

MESSAGE FROM THE STATE COURT ADMINISTRATOR



HONORABLE PATRICIA W. GRIFFIN

Fiscal Year 2015 brought great progress on a number of Judicial Branch initiatives introduced by Chief Justice Leo E. Strine, Jr. in his 2014 State of the Judiciary address. Under the guidance of Chief Justice Strine, the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) has embarked on a series of new reforms that focus on improving the efficiency and effectiveness of justice provided to the citizens of Delaware. I would like to take the opportunity to highlight some of those efforts below:

Managing Our Limited Resources More Effectively

Recognizing the ever-growing demand for more efficient and cost-effective processes while ensuring access to justice for all, the AOC oversaw a number of process improvement projects stemming from the 10-year partnership between the Judicial Branch and the Alfred Lerner School of Business and Economics at the University of Delaware, that began in November 2014. Led by the AOC's Judicial Information Center (JIC), the courts and other system partners (including the Attorney General, the Office of Defense Services, the Department of Correction, the Division of Youth Rehabilitative Services, and the Governor's Office) worked with the University to develop new ways to work smarter and more efficiently across the justice system using validated Lean Six Sigma techniques. In the first year of the partnership, these efforts have al-

ready yielded a savings of more than 4,250 staff hours across 19 projects in both the courts and at participating partner agencies.

E-filing and Technology

In other efforts to improve productivity and ease access to information, the Judiciary is on target to move all of the Delaware Courts to a single, high-quality e-filing system in all civil and criminal cases by 2017. Implementation of one statewide filing system for all cases should be easier for litigants to manage, minimize staff costs, and simplify information sharing and accessibility.

The Office of State Court Collections Enforcement (OSCCE), which is a division of the AOC that handles collection of court-ordered financial assessments, continued to upgrade and improve payment kiosks introduced in 2010. This year, kiosks expanded to Division of Motor Vehicle offices to make them more convenient to members of the public who have court-ordered payments in all of the Delaware State Courts, along with certain Department of Corrections fees and child support payments. With real-time payment processing, most failure to pay capiases are now automatically cleared upon payment at the kiosks without the person having to go to a courthouse. OSCCE expects to add more kiosk locations and further expand services in FY 2016.

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Increased Access to Information

Similarly, AOC staff played a key role in modernizing and updating the Judicial Branch's operating procedures this past year. Transforming hard-to-find Administrative Directives into a comprehensive procedures manual organized by topic and indexed, the new online document should be easier to access and use by court staff, attorneys and the public. The Operating Procedures for the Delaware Judicial Branch can be found online at <http://courts.delaware.gov/Supreme/operating-procedures.stm>.

Another initiative to improve access to information is the overhaul of the Delaware Courts website at www.courts.delaware.gov. JIC, and others in the AOC and the Courts, have been working in cooperation with the executive branch and its technical support division – the Government Information Center (GIC) — to redesign the Delaware Courts' website with a more modern looking, user-friendly and responsive design based on current best practices for the web. GIC recently completed a similar upgrade of the Delaware.gov website and the Courts are benefitting from their experience and expertise. We are grateful for their assistance in this effort. Because the redesigned Delaware Courts' website uses the latest programming language, the website's content can be as easily viewed and used on a smart phone and tablet computer as it is on a desktop computer.

Access to Justice

AOC continued to provide administrative, logistical and technical support for another on-going, key initiative – the Supreme Court's Access to Justice Commission. The Commission is charged with identifying barriers to access to justice and developing recommendations designed to improve access to justice for all Delawareans. Under Chief Justice Strine, the Commission's four committees have made great progress this year on issues related to funding for, and the expansion of, *pro bono* services; support for *pro se* litigants; and fairness in the criminal justice system. The committees are in the process of collecting data through surveys, interviews, public hearings, research and analysis. Those committees looking at issues on the civil side are expected to submit their final recommendations to the Delaware Supreme Court in the fall of 2016. Preliminary proposals involve new uses of limited resources, including transforming existing law library space into modern day resource centers for *pro se* litigants navigating the court system.

The Committee on Fairness in the Criminal Justice System, aided by the AOC, is working with criminal justice experts

from the University of Pennsylvania Law School's Quattrone Center for the Fair Administration of Justice, Bryan Stevenson's Equal Justice Initiative, and the University of Delaware to identify reforms to reduce crime and increase racial equity in the justice system. The experts presented their research to the committee at two public informational sessions this fall. Community members were then invited to share their ideas with the committee to improve the criminal justice system at a series of public hearings held throughout the state and to submit written comments on the Fairness Committee's webpage created by the AOC. That webpage, which is located at <http://courts.delaware.gov/Supreme/access.stm>, serves as a central hub for the Committee's work and contains up-to-date agendas, important background material, copies of the experts' reports to the Committee and videos of the informational hearings. All public comment and experts' submissions will be considered as the Committee identifies possible reforms for Delaware and determines the next steps.

In another access-related initiative, the AOC assisted the American College of Trial Lawyers and the Delaware State Bar Association in conducting a survey of the Delaware Bar and judicial officers about how the Delaware Courts' operations could be improved and enhanced. The resulting recommendations are expected to be released early in 2016. The AOC also supported the work of the Criminal Justice Council for the Judiciary. Under the leadership of co-chairs President Judge Jan Jurden and Superior Court Judge William Carpenter, the Council has worked with experts from American University to evaluate the State's problem-solving courts and make recommendations to enhance their effectiveness, improve the consistency of operations across counties and courts, employ measurable standards in their operations, and consider their effect on key agency partners, such as Probation and Parole. Recommendations stemming from that review will be presented to the Supreme Court for consideration over the next few months.

