and training on trauma, and applying trauma-informed design in office layout, strengthens the department's ability to provide trauma-informed supervision.

As our courts prioritize behavioral health at statewide summits, Union County can serve as an example, demonstrating that balancing organizational boundaries with psychological awareness not only helps manage cases but also restores lives.

Appellate Courts Bring Special Sessions to Communities Across Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania's appellate courts recently brought oral arguments outside their usual courtroom settings, holding special sessions in Delaware, Erie, York and Lehigh counties – giving local residents and students an opportunity to observe appellate proceedings and learn more about the role of the courts.

Superior Court – Delaware County

The Superior Court held three days of special sessions in Delaware County on Sept. 15-17. The first session took place at the historic 1724 Chester Courthouse, which recently marked its 300th anniversary and is recognized as the oldest surviving meeting place of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. The remaining sessions were held at the Delaware County Courthouse.



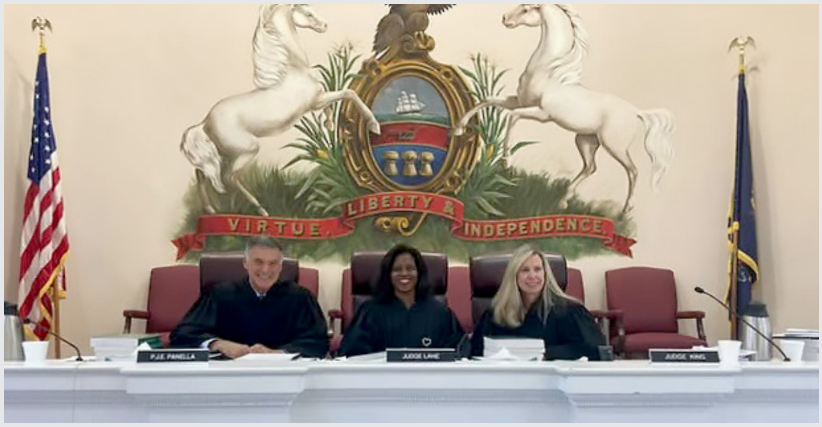


*President Judge **Anne E. Lazarus**, Judge **Jill Beck** (presiding) and Judge **Brandon Neuma**n heard arguments during the sessions.*



Superior Court – Erie County

On Aug. 4 and 5, the Superior Court held two days of special sessions at the Erie County Courthouse, where President Judge Emeritus **Jack A. Panella**, Judge **Timika Lane** and Judge **Megan McCarthy King** comprised the three-judge panel.

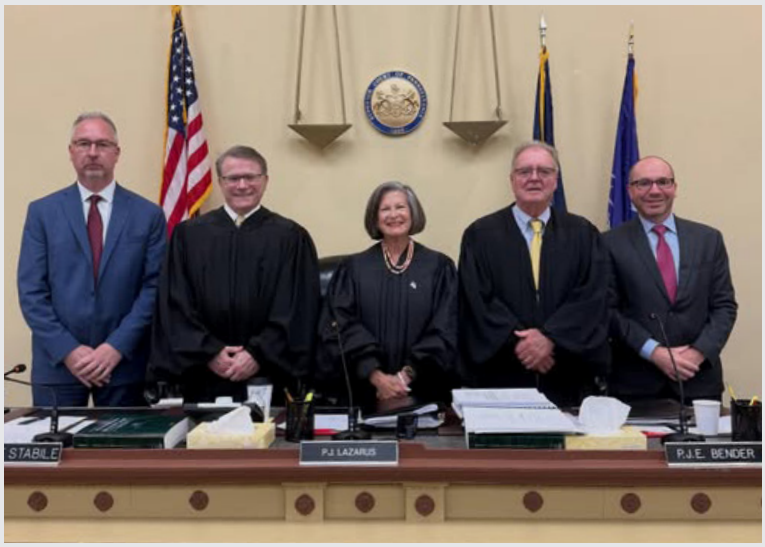




*Superior Court staff **Brian Leventhal** and **Rich Ruffolo**, Judge Lane, **Christopher Culver** (Superior Court staff), and Judges King and Panella*

Superior Court – York County

The Superior Court also held a two-day special session in York County on Aug. 18-19. President Judge **Anne E. Lazarus**, Judge **Victor P. Stabile** and President Judge Emeritus **John T. Bender** heard arguments during the sessions.



(l to r) ***Michael Welker*** *(assist. court crier), Judges Stabile, Lazarus and Bender, and* ***Jeffrey Bott*** *(court crier supervisor)*

Commonwealth Court – Lehigh County

The Commonwealth Court held a special session at the Lehigh County Historic Courthouse on Constitution Day, Sept. 17. Judge **Anne E. Covey** (presiding), Judge **Stacy Wallace** and Judge **Matthew S. Wolf** comprised the panel.

In addition to the special session, Commonwealth Court Judges **Lori Dumas, Stella Tsai**, and **Bonnie Leadbetter** (ret.) visited local students at DeSales University, Moravian University and Muhlenberg College to speak about the role of the courts within our constitutional system and the importance of an independent judiciary.





(l to r) Judges Wallace, Dumas, Leadbetter, Covey, Tsai and Wolf



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!

Pennsylvania Students Get Firsthand Look at State Courts During America250PA Civic Learning Initiative

On Sept. 9, Pennsylvania appellate jurists joined high school students from across the state for a civics education program held in conjunction with the Pennsylvania House of Representatives' Legislative Session at Congress Hall in Independence Square.



(l to r) Justice Mundy, Judge Sullivan and Judge Tsai

Developed in partnership with America250PA, the program had participating state representatives select students from their districts who had demonstrated interest in civic engagement to attend and see how each branch contributes to the state's system of representative government.



