



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

NEWS RELEASE

CONTACT:

Steve Schell, Communications Coordinator 717-795-2000 ext. 3269
E-mail steve.schell@pacourts.us

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WWW.COURTS.STATE.PA.US

Supreme Court Safety/Preparedness Committee

**State Judiciary Upgrades Magistrates' Security;
Enhancements 'Cool' Tempers, Avoid Incidents**

HARRISBURG, June 14, 2006 - Five hundred fifty-three magisterial district courts, central booking and night court facilities in Pennsylvania have been equipped with electronic security measures, a major step in better securing those courts, state Supreme Court Justice Sandra Schultz Newman announced today. The total project, which includes the installation of shatterproof safety glass and better restraints for in-custody defendants, will be completed under its original \$4.4 million price tag.

The security measures – including 750 digital cameras and 1,400 duress alarms – are a direct result of the collaboration of the legislative and executive branches of state government with the state judiciary and, in turn, with both county commissioners and judges.

“The installation of digital surveillance equipment in each of the offices has already helped to moderate potentially threatening behavior in at least two reported instances,” Newman said.

One reported, recent incident involved an irate woman in an MDJ office whose actions in protest of a citation were disturbing to staff and others in the office. According to reports, midway through her disturbance the woman noted a sign indicating the presence of electronic monitoring equipment (cameras) and became less agitated almost instantly upon learning that her actions were indeed being monitored or recorded.

“We can all appreciate vexation at having to pay a citation and most people do so without a thought of disturbance or violence, but experience indicates that a small percentage of disgruntled litigants or their family or friends may become threatening,” said Newman. “One of our goals is to provide methods and means to minimize that risk, as the cameras apparently did in this recent incident.”

Newman chairs the state Judicial Council's Committee on Judicial Safety and Preparedness. The committee has approximately 30 local and state officials, including sheriffs, county commissioners, judges, county row officers and court administrators.

-- more --

Since 2003, the committee, along with staff of the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC), has devised a variety of means to increase security in court facilities across the Commonwealth. Those enhancements have significantly focused on low-cost, practical approaches to better security – including better planning, greater awareness, and increased education as to risks.

“Without the strong support of Governor Rendell, legislative leaders and every member of the General Assembly, our committee’s work would not be as successful and our MDJ courts would not be as secure,” said Newman.

Emphasizing that funds alone are not the complete answer to better court security, Newman noted that an additional aspect of the state courts’ security work has been to develop better data as to what actual threats exist to those engaged in the judicial process, whether as litigants, jurors, staff or judges.

“We recognized that without consistent and complete incident reporting we could not maximize the benefits of our court security dollars,” Newman said. “That’s why in July 2005 we developed, within the AOPC, a first-of-its-kind-in-the-nation automated incident reporting system, providing vital information on actual or potential threats to anyone with business in magisterial district courts.” To date 155 security incidents have been reported.

“With accurate and comprehensive reporting of court security incidents,” Newman added, “we will be able to more effectively identify trends that will not only inform sheriffs, police, and our Judicial Security Unit about incidents, but enable us to acquire and best direct resources for maximum security improvements.”

Later this year the automated incident reporting system will be extended to 67 common pleas courts where the AOPC plans “hard” security upgrades from FY 2006-2007 funding.

Newman pointed to various incidents in courts around the country in recent years as a measure of the importance of considering court security improvements. “Late last year, our committee hosted the court administrator of Fulton County, GA, the county where a judge, a court reporter and a sheriff’s deputy were all shot and killed by an escaped prisoner,” said Newman. “Her message was clear that planning for such emergencies is a key to avoiding tragedy. With this message in mind, the judicial safety and preparedness committee has taken numerous additional steps toward improving court safety.” *(see attachment #2 listing those additional steps).*

#

Note: Attachment #1 provides a county-by-county breakdown of cameras and duress alarms installed.

Attachment #1

<u>COUNTY</u>	<u>CAMERAS</u>	<u>DURESS ALARMS</u>	
ADAMS	8	8	
ALLEGHENY	92	154	
ARMSTRONG	7	15	
BEAVER	18	19	
BEDFORD	8	18	
BERKS	36	48	
BLAIR	18	27	
BRADFORD	5	8	
BUCKS	36	36	
BUTLER	11	23	
CAMBRIA	13	20	
CAMERON	1	3	
CARBON	4	15	
CENTRE	6	10	
CHESTER	28	74	
CLARION	4	15	
CLEARFIELD	5	13	
CLINTON	3	8	
COLUMBIA	5	14	
CRAWFORD	4	10	
CUMBERLAND	7	23	
DAUPHIN	21	37	
DELAWARE	43	0	
ELK	2	7	
ERIE	19	35	
FAYETTE	14	26	
FOREST	4	4	
FRANKLIN	8	28	
FULTON	4	9	
GREENE	3	10	
HUNTINGDON	4	11	
INDIANA	7	12	
JEFFERSON	3	6	
JUNIATA	2	5	
LACKAWANNA	12	22	
LANCASTER	21	72	
LAWRENCE	7	24	
LEBANON	6	17	
LEHIGH	20	28	
LUZERNE	20	57	
LYCOMING	9	20	
MCKEAN	4	11	
MERCER	5	12	
MIFFLIN	3	9	
MONROE	12	36	
MONTGOMERY	43	60	
MONTOUR	1	2	
NORTHAMPTON	16	49	
NORTHUMBERLAND	6	16	
PERRY	3	10	
POTTER	3	9	
SCHUYLKILL	12	37	
SNYDER	3	11	
SOMERSET	5	13	
SULLIVAN	1	2	
SUSQUEHANNA	3	8	
TIOGA	2	5	
UNION	2	4	
VENANGO	6	11	
WARREN	6	15	
WASHINGTON	12	22	
WAYNE	4	16	
WESTMORELAND	27	37	
WYOMING	3	6	
YORK	22	41	
65	752	1433	TOTALS

Note: Installation of the MDJ electronic security measures cost several million dollars and contracts for the equipment's installation were awarded after a competitive bid process.

Additional steps taken by the Judicial Safety and Preparedness Committee

- Organized security committees in each county consisting of representatives from both county executive and judicial branches.
- Developed a court security manual and conducted statewide training workshops on its content as a “how-do” guide to plan and practice better security procedures in court facilities.
- Planned, in concert with state emergency preparedness officials, for contingency operations sites within counties.
- Developed with the University of Pittsburgh’s Graduate School of Public Health and Centers for Rural Health Practice and Public Health Preparedness a courthouse preparedness kit for public health emergencies.
- Assisted in securing Philadelphia’s courts consistent with initiatives introduced in magisterial district courts.
- Providing personal safety and security training for all magisterial district court staff

Note: These activities follow earlier work by the AOPC and the committee and county volunteers to assess the vulnerability of county court facilities and jurists to various types of threat. That work began prior to the devastating events of 9-11-2001 and accelerated after that disaster. However, the primary focus of the judiciary’s preparedness work is focused on more traditional threats by disgruntled litigants and from potential natural disasters, like last year’s Hurricane Katrina.