Ongoing Operations and Programs

In addition to these new initiatives, the AOC continued its work to support the courts and those who conduct business within our facilities, including:

Security and Facilities

The security of those who work in and visit our court facilities has remained a top priority for the Judicial Branch. In October of 2015, the AOC hosted nearly 90 court security officers from across Delaware and three surrounding states for a two-day court security training seminar in Dover. The pro-

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gram was conducted by the Virginia-based National Sheriffs' Association and focused on such matters as courtroom security, defendant management, judicial threat management, professional awareness, emergency events and high-profile cases. The goal is for a more unified statewide approach to security training at our courthouses.

The AOC spearheaded a number of initiatives aimed at making sure that our facilities can meet the demand of increasingly complex caseloads. The AOC supported the work of the Court Facilities Improvement Working Group which was established to develop flexible, cost-effective and potentially innovative solutions to court facility space issues. With input from all branches of government and private partners, the Working Group issued its report targeting critical facility needs for the Family Court in Kent and Sussex Counties in January 2015. The AOC also worked with courts throughout the state to plan for, and secure, needed improvements to maintain the facilities so that we can continue to effectively and safely serve the public.

Court Interpreter Program

The Court Interpreter Program continues to see a steady increase in requests for services, particularly for Limited English Proficient litigants speaking Spanish and Haitian Creole in all types of civil and criminal proceedings. The AOC Program Coordinator has introduced training sessions for court staff to help them understand how interpreters work inside the courtroom. Additionally, new continuing education training was offered to court interpreters and a new structured shadowing program for prospective interpreters was introduced to assist prospective interpreters in enhancing their language and interpretation skills and providing an opportunity to experience interpreting within a court setting. The AOC continues to look for ways to enhance the quality of interpretation services, streamline data collection, and manage limited resources responsibly.

Staff Training

The AOC introduced a number of new training options for court staff this year. New online training and other computer-based technologies allowed a broader audience to attend more training with limited impact to court schedules and work time. The cata-

log of training programs now established for court staff includes a vast array of topics including a new series of courses designed for supervisors on leading staff and a newly developed onboarding program for employees.

Grants

The AOC continued to oversee several federally supported Judicial Branch initiatives:

- The Bureau of Justice Assistance awarded the AOC a grant to support the development of a database collection platform tailored to the needs of Delaware's problem-solving courts. The database will allow each court to track the progress of defendants entering a program and provide data on the success rate of individual programs.
- The Office of Violence Against Women continued to fund services offered through the Victim Awareness and Safety Enhancement (VASE) project enabling the program to extend to litigants in the Court of Common Pleas' general criminal calendar. The VASE's mission is to provide trauma-informed care to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault who have been convicted of a crime.

Community Outreach and Education

The AOC continued its efforts to bring innovative civics educational opportunities to schools and community organizations. The Annual Delaware High School Mock Trial Competition was, once again, hosted at the New Castle County Courthouse with 24 teams participating from across the State; the Summer Volunteer Youth Program provided 48 high school students, many in foster care, with job skills training and the opportunity to get a first-hand look at careers within the Judicial Branch. The Youth Forum invited middle school students to learn about the court system by working with judges and attorneys in an impromptu mock trial held in a real courtroom setting. The Media Working Group was established as a forum to discuss the media's needs or issues of concern in the Delaware Court system. A new media policy discussing access to courthouse media rooms and more liberal cell phone access resulted from the work of this group and underscores

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the Courts' commitment to public access of information when possible.

Legislative Coordination

Over the past year, the Judiciary has refined its strategic and legislative approach through the establishment of the Judicial Strategies Committee (JSC) in May 2015, which was tasked with implementing a long-term strategic plan for the Delaware Courts that will facilitate the identification of emerging trends affecting the Courts and justice system, and the development of policy-oriented and legislative solutions to issues. The AOC plays a key role in the work of the JSC, as well as the coordination of the Judiciary's legislative initiatives and interactions with the Legislative and Executive Branches.

Fiscal Year 2016 is turning out to be a busy and exciting year. We are ready for the challenges ahead and the promise of new and better ways to serve the citizens of our State. On a personal note, I was honored to be selected to serve as president of the Conference of State Court Administrators (COSCA) and vice-chair of the National Center for State Courts Board of Directors for a one-year term beginning in

August 2015. In December 2015, I presented at a working session at the U.S. Department of Justice, and participated in a related session at the White House, on issues pertaining to court fines, fees and poverty. I am excited to work on national initiatives that will enhance access to justice that are being spearheaded by COSCA, the Conference of Chief Justices and the National Center for State Courts. Above all, I am grateful to the staff at the AOC and all in the Delaware Judicial Branch who work daily to make available to all Delawareans an effective and efficient system.



Patricia Griffin, State Court Administrator, presenting at the U.S. Department of Justice on December 2, 2015.



Lt. Michael Hertzfeld (front left), Deputy State Court Administrator James Wright (front center) and Lt. Lee Clough (front right) address the audience at the start of a two-day Court Security Training seminar held in Dover on October 29 and 30, 2015.