Judge Beck

Before gathering at the National Constitution Center to watch the livestream of the legislative session, students headed to Carpenters' Hall for presentations led by Justices **Sallie Updyke Mundy** and **Daniel McCaffery** of the Supreme Court; President Judge **Anne Lazarus** and Judges **Victor Stabile**, **Alice Dubow**, **Megan Sullivan**, **Jill Beck** and **Brandon Neuman** of the Superior Court; and Judges **Lori Dumas** and **Stella Tsai** of the Commonwealth Court.

> *"Philadelphia is a place where the foundations of our government and our nation's history are all around us, and bringing students here to learn about the courts provides a meaningful way to connect that history with the work of Pennsylvania's judiciary today and the role it continues to play in our system of government," Justice Mundy said.*



Judge Dumas

> *"Students are not just learning about government – they are the citizens who will shape its future," Justice McCaffery said. "Connecting with them today helps reinforce the importance of understanding and participating in our democracy, while giving them a better understanding of how our court system operates to serve the people of Pennsylvania."*

Students participated in an interactive discussion of the work of Pennsylvania's three appellate courts, learned about the judiciary's role in state government and engaged directly with judges.



(l to r) Judge Dubow, Justice Mundy, Judge Stabile and Judge Tsai

"This was a unique opportunity to bring students from across the Commonwealth face-to-face with the people who serve in our state's judicial branch and help them better understand how our courts fit into our system of government," said Judge Beck. "Civics education is most meaningful when students have the opportunity to ask questions, engage in the conversation and understand how the institutions they are learning about actually work."



(l to r) Justice McCaffery, Judge Beck, Judge Lazarus, Judge Dumas and Judge Neuman (front) with students at the program

This program is part of the Pennsylvania Courts' participation in the America250 commemoration, with jurists and court staff joining commemorations and educational initiatives throughout the year highlighting the state's judicial history and the role of the courts in civic life.

Spotlight: Treatment Courts in Pa

Four Treatment Courts Earn Supreme Court Certification

Four treatment court programs in three Pennsylvania counties earned recognition from the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania in August, recognizing the programs' adherence to established treatment court standards.

These certifications demonstrate a strong commitment to innovative approaches and to delivering high-quality services. As a result, more people in these counties can recover and build stable, productive lives, while building community trust and support.

Northampton County's Recovery Court received official state certification on Aug. 27.

"Seeing Northampton County's treatment courts receive this certification is especially meaningful to me," said Northampton County President Judge **Craig Dally**. "When we started these courts in 2015, our goal was to recognize that some of the people who come before the court need more than punishment – they need accountability, treatment, support, and an opportunity to change the course of their lives."

"I am incredibly proud of our entire Recovery Court team and the unwavering dedication they demonstrate to every participant who comes before us," said Northampton Common Pleas Administrative Judge of Treatment Courts **Jennifer Slevtold**. "The team's exceptional work and adherence to evidence-based practices enabled the court to meet all the best-practice standards required for certification. This achievement is a testament to their professionalism, collaboration and steadfast belief in the potential of every participant to achieve lasting recovery and build a healthier, more productive future."

Chester County's Drug Treatment and Recovery Courts received the same certification on Aug. 31, recognizing their commitment to excellence, accountability, and adherence to best practices in treatment court operations.

Established in 1997, Chester County Drug Court was the second treatment court established in Pennsylvania and has graduated more than 1,670 individuals. Recovery Court is a post-conviction program serving non-violent individuals whose sentencing guidelines permit restrictive probation conditions, involving a designated prison and probation sentence. More than 300 people have graduated from Recovery Court since its establishment in 2007.

Both programs continue to provide eligible participants with structured pathways to treatment, recovery, and a positive change.

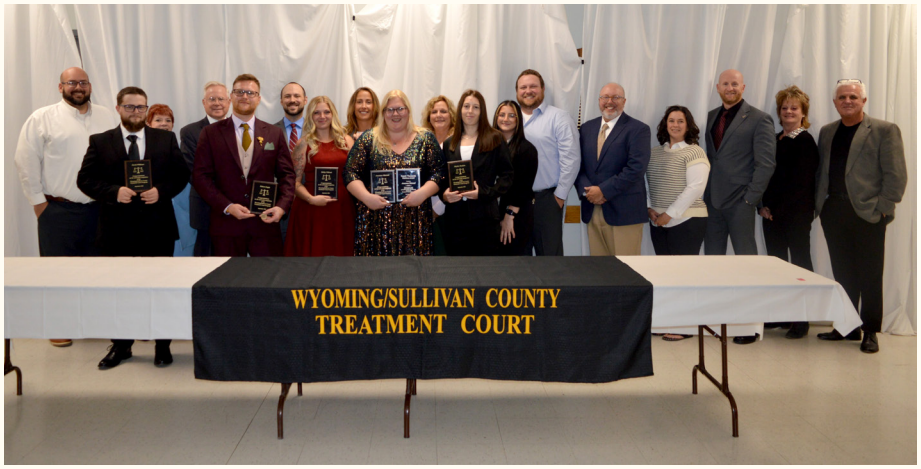
Wayne County's Drug Treatment Court received the official Supreme Court certification on Aug. 18, as the program approached its 10th anniversary.

"Our drug and treatment court has high expectations while providing strong support for every participant," said Wayne County President Judge **Janine Edwards**, who oversees the treatment court. "This certification reflects the dedication of our team and partners, and our commitment to treatment with intensive supervision when appropriate and consistent with public safety."

Together, the recognitions underscore the important role treatment courts play across Pennsylvania in combining accountability with meaningful opportunities for rehabilitation and recovery.

