

# MESSAGE FROM THE STATE COURT ADMINISTRATOR

*Honorable Patricia W. Griffin*



Over the past year, the Administrative Office of the Courts has made significant progress in a number of areas, both in initiating new projects and completing existing ones. We will continue to strive to enhance the services provided by the AOC. As a part of that initiative, I would like to recognize the efforts of all of those in the AOC who work to support the Judicial Branch and the citizens of Delaware. It is my hope that the following highlights from the past year will provide the reader with a sense of the AOC's many accomplishments during that time.

## ***Self-Represented Litigants/Procedural Fairness***

During the past year, the report of the Delaware Courts: Fairness for All Task Force was completed and approved by the Delaware Supreme Court after which implementation began. Implementation activities included:

- Developing a video for self-represented litigants. The video, which is in short segments that can be viewed individually, explains the various aspects of preparing a case and appearing in court and is available on the Judicial Branch web site.
- Preparing an interactive form for the return of a security deposit in conjunction with the Justice of the Peace Court. The form, which is found on the Court's home page, fills out the complaint form based on the answers provided by litigants to questions. This is the first in a planned series of such forms.
- Staffing a Bench Bar Committee on Limited Scope Representation which reviewed possible rule changes to clarify the parameters of such representation.
- Staffing a Judicial Committee on Self-Represented Litigants which was formed to discuss ways in which judges could be assisted in balancing the needs of self-represented litigants and the need to maintain neutrality in the courtroom.

## ***Mental Health and Criminal Justice Task Force***

The Delaware Supreme Court Task Force on Criminal Justice and Mental Health, staffed by the AOC, is charged with identifying ways to improve early identification, prevention, and system-wide responses for persons with mental illnesses entering the criminal justice system or re-entering into the community. To this end, in January 2010, the Task Force released a strategic plan with long and short term objectives based on the sequential intercept model for intercepting and diverting persons from the criminal justice system. Following adoption of the strategic plan, the Task Force began planning implementation efforts. These include a colloquium for mental health providers to be held in November 2010, Crisis Intervention Team (C.I.T.) training for law enforcement officers, which is planned for May 2011, as well as a conference on mental health issues related to the criminal justice system designed for judicial officers, the Department of Justice, the Office of the Public Defender and other appropriate treatment providers and criminal justice agencies, also planned for May 2011.

## Community Outreach

During the past year, the AOC's youth forum for middle school students expanded to include seven schools during the school year and three community groups during the summer months, with approximately 350 students participating during the year. The youth forum provides an opportunity for students to learn about the court system by working with real life judges, deputy attorneys general and assistant public defenders in an impromptu mock trial held in a real courtroom during which each student participates by either taking on the role of one of these professionals or serving as a witness or juror. This year also saw the continuation of the Supreme Court's "From Classroom to Courtroom" project, coordinated by the AOC, which is a three day event through which teachers participating in the University of Delaware's externship program learn more about the court system and take this information back to their schools to assist their fellow teachers and students. Other efforts included staffing the Delaware high school mock trial program and assisting in promoting the iCivics program in Delaware. iCivics is a web-based education project, designed to teach students civics and inspire them to be active participants in our democracy. iCivics was started by former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor and initiated in Delaware by Delaware Supreme Court Justice Randy J. Holland. In addition, the AOC coordinated a volunteer summer internship program for high school students, who learned about the working world and the courts as they helped the Court of Common Pleas with an archiving project.



Family Court Judge William L. Chapman, Jr. talking to student participants from the Latin American Community Center during a Youth Forum last summer.



*Teacher Participants in the 2010 Supreme Court "Classroom to Courtroom" Teachers Program, along with Chief Justice Myron T. Steele, Justice Henry duPont Ridgely and Justice Carolyn Berger.*

## Collections

A new initiative for the Office of State Court Collections is being planned for a pilot project to install kiosks, which would accept payments of fines, costs, and restitution, in Probation and Parole facilities. The system, which will operate at no charge to the State, will provide for secure, real time payments, enhance availability of services to the public, and refocus OSCCE staffing from payment processing to collections enforcement. If the pilot project is successful, OSCCE anticipates expanding the installation of kiosks to additional locations.

### ***Racial and Ethnic Diversity***

The AOC worked with the courts to prepare for certifying compliance with the Criminal Justice Council's "Declaration of Leading Practices to Protect Civil Rights and Promote Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Criminal Justice System in Delaware". An initiative of the CJC's Racial and Ethnic Fairness Committee co-chaired by Justice Henry duPont Ridgely and Chief Judge Alex Smalls, this project is designed to give priority in grants awarded through the CJC to those organizations in compliance with the Declaration's requirements. The AOC and the courts have focused on implementing policies and procedures consistent with those requirements, including complaint processes, community outreach, and bias-free decision making. Additionally, the AOC continued its diversity training programs for court staff. Several training sessions for Justice of the Peace Court staff were held and planning was undertaken for additional diversity training sessions for court staff for next year.

Overseeing the provision of language access services to the courts remains a key focus of the AOC. In FY 2010, the AOC worked with the courts to identify key documents for translation, install Spanish signage for the New Castle County Courthouse (signage for other courthouses is being undertaken through the translation project), and implement a telephonic interpreter pilot project providing language assistance at Justice of the Peace Court front counters.

### ***Continuity of Operations Planning/Security/Facilities***

During the past year, the Judicial Branch became one of the first State entities to complete the Living Disaster Recovery Planning System (LDRPS), a statewide effort coordinated by the Department of Technology and Information. In addition, testing of the Notifind system, which provides for notification of key personnel in an emergency, has been completed.

Security and facilities work during FY 2010 focused on improvements to the Department of Corrections parking lot at the New Castle County Courthouse, which was paved and fenced in for security purposes. In addition, work began on installing a security gate for the NCCCH's loading dock and preparing for the installation of new courthouse front doors.

### ***Technology Management and Support***

With the completion of the civil phase of the new COTS case management system, the Supreme Court adopted a modified COTS governance structure to be used in support of the remaining phases of the project. Led by a new Project Leadership Team, chaired by Justice Henry duPont Ridgely, and the Trial Courts COTS Committee, headed by Marianne Kennedy, Court Administrator for the Justice of the Peace Court, the COTS focus has been on determining the best approach for moving forward with modernization of the case management system. It is anticipated that a final decision on the approach to be taken for modernization of the Courts' criminal, and Family Court's civil, case management systems will be made in the coming fiscal year.

Starting this year and looking ahead to FY 2011, the AOC is reinvigorating its service-oriented approach for technology to better address COTS project demands and meet the Courts' needs. FY 2010 initiatives included the development of online e-filing user training, website improvements, and refinements to the COTS system, such as enhancements to the "courtroom assistant" program which the Courts have found beneficial.