

MESSAGE FROM THE STATE COURT ADMINISTRATOR

HONORABLE PATRICIA W. GRIFFIN



The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) plays an important role in the Judicial Branch’s efforts to stay responsive to the needs of its constituents and to improve delivery of justice. Over the past year, the AOC has continued to provide logistical, operational, and administrative support, as the Judicial Branch undergoes a systemic evaluation of its current operations and procedures, as well as future planning to meet the needs of our changing society. Efforts towards maximizing system-wide efficiencies to bolster existing resources are ongoing. Throughout this process we have worked to strengthen relationships, and have sought opportunities to partner with other branches of government, our academic institutions, the Bar, the business community and others, to explore ways of conducting business so that we might better serve the public. Access to justice remains a focal point of those efforts. And, under the leadership of Chief Justice Leo E. Strine, Jr. and the Delaware Courts, the AOC continues to provide support for initiatives to increase access to justice for all. I am grateful for the opportunity to highlight some of our achievements and ongoing work below.

Mobile or stationary – no problem! Information is but a click away

The AOC, along with its technical support division, the Judicial Information Center (JIC), re-

launched the Delaware State Courts website <https://courts.delaware.gov> on March 16, 2016. The redesigned website is brighter, more user-friendly and may be accessed from a variety of electronic devices. The project took nearly a year and involved over 1,200 web pages and applications. New features of the website include a footer menu, which gives users an index and instant access to all parts of the website, and four new user “portals” that reflect the Courts’ core constituents: the public, jurors, attorneys, and the media. The portals are designed to collect information and resources tailored to each group on a single webpage.

The new design and functionality has been well-received by our users – some of whom are accessing our website from faraway places including India, the United Kingdom, and the Philippines. We would like to thank our partners at the Office of the Secretary of State and its technical support division, the Government Information Center, for their assistance in bringing this project to fruition.

Coming soon to a location near you – self-payment kiosks

The AOC continued to expand the network of self-payment kiosks operated by the AOC’s Office of State Court Collections Enforcement (OSCCE) for those who wish to pay fees, fines

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or other similar obligations. To make it more convenient to make payments, in March 2016, kiosks were installed in all Delaware Division of Motor Vehicles offices across the state. The kiosks were also reconfigured to expand payment options to include the collection of child support payments on behalf of the Delaware Division of Child Support Services. Since the expansion in Fiscal Year 2016, the use of the kiosks has grown significantly from collecting about \$29,000 in FY 2012 to over \$161,000 in FY 2016. More than 200 of those transactions (since March) involved child support payments. The AOC is grateful for the cooperation of the Division of Motor Vehicles, the Department of Correction, the Division of Child Support Services, and the Courts in making this joint project happen. We look forward to further expansion of this important service in the future.

New ways of bridging communication gaps

Like many court interpreter programs around the country, the Delaware Court Interpreter Program has continued to look for innovative ways to meet the increasing demand for language services. Turning to our data experts for assistance, the Court Interpreter Program analyzed growth trends and innovative scheduling practices resulting in a pilot program which we hope will help us better focus our interpreter resources to handle high volume calendars across our courts.

The Court Interpreter Program also redoubled its efforts to recruit new court interpreters. The first wave of participants completed the Delaware Court Interpreter Shadowing Program introduced in 2015. This program provides individual language students, or interpreters seeking to become certified in Delaware, with a wonderful opportunity to shadow a registered court interpreter during public court proceedings and interact with the registered interpreter. Language students have found this program particularly gratifying as it has raised their awareness of interpreting opportunities in the Judicial Branch. The Court Interpreter Program hopes to build on this program to attract and retain qualified court interpreters.

Innovation, improvement, and education

New solutions and approaches

The AOC was actively involved in providing critical administrative support for many new and ongoing programs that seek to bring change to the delivery of civil and criminal justice and enhance our operational efficiencies. These include:

- The Access to Justice Commission (ATJ Commission) and its various committees focused on improving access to the civil courts by those who cannot afford counsel or appear *pro se*;