By bringing courts, treatment providers, probation and other community partners together, these programs provide participants with a coordinated path toward meeting court obligations and building a better future.

Recent Treatment Court Graduations



On Sept. 24, Wyoming/Sullivan County Drug Treatment Court held a graduation ceremony. Wyoming/Sullivan County President Judge **Russell Shurtleff** and Bradford County President Judge **Maureen Beirne** offered words of congratulations and presented plaques to the six new graduates. Since 2007, 134 participants successfully completed the program - performing more than 26,000 hours of community service.

(continued)



(l to r) Judge Cherry, Chief Justice Todd, Two Graduates, and Judges Salisbury and Maines

Chief Justice **Debra Todd** visited Clearfield County to attend a Veterans Treatment Court graduation ceremony on Sept. 24.

She presided alongside Clearfield County President Judge **Paul E. Cherry**, Judge **Joshua S. Maines** and Clinton County Judge **Michael F. Salisbury**, who recognized her leadership in helping establish these treatment court programs across Pennsylvania.

The Chief, whose husband is a U.S. Army veteran, congratulated the graduates for their perseverance and recognized the sacrifices made by themselves and their families.

She ended the ceremony with one of her favorite quotes, telling the graduates -- "Babe Ruth once said, 'You can't beat the guy who never gives up,' and neither of you have given up."



Judge Marsico delivering remarks and presenting a graduate with her plaque

Dauphin County RALLY Court held its 39th graduation on Aug. 4, celebrating seven graduates. During the ceremony, graduates reflected on their recovery journeys, highlighting restored relationships and personal growth – with many specifically thanking Judge **Edward M. Marsico**, Jr, for leading the program that changed their lives.



Judge Dowling and Judge McShane (pictured center) with the graduates

On July 15, Dauphin County Mental Health Court celebrated its fifth graduation by honoring four graduates. Judge **Katherine E. McShane**, who took the bench as Presiding Judge of the program in March 2026, presented each graduate with a plaque to commemorate their accomplishments. Former Presiding Mental Health Court Judge **Andrew H. Dowling** offered words of encouragement and highlighted each graduate's unique qualities, and how those qualities can assist in maintaining mental health recovery post-graduation. Judge Dowling was the presiding judge for most of the graduates' time in the program.



Judge Geishauser and Judge Bodor preside over the ceremony and congratulate the participants

On Sept. 3, Berks County Treatment Court held a graduation ceremony recognizing 35 graduates from their DUI, Drug, Mental Health and Veterans Treatment Court programs.

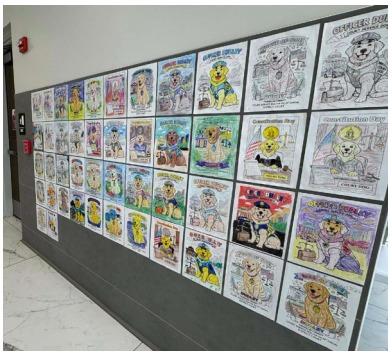
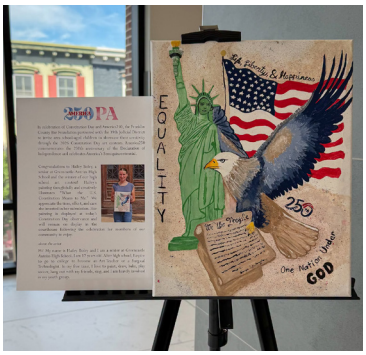
Held in September to coincide with Recovery Month, the heartfelt ceremony included remarks from Judge **Eleni V. Dimitriou Geishauser** and Judge **Justin D. Bodor**, who congratulated everyone on this important milestone in their recovery journeys.

Franklin County Students Bring the Constitution to Life

Constitution Day took on a creative twist in Franklin County as local students explored what the U.S. Constitution means to them through art.

The 39th Judicial District's annual Constitution Day ceremony was held on Sept. 15 this year, concurrently celebrating America's 250th. The event featured remarks from Franklin County President Judge **Shawn D. Meyers** and Lackawanna County President Judge **James A. Gibbons**, who emphasized the importance of respecting and upholding the Constitution as the foundation of our nation's continued success.



(left) Franklin County President Judge Shawn D. Meyers (middle) Officer Dudley coloring contest (right) Hailey Boley, a Greencastle-Antrim High School senior, won the high school art contest, which asked students to illustrate the theme, "What The U.S. Constitution Means to Me". (Photos courtesy of Franklin County)

As part of the commemoration, the Franklin County Bar Foundation partnered with the school district to host art contests for students across the county, many of whom from the Greencastle Area School District were in attendance.

Additionally, more than 80 elementary students submitted Officer Dudley coloring pages, while middle and high school students created posters inspired by the Constitution and its meaning in their lives. The winning artwork is now on display on the first floor of the Franklin County Judicial Center.

