



**HONORABLE  
PATRICIA W. GRIFFIN**

The Administrative Office of the Courts embarked on a number of exciting new initiatives during the past year. I would like to take this opportunity to highlight some of these as I believe they represent important steps forward in the continuing efforts of the AOC to assist the Judicial Branch in serving the citizens of Delaware. I would also like to recognize the ongoing efforts of all of those who work so diligently in the AOC to provide the behind the scenes support to the Judicial Branch. It is my hope that this report will give the reader a sense of the many ways in which the AOC serves the Judicial Branch and the citizens of Delaware.

## **Initiatives Assisting the Judicial Branch**

### ***Training for excellence***

The AOC has developed several new educational opportunities for court staff this year that will help them to better meet the demands of their jobs. A partnership created this year with the Michigan State University Judicial Administration Program will enable Delaware court staff to use Michigan State distance learning courses to obtain a certificate in court management. Red Cross certification classes for bailiffs and security staff have enabled them to respond more effectively to crisis health situations and new classes in Excel, Word, and Outlook are enabling court employees to improve their computer skills. The AOC has also developed an orientation manual for new judges specific to AOC/administrative operations.

### ***Ensuring quality court interpreter services***

Final Rules for the Court Interpreter Program designed to ensure the quality and integrity of court interpreters in the Delaware courts were adopted by the Delaware Supreme Court this year. Efforts to increase the pool of qualified interpreters have continued and, for the first time this year, the AOC sponsored a two day training session on simultaneous interpretation, an area of need identified from previous testing. In addition, a telephonic interpreting program was initiated through which Delaware certified interpreters can be reached by phone to provide services in certain court proceedings. This new program offers effective service, while reducing costs. Information on the use of interpreters was enhanced through a new intranet site for court use, the development and distribution of bench cards for judicial officers on best practices in using court interpreters, and similar information targeted to attorneys.

### ***Assisting self-represented litigants***

A new initiative, Delaware Courts: Fairness for All, was established by Supreme Court Administrative Directive 168 in June 2008. The initiative will build upon existing efforts by exploring additional ways in which the Judicial Branch can assist self-represented litigants in civil cases, as well as help to ensure fairness, and the perception of fairness, for civil litigants.

### ***Updating Judicial Personnel Rules***

This year, AOC staff prepared a draft of revised Judicial Branch Personnel Rules to better address current human resources needs. The proposed Rules will also more closely dovetail with the revised Merit Personnel Rules. It is anticipated that a final version of the Judicial Branch Personnel Rules will be adopted during the coming year.

### ***Planning for Continuity of Operations***

All of the courts and the AOC have completed assessments of business operational needs which will assist in determining priorities among court services during recovery operations. The assessments are part of a state-wide effort coordinated through the Department of Technology and Information.

### ***Reaching out to the public***

New initiatives undertaken this year have served to expand public information about the court system. The National High School Mock Trial Championships, which were sponsored by the Delaware Supreme Court and the Delaware Law Related Education Center, were held in the New Castle County Courthouse in May. The mock trials provided an educational experience for forty-two teams from throughout the country, as well as Guam, South Korea and the Northern Mariana Islands. Staff of the AOC, along with judges, attorneys, court staff, police agencies, and members of the public devoted countless hours to making this project an outstanding success.

In addition, public outreach efforts were expanded with the development of a new Judicial Branch public information brochure, and a new educational/ community outreach section of the Judicial Branch website to provide general information on the court system for the public, including material targeted to children and teachers. Other efforts included a teacher externship program held at the New Castle County Courthouse in June, assisting with the Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> Street productions in each county in December, and supporting the Racial and Ethnic Fairness Committee by planning staff training programs and a youth forum, both to be held in early FY 2009.

### ***Improving the handling of the mentally ill in the criminal justice system***

AOC staff, working with the mental health courts and others in the criminal justice and mental health communities, prepared an application which led to Delaware's selection to participate in the Chief Justice-Led Criminal Justice/Mental Health Task Force initiative of the Council of State Governments. As the result of its selection, the Supreme Court will receive funding and technical assistance to create and lead an intergovernmental task force to study ways to improve the handling of the mentally ill in the court system.

### ***Measuring progress***

AOC staff began work this year on assisting the courts with COTS performance measures. A study of the reliability and integrity of court files (a court performance measurement nationally established by the National Center for State Courts), was undertaken by AOC staff and the Court of Common Pleas to establish a baseline measurement prior to the implementation of COTS. Additional performance measures are being explored with several courts.

### ***Partnering with others to promote new ideas***

This year the AOC hosted the Mid-Atlantic Region Conference of State Court Administrators, which included representatives from Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Delaware at a meeting to discuss ways to foster procedural fairness, and the perception of procedural fairness, in the court system. In addition, AOC staff participated in planning the statewide Partners for Progress initiative which promotes personal and professional development for State employees.

