

MESSAGE FROM THE STATE COURT ADMINISTRATOR

The 2020 Annual Report of the Delaware Judiciary

The year 2020 has been unlike any other. And despite the unexpected challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020 also has been a year of tremendous achievement for the Delaware Courts. The declarations of national, state, and judicial emergencies, and the threat presented by the virus itself, fundamentally affected the normal operations of the Courts. Nonetheless, the Judicial Branch pulled together under the leadership of Chief Justice Seitz and the Presiding Judges of the trial courts to ensure that all of Delaware's Courts had the resources and support to continue providing essential services to the public and to continue making progress on important Judicial Branch initiatives. The key to the Courts' successful navigation of this storm has been the unwavering cooperation between the Courts, our employees, and our partners in the other branches of government.

You will see evidence of changes wrought by the pandemic reflected throughout this year's Annual Report, from our statistical information to the photographs of our judicial officers. What this Annual Report cannot adequately capture, however, is the tremendous effort of all the Judicial Branch employees who worked tirelessly behind the scenes to keep the wheels of justice turning. These unsung heroes include the court security and Capitol Police officers helping employees and the public navigate new safety protocols upon entering the court's facilities; the court clerks and case managers — so essential to the Courts' operations — who continued to report to work when so many other Delawareans were able to stay home per public health guidance; and the countless administrative support staff who resolved pandemic-related issues daily so that judicial officers could continue to focus on the Courts' core mission of resolving cases fairly and efficiently.

I particularly want to acknowledge and thank the AOC staff who, individually and collectively, leaned into the demands of this unprecedented situation. From procuring and distributing needed safety supplies and equipment, to obtaining COVID-related grant funding and CARES Act funding, to addressing novel legal issues, to keeping the public informed of the many changes in the Courts' operations, to ensuring employees were able to work and receive a paycheck, to paying the bills and meeting our obligations, the AOC staff—to a person—adapted quickly to working remotely and handled the increased workload without complaint. The continuity of our operations barely skipped a beat. They put in countless hours to ensure that all of the courts had the equipment, services and support they needed to keep operations running smoothly.

Although the AOC staff all deserve kudos, I particularly want to shine the spotlight on the staff of the Judicial Information Center and JIC Director, Ken Kelemen. They are the real heroes of the Courts' pandemic saga. Ken and the JIC staff were able to obtain needed equipment and licensing and to employ technology in innovative ways, which allowed many Court employees to transition quickly to working from home and allowed Court employees and judges within the Court facilities to hold essential in-person proceedings in a manner that minimized the risks of transmission of the virus to the participants. The Courts' successful operation in 2020 was owed in no small measure to the efforts and the support of JIC. I am grateful for Ken's steady leadership during this time and for his unparalleled work ethic.

If nothing else, 2020 has proven to us that the Delaware Courts can weather even the worst of storms. We are ready for whatever 2021 may bring.

Sincerely,



Gayle P. Lafferty

State Court Administrator