Learn more

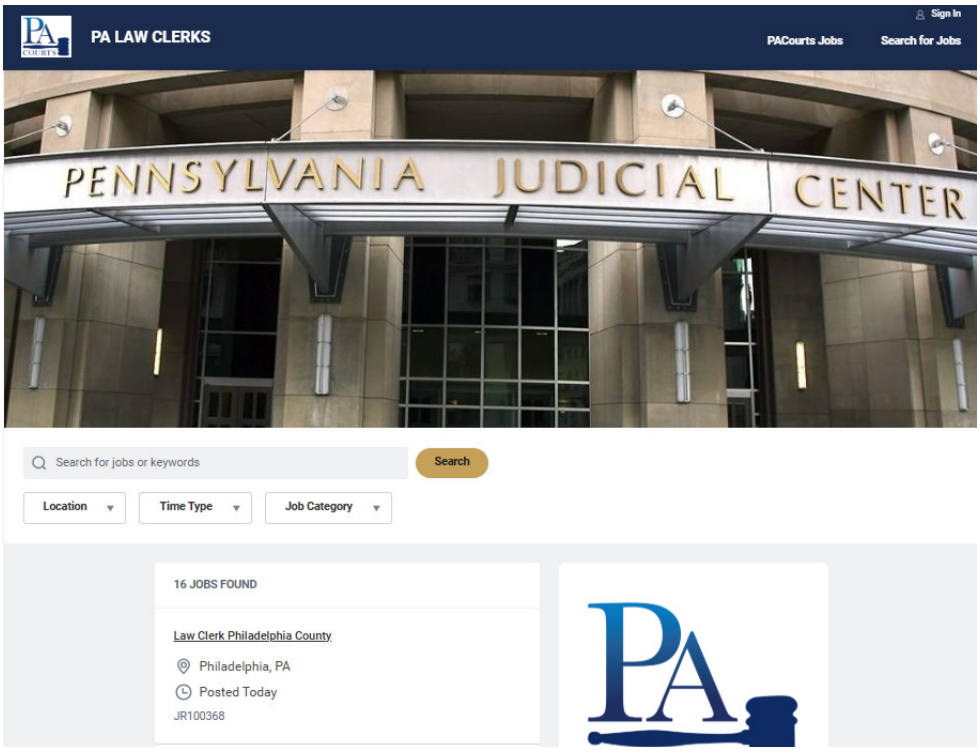
https://www.pacourts.us/civics-ed#Constitution

New Site for Law Clerk Recruitment

AOPC Human Resources has launched a new centralized PALawClerks.pacourts.us site to help promote law clerk job opportunities across Pennsylvania's judicial districts.

AOPC HR will partner with judicial districts to increase the visibility of law clerk openings.

Court administrators are also encouraged to expand recruitment outreach through no-cost platforms such as LinkedIn, Indeed and Handshake. For guidance on law clerk recruitment, please reach out to Human.Resources@pacourts.us.

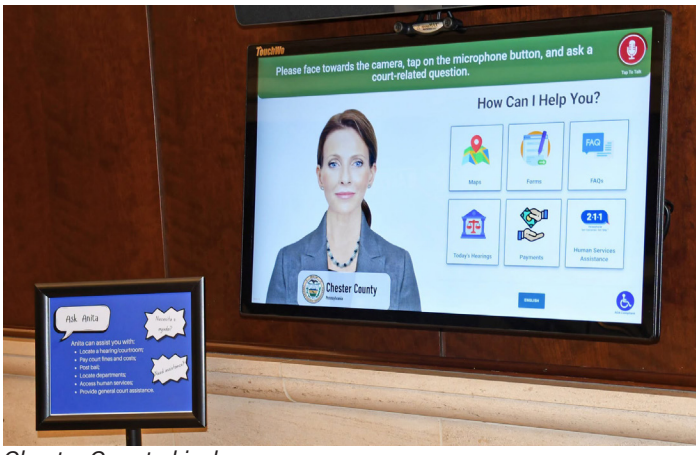


Innovation in Action: Chester County's AI Kiosks Earn National Recognition

Chester County's AI Self-Service Kiosk project was recently named a **2026 Center for Digital Government AI 50 Award** winner, recognizing innovative and responsible uses of artificial intelligence in the public sector.

Launched in 2025, the project introduced self-service kiosks at the Chester County Justice Center, Government Services Center and several magisterial district courts. The goal is simple – give visitors convenient, easy-to-use tools to find information and navigate the court system while allowing staff to focus on more complex needs.

So, what can the kiosks do? A lot.



Chester County kiosk

Visitors can:

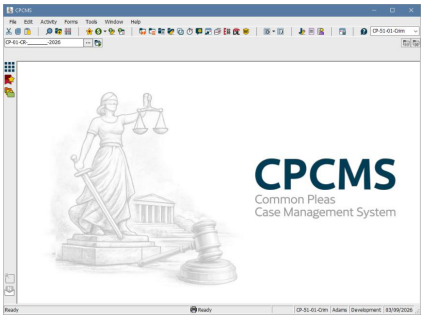
- search for hearings by name or case
- access court forms and documents
- make payments for fines and costs
- find answers to frequently asked questions
- determine jurisdiction
- navigate courthouse buildings
- connect with 211 community resources.

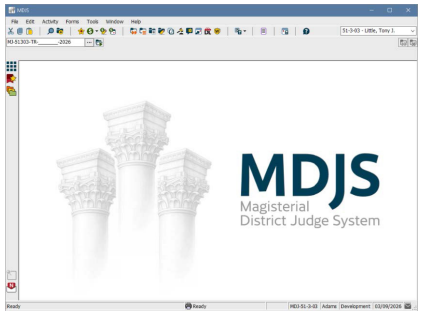
All of these services are offered in both English and Spanish.

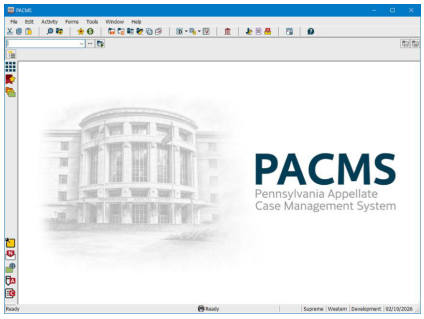
The project has been well received by the public, according to Chester County District Court Administrator **Patricia Norwood-Foden**, who called it one of the county's most successful public-facing technology initiatives.

Chester County's experience is an example of how AI can complement the work of court staff while creating a more accessible, efficient and user-friendly experience for the people we serve.