### ***Increasing offender collections***

During the past year, the Office of State Court Collections Enforcement developed partnerships with other State entities and re-engineered collections practices and procedures to increase the amount of past due probation supervision fees collected from criminal justice offenders by 71% - from \$429,560 in FY 2007 to \$735,532 in FY 2008. Correspondingly, the number of offenders from whom supervision fees were collected increased from 7100 in FY 2007 to 8900 in FY 2008.

### ***Providing technology management and support***

The COTS case management initiative continued to be the major focus for the Judicial Information Center, including phase 3 implementation in Superior Court and the Court of Common Pleas (Sussex County), and implementation of the enhanced e-filing system in the Justice of the Peace Court and the Court of Common Pleas. Work also continued on supporting and enhancing current technology, as well as on new projects, such as designing and implementing a web site for the National High School Mock Trial, making revisions to the Judicial Branch Intranet site, providing updates relating to Family Court's Court Improvement Project, creating a new website for the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program, and adding the new security assessment to existing case management systems.

### ***Continuing Support of Judicial Branch Agencies***

During the past year, the AOC continued to provide administrative support to Judicial Branch agencies. AOC staff assisted agencies with a variety of human resources needs, such as helping with the hiring process through posting of positions, screening of applicants, participating in selection interviews, and providing guidance regarding specific disciplinary and leave issues. In addition, the AOC provided accounting and budgeting support, including preparing and processing documents, paying vendors, familiarizing agency staff with State budget requirements, and providing ad hoc budget and accounting reports, as needed, to assist agencies in the budgeting process. The following agencies are included in the Judicial Branch and receive administrative support through the AOC: Child Death, Near Death and Stillbirth Commission, Child Placement Review Board, Law Libraries, Nursing Home Residents Quality Assurance Commission, Office of the Child Advocate, Office of the Public Guardian, and Violent Crimes Compensation Review Board.

## **AUTHORIZATION AND FUNCTIONS**

The Administrative Office of the Courts was established in 1971 pursuant to 10 *Del.C.* § 128. The function of the Office is to assist the Chief Justice in carrying out the responsibilities as administrative head of the Delaware courts.

The AOC provides a wide variety of support services to the courts ranging from assisting in policy development to technology assistance to providing day-to-day support services. Among its ongoing services are:

- Preparation of the Judicial Branch Budget in conjunction with the individual courts and agencies and coordination with the Budget Office
- Support services for the New Castle County Courthouse including operating the information desk, the filing and payment center, and the mailroom
- Coordination services for the New Castle County Courthouse including staffing the Courthouse Operations Policy Committee and the Security Operations Committee, as well as coordinating with Facilities Management and Capitol Police
- Judicial Education and staff training
- Court Interpreter coordination to provide interpreters in various languages as well as for hearing impaired persons
- Self-represented litigant assistance including working with Family Court to operate the New Castle County Courthouse Self-Help Center, the *pro bono* legal assistance program, and related assistance
- Public Information including preparation of the Annual Report of the Judiciary, the Delaware Docket Newsletter, and press releases
- Research and Statistics including compilation and analysis of data for the Annual Report
- Staff support to various Judicial Branch Committees
- Legislative Coordination as part of the Judicial Branch's Legislative Team
- Personnel and accounting support for the Supreme Court, Arms of the Court, and Judicial Branch Agencies
- Coordination of technology-related projects including the COTS integrated case management program
- Operation of Helpdesk for technology problems experienced by court users
- Website assistance for developing and maintaining websites
- Business analysis, program development, and data integration/administration for technology-related initiatives
- Statewide collections of certain court-ordered financial assessments

**FY 2008 AOC Statistical Snapshot: How Many?**

*Dollars OSCCE collected in amounts due to court and agencies:*

\$3,797,404

*Visitors obtained information from the New Castle County Courthouse (NCCCH) Information/Front Desk:*

257,020 visitors

*Visitors obtained information from the NCCCH Self-Help Center and limited pro bono legal assistance program:*

15,495 persons received assistance in the Self-Help Center  
202 persons received assistance through the limited *pro bono* legal assistance program

*Number of court appearances for which interpreters were provided:*

10,053 court appearances

*Requests to address problems did the JIC Helpdesk receive and address:*

8,761 calls were received and addressed.



Sharelle Lemons, NCCCH mail room staff, delivering mail



NCCCH Filing and Payment Center

**AOC'S FACILITY SERVICES AT WORK**



Terry Morgan providing services at the NCCCH Self Help Center



Dave Brezenski at the NCCCH Information Desk providing directions