The redesigned Delaware Courts website

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- The ATJ Commission’s Committee on Fairness in the Criminal Justice System held a series of public hearings in fall 2015 and is working on improvements to make our criminal justice system more equitable and to improve public safety;
- A disparity study of Delaware Courts, “Evaluating the Role of Race in Criminal Justice Adjudications in Delaware,” authored by University of Pennsylvania’s Professor John M. MacDonald and Lecturer Dr. Ellen Donnelly. The study, which was released in September 2016, analyzed data of all cases involving adults arrested for criminal offenses between 2012 and 2014 and looked for trends and patterns that might explain racial disparities in the state’s prison population;
- An introductory session of implicit bias training organized by the AOC for over 500 employees of criminal justice agencies and the courts in October 2016. This session is a precursor to efforts to develop on-going implicit bias training programs for the courts and criminal justice agencies in Delaware;
- The “Joint Study of the Delaware Courts by the Delaware Chapter of the American College of Trial Lawyers and the Delaware State Bar Association” surveyed Delaware attorneys and made recommendations on ways to improve court operations. The report on the study was released in June 2016, and follow-up efforts are underway;
- The Criminal Justice Council of the Judiciary (CJCJ) completed its review of problem-solving courts in July 2016, recommending that statewide standards for operations of all problem-solving courts be established and that certain problem-solving courts be consolidated to better deploy scarce resources and ensure consistency. Planning is underway to implement a recently received federal grant to implement these recommendations. The grant will support a statewide problem-solving court coordinator to work with the National Center for State Courts and the AOC in developing core standards and bench books, and implementing other recommendations of the CJCJ report; and
- We assisted in the legislatively driven Criminal Justice Improvement Committee as it began its work on the criminal code improvement project to identify statutes that are disproportionate, redundant, outdated, duplicative or inefficient; crimes that should or should not constitute jail time; and study bail and alternatives to incarceration.



Chief Justice Leo Strine makes an introduction at the June 14, 2016 unveiling of the Joint Study of the Delaware Courts conducted by the Delaware State Bar Association and the Delaware Chapter of the American College of Trial Lawyers.

Future technology and a way of thinking about change

The AOC, through JIC, is a key player in the Judicial Branch’s 10-year process improvement initiative, in partnership with the University of Delaware’s Alfred Lerner College of Business and Economics, to implement a single, high-quality approach to process improvements throughout the Judiciary and the justice system. Administrative leaders, high level managers, and others in the courts and partner agencies, including the Office of the Attorney General, Office of Defense Services, Department of Correction, Division of Youth Rehabilitative Services, and the police have been trained in Lean Six Sigma process improvement techniques, through this program. In addition, JIC continues to work hard to strengthen the Judicial Branch’s technology infrastructure and to modernize outdated technology and systems. Other important technology projects include establishing a single state e-filing system for civil and criminal cases, updating the Automated Sentence Operating Program, and making improvements to online access of court materials.

Supporting innovation and new models

In FY 2016, the AOC continued to oversee and administer a number of federally supported Judicial Branch initia-

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tives. These included the Victim Awareness and Safety Enhancement (VASE) Project and a Bureau of Justice Assistance award to support the development of a database collection platform tailored to the needs of Delaware's problem-solving courts.

Work has also begun on the recently awarded grant from the State Justice Institute to secure consulting services from the National Center for State Courts to analyze criminal case scheduling through case flow management and scheduling efficiencies for litigants, attorneys, and court.

The court as a classroom for the leaders of tomorrow

In January 2017, the Judiciary instituted the Judicial Fellows program, in partnership with the University of Delaware's Institute of Public Administration. Through this program, graduate-level students from the University of Delaware will research and work on improvement business and policy issues in the courts.



Alexander Burns (left) and Josh Berkowitz (right) were named the first Judicial Fellows in the court's new Judicial Fellows program launched in January 2017.

Aspiring lawyers of tomorrow had the opportunity to exercise their skills at the 25th Annual Delaware High School Mock Trial Competition held at the New Castle County Courthouse (now the Leonard L. Williams Justice Center) in February 2016. Two hundred and fifty

students from twenty-five different public, private, parochial, and charter schools throughout Delaware participated in the two-day event that was facilitated by the AOC.

Forty-two high school students, many in foster care, had the opportunity to get a firsthand look at careers with the Judicial Branch through the AOC Summer Volunteer Youth Program. This program, which is in its 8th year, provides the youth with an opportunity to get real life job skills training, as well as pointers in interviewing and workplace etiquette.

Middle school-aged students were given an opportunity to learn about the judicial system through the Youth Forum program. Working with judges and attorneys in an impromptu mock trial held in a real courtroom setting, Youth Forum students prepared and presented a trial from opening to closing arguments and through to jury deliberations and a final verdict. This year, foreign exchange students from France participated in the Youth Forum Program.

New challenges

Ending on a personal note, I was gratified to have had the opportunity 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 during this past fiscal year. As Past President of COSCA, I continue to advocate at the national level, through the work of COSCA, the Conference of Chief Justices, and the National Center for State Courts, in support of initiatives that impact Delaware courts.

Finally, as we look forward to the challenges ahead, the AOC will continue to help the Courts in their efforts to better serve their constituents and the citizens of Delaware, and to support initiatives to improve our justice system as a whole. ♦