Modernizing the Case Management Experience







The AOPC IT Department recently modernized the framework supporting Pennsylvania's case management systems – introducing visual and navigational enhancements designed to improve usability, while preserving existing functionality, screens and workflows.

Enhancements include a customizable toolbar, expanded workspace, improved screen navigation and personalized favorites for quicker access to frequently used screens. Updated icons and visual standards also make the systems clearer and easier to use.

Modernization also introduces a dynamic reporting tool that allows users to visualize court data, compare multiple metrics and more easily identify trends in court activity. Together, these improvements are working to create a more streamlined case management experience while supporting future system capabilities.

Clarion County Courthouse Rededicated Following Major Renovation

The Clarion County Courthouse was recently rededicated following a nearly two-year renovation that modernized the building while preserving an important piece of the county's heritage for future generations.

Approached with an emphasis on preserving the building's historic and architectural features, the work included necessary updates to the heating, cooling, plumbing, electrical, and network systems, as well as enhancements to the office and mechanical spaces.

On Aug. 28, the public had an opportunity to tour the courthouse during an open house and rededication ceremony that gathered court staff, county leaders and community members.

During the ceremony, Clarion County President Judge **Sara Seidle-Patton** and Senior Judge **James Arner** both reflected on the challenges of maintaining the 141-year-old courthouse, highlighted the improvements made through the renovation, and recognized those who helped bring the project to completion.

Talking to the crowd, President Judge Seidle-Patton went on to explain the significance of the rededication, saying, "Today's rededication is a recommitment to the principles that make this structure more than a building, but a pillar of our society."

"This courthouse is more than just a building. Our courthouse houses an institution that protects the rights of individuals, resolves disputes among neighbors and provides a system to administer fairness and order in the community. It is a place where people come to seek justice, where judges and elected officials carry out duties for which they have been entrusted, where attorneys zealously advocate for their clients, where citizens participate in important civic duties such as jury service, and where many employees work behind the scenes to ensure the business of the court and of local government is carried out."



Judge Arner recalled stories of some of these long-standing challenges, from jurors needing coats in frigid courtrooms to an air conditioning malfunction that once caused rain to fall during a proceeding.

"We now have a very functional, modern building, and everything has just been improved so much," he said, noting how the updated technology and facilities improvements – including new restrooms and entrances – have created a more functional and accessible facility for the community.

All photos reprinted with permission from Explore Clarion/Dave Cyphert



President Judge Sara Seidle-Patton speaking at the rededication ceremony

Looking to the Stars

A request from his grandson to get a telescope sparked a hobby that longtime AOPC employee **Darren Breslin**, assistant director of judicial education, has turned into something much larger – the creation of an entire community outreach organization.

Darren founded Community Stargazers™ to bring astronomy to libraries, community groups, public events, and other gatherings, giving people the opportunity to view the night sky through high-quality telescopes and learn more about the universe around them.

"Even in areas with significant light pollution, like Philadelphia or Harrisburg, there is still plenty to see," Darren said. "The moon, planets and star clusters are all visible, and it is always exciting to share that experience with others."

From the beginning, Darren's goal was to make astronomy more accessible and welcoming for people of all ages and backgrounds, choosing the name Community Stargazers™ to reflect the idea of bringing people together through a shared interest in exploration and discovery.

Using a telescope and imaging equipment, he captures detailed photographs of galaxies, nebulae and other celestial objects. His astronomy images and educational content have reached thousands of people through his website and social media pages.

The most rewarding part of the organization he created, Darren said, is introducing people to astronomy who may never have looked through a telescope before.

"I enjoy seeing people experience it for the first time," he said. "A lot of people have never had the opportunity to use a telescope or see these objects up close."

Since founding the organization, Darren has brought programs to events throughout Pennsylvania, including in Philadelphia, Harrisburg and Hershey. He has also shared his telescopes while traveling, including during a trip to Jacksonville, Florida, where he presented a lecture on judicial independence.

In addition to his outreach work, he is a member of the Delaware Valley Astronomical Association and the Astronomical Society of Harrisburg. He also volunteers as a library telescope ambassador, supporting efforts to expand library-based telescope lending programs.

Darren continues to develop educational resources for both adults and children through Community Stargazers™, with the goal of making astronomy easier to understand and more accessible to the public.



Darren with his telescopes on the roof of the Pennsylvania Judicial Center in August.



Learn more

and view his astronomy photography at **http://www.communitystargazers.com**.

Connecting with Communities: OEJC Brings Civics and Elder Justice Resources to Pennsylvanians

By Robert Campbell, OEJC trainer

From senior centers to National Night Out, the Office of Elder Justice in the Courts (OEJC) is taking a proactive approach to outreach, bringing practical information and court resources directly to the communities it serves.

Through presentations and one-on-one conversations, the office is helping older adults and other community members understand the courts, access support and plan for the future before court involvement becomes necessary.

In recognition of America's 250th anniversary, the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania called on courts across the Commonwealth to expand civics outreach. OEJC responded this spring and summer with presentations on civics and elder justice at senior centers throughout the state, aiming to help older adults feel more connected and empowered in their communities.

Working with AOPC Communications, OEJC developed a civics refresher tailored to older adult audiences. The presentation explored:

- The structure of federal, state and local government
- Pennsylvania's court system
- How judicial elections work
- The role of voting and jury service in daily life
- Issues affecting older adults' safety and well-being

Each attendee received a contact card with resources for reporting suspected abuse and finding free legal advice or support, helping participants feel more confident about seeking assistance when needed.



*The OEJC's **Joan Bertone** presents to an audience at the Blain Senior Center. (Photo Credit: Cole Benko)*



Cole Benko, OEJC Analyst

OEJC brought a similar focus on information and preparedness to National Night Out in Lititz, where OEJC Analyst Cole Benko connected with attendees in a welcoming, family-friendly setting. Throughout the evening, he shared resources and answered questions about elder justice, guardianship and the importance of planning.

