

MESSAGE FROM THE STATE COURT ADMINISTRATOR

The 2021 Annual Report of the Delaware Judiciary

Last year, I described 2020 as a year “unlike any other.” But as COVID-19 persisted, 2021 was very much the same. Even so, the Judicial Branch was able to resume operations and make meaningful progress on several major initiatives – the creation of the Delaware Bench and Bar Diversity Project to increase diversity in Delaware’s legal system and securing substantial funding for the construction of two new Family Court facilities in Kent and Sussex Counties and for renovation design of the historic Custom House in Wilmington. I am also proud to share the Administrative Office of the Courts’ achievements in 2021, especially as this marks our 50th year serving the Delaware Judicial Branch.

In reopening the Courts and resuming operations, many changes that started as temporary pandemic responses became everyday fixtures in 2021. Social distancing and plexiglass barriers remained in place, the mask mandate was reinstated, and we saw the integration of technology into almost every facet of our Courts’ functions. But 2021 also gave us new tools to protect the health and safety of our employees and visitors. With the widespread availability of COVID-19 tests and vaccines, the Judicial Branch expanded its efforts to help combat the pandemic. The Judiciary hosted several vaccination clinics in all three counties. The Judiciary also directed that all employees provide proof of vaccination or participate in weekly COVID-19 testing. The AOC oversaw the successful implementation of both efforts.

The Judicial Branch’s technology infrastructure was key to our Courts’ successful reopening. Without the tremendous work of our Judicial Information Center staff in installing, maintaining, and supporting that infrastructure and training court employees to use new tools, reopening would not have been possible. JIC’s remarkable efforts have been widely recognized, and we are so pleased to congratulate the team who received the Governor’s GEAR P3 Innovation and Efficiency Award in May 2021. We also congratulate JIC’s leader, Ken Kelemen, whom the Delaware State Bar Association celebrated in December as the recipient of its 2021 Government Service Award. These honors were well-deserved.

Our pandemic experience underscored how vital technology has become for the Judicial Branch. The AOC is committed to the continuous improvement of the Judiciary’s technology infrastructure. We are upgrading our courtrooms and embarking on our long-awaited statewide electronic filing, case management and document management system project. These projects will enable more efficient and cost-effective operations branch-wide and guarantee greater access to justice for all.

Another major AOC initiative arising from the pandemic occurred in court collections. In April 2020, Chief Justice Seitz ordered a moratorium on court collections. Before resuming collections in 2021, the Judicial Branch adopted a new policy to clear aged fees and fines accounts, forgiving non-restitution debts over 10 years old. Bill DiBartola of the Office of State Court Collections Enforcement successfully coordinated this massive write-off effort. The new policy recognized that these receivables were uncollectible and that the continued threat of collection created more hardship for people on their path to rehabilitation and a return to society.

Finally, in 2021 the AOC welcomed several new members to our core services team: Jenna Quigley was named our Statewide Problem Solving Court Coordinator; Marlaine White was appointed Staff Attorney following Ashley Tucker’s promotion to Deputy Court Administrator; and Zoe Carter and Shannon Samuels joined our Human Resources unit. Together, the AOC looks forward as we begin our 51st year of service to the Judicial Branch.

Sincerely,



Gayle P. Lafferty
State Court Administrator

