

# MESSAGE FROM THE STATE COURT ADMINISTRATOR

Building upon our efforts to support the Judicial Branch in its service to the citizens of Delaware, the Administrative Office of the Courts, including the Judicial Information Center and the Office of State Court Collections Enforcement, embarked on a series of exciting initiatives during the past year. I would like to highlight a few of our accomplishments.

## TRAINING FOR STAFF EXCELLENCE

Facing growing workloads and limited resources, court staff has worked hard to keep the courts moving forward. Training has become increasingly important to support the high quality of services provided by the courts. Recognizing staff's time limitations, the AOC is exploring computer-based training, along with other types of training to meet staff training needs. Recently, the AOC's training team piloted a web-based program using software training tools. Online orientation training is being considered for new court staff. Additionally, planning for a Lunchtime Learning Series including court-focused topics such as E-mail Etiquette, Legal Information vs. Legal Advice, and Time Management, is underway.

## RACIAL AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY

**Delaware Racial Justice Improvement Project (RJIP):** The RJIP, led by Supreme Court Justice Henry duPont Ridgely, continued its efforts to promote fair, efficient, and accountable systems through a grant sponsored by the Bureau of Justice Assistance and American Bar Association. Joined by task force members including the Court of Common Pleas Chief Judge Alex Smalls, and staffed by the AOC, the task force is in the final stages of implementing its planned reform ensuring that racial disparity does not play a role in violation of probation cases. Through the work of the task force, a new bias-free decision-making policy, including guidelines for the imposition of graduated sanctions, has been adopted by the Probation and Parole Division of the Department of Corrections ("DOC"); implicit bias training has been provided for probation and parole officers; and the DOC case management system is being modified to track the application of the graduated sanctions. Educational programs on implicit bias have been provided to judges as well.

**Language Access Program:** The Delaware Judiciary's commitment to provide language access services to litigants with Limited English Proficiency ("LEP") continues to be supported by the AOC's Court Interpreter Program. The program has experienced increasing demand for services, with the service hours increasing by 18% in FY 2012. In addition to coordinating the courts' interpreter services and implementing the second phase of the court forms' translation project, the AOC offered a series of educational seminars on best practices to the courts and the Delaware Bar. A recent highlight was the participation of a team from Delaware, including AOC staff and judges, in the National Summit on Language Access in the Courts in Houston, Texas, which was sponsored by the Conference of Chief Justices, Conference of State Court Administrators, National Center for State Courts, and the State Justice Institute. The conference offered the opportunity for state court leaders across the country to share successful language access strategies and evidence-based practices, and to devise approaches to improve access to justice for LEP litigants.



*Honorable Patricia W. Griffin*

## SELF-REPRESENTED LITIGANTS/PROCEDURAL FAIRNESS

To address access to justice issues, the AOC has intensified its efforts to find innovative ways to meet the needs of self-represented litigants, both through enhanced programming and strengthened partnerships. Those efforts include:

- AOC participation in the Delaware State Bar Association's ad hoc Committee on Access to Justice which was tasked with promoting access to justice for all litigants in Court of Common Pleas consumer debt collection matters. The Committee's recommendations on revisions to the Administrative Directive on Consumer Debt Collection Actions

# ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS

were approved and adopted by the Court of Common Pleas.

- Expansion of the AOC's Limited Legal Assistance Program for court litigants by adding new volunteer attorneys and issuing a monthly program newsletter, as well as plans to include volunteer paralegal assistance for litigants, extend the hours of the program, and enhance the program's offering for Spanish speaking litigants. The success of the program is evidenced by last year's survey results showing that 100% of participants were satisfied with the program overall.

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH

- Community outreach through the expansion of civics educational opportunities was the cornerstone of this year's programming. The AOC supported the *iCivics* project, jointly sponsored by the Delaware Supreme Court, the Women and the Law Section of the Delaware State Bar Association, and the Delaware Paralegal Association. Through the leadership of Supreme Court Justice Randy Holland and Superior Court Judge Jan Jurden, 250 attorneys, judges, law students, and paralegals visited approximately 127 public elementary and middle schools throughout the state in conjunction with Law Day 2012. *iCivics*, a web-based program allowing students to role play their rights and responsibilities as citizens of our constitutional democracy, was founded in 2009 by retired U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor to promote civic understanding and participation among young Americans.