"I was able to share many resources and talked to people about our office and our work on various guardianship and elder justice-related issues," Benko said.

He described the event as an opportunity to reach a broad audience with information people could use before they needed assistance or became involved in the court system. Benko also reported strong interest in OEJC's work and overwhelming appreciation from the community members he spoke with.

Attendees, event organizers and members of the Lititz Police Department expressed their appreciation for OEJC's participation, reinforcing the value of making court resources available in familiar community settings. Based on that positive response, OEJC looks forward to participating in additional National Night Out events as part of its continued outreach efforts.

Keith Hinkel Appointed to National Guardianship Association

Congratulations to OEJC Assistant Director **Keith Hinkel**, who has been appointed to the National Guardianship Association (NGA) as a board member beginning Jan. 1, 2027. The AOPC is proud to have him represent Pennsylvania's courts and of the value that he will bring to those important discussions.

The NGA is a non-profit that sets high ethical and professional standards for guardians, conservators and fiduciaries in the United States – recognized as an influential resource to guide guardianship professionals in best practices and is the parent organization to the Center for Guardianship Certification.



Keith Hinkel

Small Hearts, Big Impact: Potter County Spreads a Message of Hope

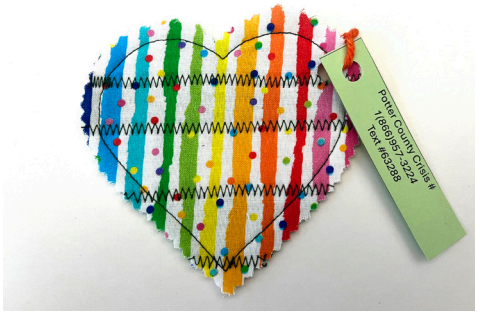
It's true that a small gesture can make a big difference.

In Potter County, court and community partners are working together as part of the county's behavioral health outreach efforts to increase awareness of mental health resources and strengthen connections to services.

One creative example comes from the Galeton Senior Center, where local seniors are crocheting and sewing colorful hearts with local county crisis contact information, along with handwritten messages of encouragement.

The idea came from a member of the county's Suicide Prevention Taskforce, who introduced the team to The Little Heart Project – a national suicide-prevention initiative they adapted to meet the needs of its community.





The hearts are now being shared throughout the community – at schools, businesses, state police locations and outreach events – where they have been met with an enthusiastic response.

The initiative also grew out of the county's broader outreach to older adults. Earlier this year, the Potter County team visited senior centers throughout the county to talk about mental health, suicide prevention and available resources. Those conversations led to an opportunity for seniors to become part of the outreach themselves, turning their creativity into a way to share resources and messages of hope with others.

The colorful hearts may be small, but their message is powerful: help is available, hope matters and no one has to face a difficult moment alone.

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PBA Launches New Project LITIGATE Committee

This article is reprinted with permission from the Pennsylvania Lawyer.

The PBA has formed a new committee: **Project LITIGATE (Lawyers Initiative To Improve Next Gen Attorneys' Trial Experience)**

Project LITIGATE was established in response to the growing challenge facing newer attorneys in gaining meaningful trial and litigation experience in civil matters. As fewer civil cases proceed to trial, a widening gap has emerged between seasoned litigators and those entering the profession. Recognizing that effective courtroom advocacy cannot be learned in a classroom alone, this initiative emphasizes the critical role of experienced attorneys in mentoring and providing hands-on opportunities for emerging practitioner.

Mission

The mission of Project LITIGATE is to narrow the gap in courtroom experience for the next generation of attorneys by encouraging law firms to provide early, substantive exposure to courtroom training and key litigation tasks that prepare lawyers for real-world practice. Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice **Christine L. Donohue** has championed this initiative and PBA President Jim Antoniono has committed to highlight this important effort to give newer attorneys more opportunities to get invaluable courtroom experience.

Through the LITIGATE Pledge and targeted programming, the committee fosters accountability, strengthens professional development and expands meaningful, hands-on litigation opportunities.

PBA Past President Thomas G. Wilkinson Jr. and Patricia B. Santelle serve as co-chairs of the Project LITIGATE Committee. Both bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to their roles and will be instrumental in advancing the committee's mission and future initiatives. Veronica Morrison of Dauphin County and Danielle Parks of Allegheny County have been appointed vice chairs of the committee.

Members with an interest in litigation, mentorship and professional development are encouraged to join this impactful initiative and contribute to its continued success.

Get involved today!

To join the Project LITIGATE Committee, please follow these steps:

- Log in to your account on the PBA website (www.pabar.org), then click your name in the gold box at the top of the page to open your Member Dashboard
- Select Update My Information, then scroll to the bottom of the page to find the My Committee section
- Choose Update My Committee and check the box for the Project LITIGATE Committee
- Once you're signed up, you will receive a welcome letter and be added to the Project LITIGATE listserv

Help train tomorrow's trial attorneys and strengthen the future of civil litigation.

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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

Duquesne Kline School of Law Honors Alumni Jurists

The Thomas R. Kline School of Law of Duquesne University Alumni Association recognized three distinguished alumni during its 74th annual Law Alumni Reunion Dinner on Sept. 25, 2026. The Hon. Christine L. Donohue, L'80, the Hon. Elliot C. Howsie, L'98, and the Hon. Matthew V. Rudzki, L'13, were honored for their legal achievements, public service, and contributions to Duquesne Kline School of Law.



