

COTS FY 2007 HIGHLIGHTS



COTS, an acronym for Courts Organized to Serve, is a Judicial Branch-wide project to create an integrated computerized case management system for civil and criminal cases in all Delaware state courts. Development of the system is a multi-year project which is expected to result in one of the most comprehensive case management systems in the country.

The COTS project made significant progress in FY 2007 with the completion of Phases 1 and 2. These phases implemented civil case management and related financial transactions in all Justice of the Peace Civil Courts. Phase 1, which consisted of implementation of the system in Justice of the Peace Courts 17 and 19 in Sussex County and Court 12 in New Castle County, was completed in the fall of 2006. Entry of cases into the new system began on October 30th and implementation continued into November with Core and Training Team members providing on-site assistance.

Following the completion of Phase 1, a post-implementation review led to the development of a seven-step plan that emphasized maintaining excellent customer service during the transition. As part of the plan, casual/seasonal positions were created to assist during the training and initial implementation periods, constables were trained to enter information in the system, business and operational processes were reviewed and the use of debit accounts and e-filing were expanded. These adjustments helped to ensure a smooth transition into Phase 2 – implementation of the new system in the remainder of the Justice of the Peace Civil Courts (Courts 9, 13 and 16). This was successfully completed during the summer of 2007.

With the new system's implementation in their civil courts, Justice of the Peace Court staff reported that they have found many advantages to the new civil system. They particularly appreciated the lack of paper files and the ability to obtain information from a file no matter in which court in the Justice of the Peace system the matter was heard. The financial package also proved to be of great assistance to court personnel as it provided for the automatic tabulation of financial information which previously had to be tabulated manually in civil cases. Both judges and staff were very pleased with Courtroom Assistant, a JIC-developed program that allows easy and complete access to Contexte case information in a courtroom setting.

Another system feature added in FY 2007 was the implementation of e-filing in the Phase 1 Justice of the Peace Courts. Pilot frequent filers filed cases electroni-

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cally in the Phase 1 courts, relieving clerks of data entry chores and improving filer access.

Intensive efforts continued in FY 2007 to prepare for upcoming phases of this complex project, including phases 3 and 4 of the COTS system which will extend the new system to all civil courts (other than Family Court), and for the implementation of the criminal case management system, which will occur in the subsequent phases.

Introduction of the civil case management system to pilot courts in one county is anticipated to take place in the spring of 2008 with extension to the remaining counties to occur in the fall of 2008.

In addition to implementing Phases 1 and 2, and preparing for phases 3 and 4 in FY 2007, work was continued on reviewing, updating, approving and testing customizations for several project phases. These customizations will cover a variety of functions, including those which will allow courts to share the same forms while minimizing the possibility of intermingling court specific data; creating standard docket text; flags and ticklers; violation expungements; and judge assignments. Other important activities in the last year have included work on the development of the interfaces needed for Phase 5 as well as requirements definition sessions for critical functionality such as sentencing.

As work on the COTS system successfully progresses, thanks are offered to all of the individuals – project team members, judges, and court staff – who have worked hard to ensure that the new case management system will enhance the ability of Delaware courts to continue to provide excellent service to the public and to maintain their leadership role among the nation's courts.



JUSTICE OF THE PEACE COURT 12 on the first day of COTS implementation—relatively smooth operations resulted from hard work by the JP Court staff, with extra help from members of the COTS team.

LEGISLATIVE HIGHLIGHTS

The Judiciary’s legislative team brings together representatives of the courts and the Administrative Office of the Courts to enhance the effectiveness of the judicial branch’s relationship with the General Assembly by serving as the main judicial branch contact for legislative matters and by monitoring and analyzing legislation for impact on the Judiciary.

FY 2007 brought a milestone of success to the Judiciary’s efforts to ensure the safety of those who appear in Delaware courts, with the enactment of legislation creating separate security assessment funding. This legislation, Senate Substitute 1 for SB 75, represented a new approach to solving the long-standing problem of insufficient resources for court security needs by offering a way to address critical security equipment and personnel shortages, particularly in the Justice of the Peace Courts. Another highlight in FY 2007 was SB 62, the constitutional amendment authorizing the Securities and Exchange Commission to certify questions of Delaware law to the Delaware Supreme Court. This amendment was enacted in response to the express interest of the SEC in seeking the Court’s advice on Delaware corporate law issues and was lauded as an opportunity to provide expedited decisions and greater certainty to questions involving Delaware corporate law.

In addition to the legislation discussed above, the following legislation affecting the judicial branch was passed during FY 2007 by the 144th session of the General Assembly and has been enacted into law:

Bill No.	Description
SB 26	Allows the Justice of the Peace Court to retain jurisdiction over a contempt charge in a truancy case
SB 30 w/SA 1	Amends various civil procedures of the Justice of the Peace Court
SB 39	Permits Title 21 violations (other than § 4177) occurring in any part of Milford to be heard in the nearest court in Kent County
SB 50	Transfers several Title 21 offenses to Family Court’s exclusive jurisdiction when committed by minors
SB 69	Transfers jurisdiction over actions arising from arbitration agreements relating to consumer credit contracts from the Court of Chancery to the Court of Common Pleas
SB 104	Permits commissioners to preside over contested, as well as uncontested, divorce matters
SB 105	Deletes the requirement that social security numbers of the parties appear on all decrees of divorce or annulment
HB 46	Brings the publication requirement for guardianship of a child into conformity with the publication requirements for other civil filings in the Family Court
HB 48	Requires separate filings for child support, custody and visitation requests when filing for divorce
HB 53	This is the second leg of a Constitutional Amendment to delete the use of the surplus term “associate” when referring to judges of the Superior and Family Courts in the Constitution
HB 56 as amended by House Amendment 1	Permits the Justice of the Peace Court to retain jurisdiction over a truancy case when the child is withdrawn from public school