(l to r) Dean April Barton, Judge Rudzki, Judge Howsie, Justice Donohue and Duquesne President David Dausey

Distinguished Alumna Award

Justice **Christine L. Donohue** received the Distinguished Alumna Award. A Pennsylvania Supreme Court justice since 2016, she previously served on the Superior Court and practiced civil litigation. Justice Donohue has earned numerous professional honors and championed opportunities for young attorneys to develop courtroom skills.

Meritorious Service Award

Judge **Elliot C. Howsie** received the Dr. John E. Murray, Jr. Meritorious Service Award for his service to Duquesne Kline School of Law. He became Allegheny County's first African American chief public defender in 2012 and was appointed to the Court of Common Pleas in 2019. He also teaches at Duquesne Kline, mentoring first-year minority law students.

Outstanding Achievement Award

Judge **Matthew V. Rudzki** received the Outstanding Achievement Award. Elected to the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas in 2025, he serves in the Civil Division. Before joining the bench, he practiced school, municipal, estate and real estate law and served as mayor and councilman of Sharpsburg Borough, advancing local environmental, historical preservation and nondiscrimination initiatives.

Philadelphia Court Administrator Graduates from National Court Leadership Program

Michael P. Bouchard, III, chief deputy district court administrator for the First Judicial District of Pennsylvania, recently graduated from the National Center for State Courts' Institute for Court Management (ICM) Fellows Program.

Bouchard was among the 55th class of ICM Fellows, representing 13 states, who graduated in July 2026 during a ceremony at the U.S. Supreme Court. The rigorous program included more than 16 months of coursework, a residency in Williamsburg, a supervised research project and court improvement plan and a final presentation.

Selected by his classmates to represent the class with a speech at the graduation ceremony, Bouchard was recognized for his leadership, collaboration and commitment to public service. In his role with the Philadelphia Courts, he oversees fiscal management, human resources, technology, procurement, research, legal services and major systemwide initiatives.



Michael Bouchard, pictued with with State Court Administrator Andrea Tuominen (l)

The ICM Fellows Program prepares court professionals to lead and manage courts effectively, with an emphasis on innovation, collaboration and continuous improvement.

Around the Judiciary





Chief Justice Todd (l) with PBA Elder Law Section Chair Samantha Wolf (r)

Chief Justice **Debra Todd** was honored with a Special Recognition Award on July 24 from the Pennsylvania Bar Association's Elder Law Section, recognizing her dedication to protecting older Pennsylvanians and advancing elder justice across the Commonwealth.





On Sept. 11, Justice **Daniel McCaffery** spoke to a group of Temple Law's LL.M. international students at the Capitol about how Pennsylvania's courts work.



Justice **Christine L. Donohue** was the recipient of the Academy of Trial Lawyers of Allegheny County Joseph F. Weis, Jr. Distinguished Service Award, the highest honor bestowed by the Academy. The award is given to those members who have made a substantial contribution to the judicial system or the legal profession.





(l to r) Justice Sallie Updyke-Mundy with Judge Jill Beck, President Judge Anne Lazarus, Chip Becker and John Hare.

On Sept. 8, a special CLE, "William Penn: Foundations of Pennsylvania's Judiciary," brought together members of the state's legal community in Superior Court's Courtroom in Philadelphia for a discussion on the origins and development of the Commonwealth's judiciary.

Moderated by Superior Court Judge **Jill Beck**, the program featured President Judge **Anne Lazarus**, John Hare and Chip Becker.

(continued)





Dean April Barton (l) and Judge Jill Beck (r)

On Aug. 20, Superior Court Judge **Jill Beck**, L'06, presided over the Professionalism and Swearing-in Ceremony at the Thomas R. Kline School of Law of Duquesne University, welcoming new students to the legal profession and emphasizing the importance of professionalism and ethics.



(l to r) Michael McCormick, past president of the National Client Protection Organization, pictured with Kathryn Morgan

Congratulations to **Kathryn Peifer Morgan**, executive director and counsel for the Pennsylvania Lawyers Fund for Client Security, on receiving the 2026 Isaac Hecht Law Client Protection Award from the National Client Protection Organization, and recognizing her decades of leadership in protecting clients nationwide.

Bedford and Monroe Counties Celebrate New U.S. Citizens

The Courts of Common Pleas of Bedford and Monroe Counties hosted two judicial Naturalization Oath Ceremonies, welcoming a combined 48 individuals as new U.S. citizens.

On Sept. 11, the Bedford County Courts co-hosted a ceremony with the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania. Twenty-three candidates from Blair, Bedford, Cambria and Clearfield counties took the oath of citizenship, representing 17 countries.

On Sept. 15, the Monroe County Courts held a ceremony at which 25 candidates took the oath. The new citizens also represented 17 countries from around the world.

Both ceremonies celebrated an important milestone for the new citizens and their families as they officially became U.S. citizens.

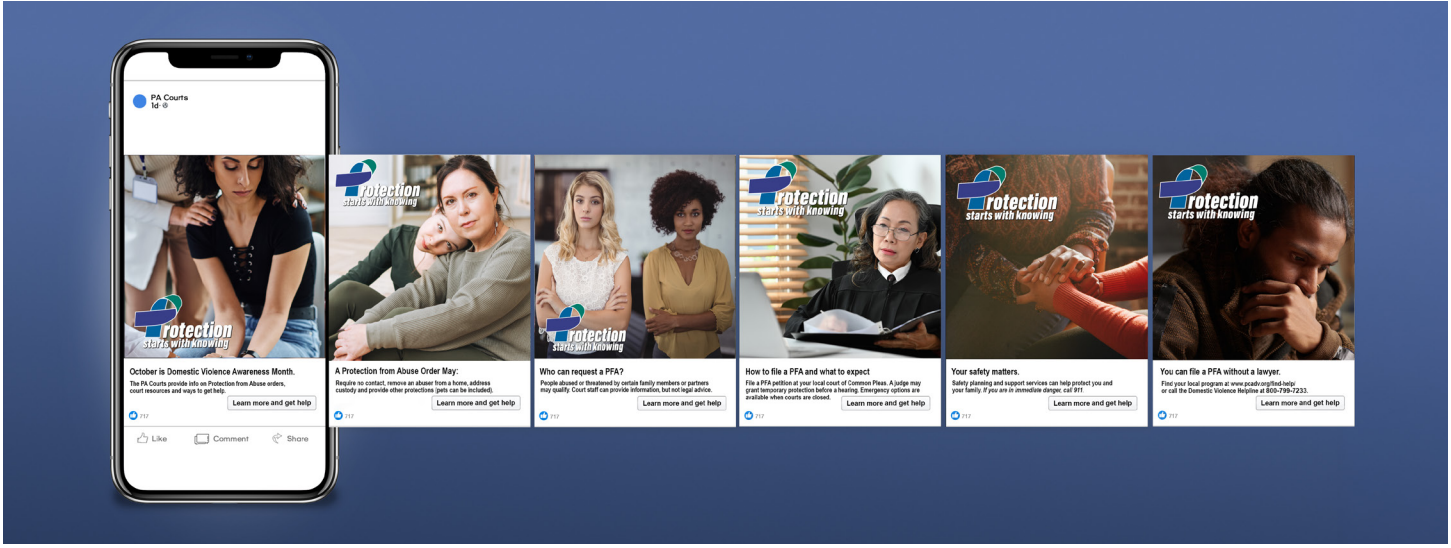




*(l to r) Bedford County Judge **Brandi Hershey**, Judge **Stephanie Haines** (U.S. District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania) and Bedford County President Judge **Travis Livengood***



*(l to r) Back row - President Judge **Jonathan Mark**, Judge **Janet Jackson**, Judge **C. Daniel Higgins**; Front row - Judge **David J. Williamson**, Judge **Jennifer Harlacher Sibum**, Judge **Stephen M. Higgins***



Protection Starts with Knowing

In recognition of Domestic Violence Awareness Month in October, the PA Courts launched a new social media campaign to help raise awareness about Protection from Abuse (PFA) orders and the resources available through the courts.

The campaign shares information designed to help Pensylvanians better understand PFA orders.

"Understanding the resources available is an important first step for individuals who may be experiencing abuse or seeking protection for themselves or their families," said Court Administrator of Pennsylvania Andrea Tuominen. "Through this campaign, we are making information about PFA orders and court resources more accessible, so people know where to turn for help."

Make sure you're following PA Courts on Facebook, Instagram and X.

It's a great way to stay up to date with what's happening around the judiciary!

Facebook
@pennsylvaniacourts

Twitter
@PACourts

Instagram
@pennsylvaniacourts

The AOPC STOP Violence Against Women Grant Program and the Office of Behavioral Health Presents

Beyond Behavior: Understanding Trauma in the Courtroom

Dec. 10, 2026 | 12 - 1:30 pm EST | Virtual

Trauma can influence how individuals communicate, remember events, respond to authority, and participate in court proceedings. These responses may be misinterpreted as dishonesty, defiance, indifference, or lack of credibility. This interactive session examines how trauma may present in the courtroom, with particular attention to interpersonal violence survivors and people who cause the harm.

Participants will explore the basic neurobiology of trauma, consider challenging courtroom scenarios, and learn practical strategies for promoting safety, engagement, accountability, and fairness without compromising judicial neutrality or legal standards.

PA COURTS
OFFICE OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Learning Objectives: By the end of this workshop, participants will be better able to:

- Identify common trauma responses that may appear in court proceedings
- Explain, at a high level, how threat physiology can affect attention, memory, emotion, behavior, and decision-making
- Distinguish trauma responses from intentional manipulation, resistance, or abusive behavior—without assuming either
- Recognize IPV-specific patterns that can complicate court participation and safety
- Apply practical, role-appropriate trauma-informed strategies while preserving neutrality, due process, evidence standards, and accountability

1.5 Continuing judicial ethics (CJE) and (CLE) Continuing legal ethics education credits expected.

Register Online:
https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_xfjPSJkjQlKzoYtE1niEGw

NEW CIVICS RESOURCES CELEBRATE PENNSYLVANIA'S JUDICIAL LEGACY

As part of our America250 commemoration, new civics education resources are helping students discover how Pennsylvania's courts have shaped our Commonwealth's past and continue to serve its future.

Pennsylvania Courts
Civics Outreach & Education Tools

Now available on the PA Courts civics education webpage, these classroom-ready materials encourage students to explore the history, evolution and role of the courts through engaging, interactive learning. The new resources include:

Kahoot!

TWO "UNDERSTANDING THE PA COURTS" KAHOOT! GAMES – Online quizzes for both primary and secondary grade levels, giving students a fun and interactive way to test their knowledge of the state's court system.



These additions join a growing collection of court and civics education resources already available on the webpage – including prior materials created for the PA Supreme Court's 300th anniversary on the History of the Court, Top 10 Interesting Facts, Important Court Cases, Early Justices and Lawyers.



COURTS IN YOUR COMMUNITY – Classroom activity that helps students connect with the courts and judicial services that shape everyday life.



EVOLUTION OF JUSTICE IN PA AND THE U.S. – Timeline highlighting the evolution of Pennsylvania's courts alongside key milestones in our nation's history.

Whether used by judges during school visits or community engagements, or by educators in the classroom, these resources are intended to offer engaging ways to spark conversations about Pennsylvania's judicial history and the role of our courts today.