Former Chief Justice Norman E. Veasey presenting on *iCivics* during Law Day 2012.



Howard High School of Technology Mock Trial Participants.

- The Delaware Mock Trial High School Competition, sponsored by the Delaware Supreme Court and the Delaware Law Related Education Center, and supported by the AOC, experienced another successful year. Months of polishing opening statements and closing arguments, sharpening rhetorical skills, and mastering the rules of evidence were put to the test in February 2012, when 24 high schools competed in the 21st Delaware Mock Trial competition.
- For the sixth consecutive year, the AOC facilitated a visit of Delaware teachers enrolled in the University of Delaware's Democracy Project Institute for Teachers to the Delaware Supreme Court and the New Castle County Courthouse.
- Another FY 2012 highlight was the AOC's Summer Youth Program. Through the efforts of Robin Jenkins, AOC's Manager of Support Services, the program has grown dramatically – with 46 children, mostly from the foster care system, participating last summer statewide. Program participants receive valuable work experience and learn new skills that they can apply to school and everyday life.
- Other efforts included hosting tours of the New Castle County Courthouse for various school and community groups, coordinating Youth Forums in which middle school students visit the courthouse, participate in a mock trial, learn about the court system, and supporting the *Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> Street* holiday production at the courthouses statewide for school children.

**Training:** The AOC supported several statewide problem-solving courts' training initiatives on best practices, including:

- As one of four states selected to participate in a Bureau of Justice Assistance grant, the AOC provided instruction to judicial officers and staff on a pilot curriculum targeted at best practices for mental health courts.
- The AOC helped coordinate the Superior Court's Veterans' Court training seminar for potential volunteer mentors, which trained veteran mentors to assist justice-involved veterans.
- The AOC conducted presentations by the Director of the Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health, the Assistant Director for the Community Mental Health and Addiction Services Division, among others, on topics related to mental illness, to the Judicial Conference, Superior Court judges, and Court of Common Pleas Drug Diversion program staff.

**Community Court:** The AOC is working with the Justice of the Peace Court to establish a community court in the City of Wilmington. Community courts focus on addressing the public safety needs of a specific locality.

**Grants:** Efforts by the AOC to coordinate grant request initiatives across the courts proved successful in attracting federal dollars to support Judicial Branch programs targeted at reducing recidivism and increasing positive outcomes. Examples include:

- **Office of Violence Against Women ("OVW"):** The OVW recently awarded the AOC a grant aimed at assisting justice-involved victims of sexual assault and domestic violence in both the Superior Court Mental Health Court and the Court of Common Pleas Trauma-Informed Program.
- **National Highway Traffic Safety Administration ("NHTSA"):** The AOC received a grant from NHTSA to provide a liaison for the Delaware Judiciary ("JOL") in the areas of impaired-driving, DUI Court, and traffic safety. Besides assisting the Court of Common Pleas with developing a DUI court, consistent with a recent legislative mandate, the JOL will develop a community outreach program to provide public and judicial education related to impaired driving and traffic safety.

## MEASURING PERFORMANCE

Expanding demand in the face of limited resources requires that courts assess performance to maximize system efficiencies. Through a partnership between the AOC and the University of Delaware, AOC and court staff participated in a series of process improvement

workshops this summer with the goal of learning new approaches to streamline and improve systems. Additionally, ongoing process improvement serves as an integral part of the Delaware Courts Automation Project, the courts' case management modernization project.

## Security Initiatives

- **Cyber Security:** The Judicial Information Center, in conjunction with the Department of Technology and Information, launched an initiative in 2012 to educate state computer users about cyber crime and proper security measures.
- **Continuity of Operations Planning:** A New Castle County Court House ("NCCCH") space study was completed this year to assist the courts in addressing growing space inadequacies within the NCCCH.
- **Court Security/Facility:** On behalf of the NCCCH Courts' Operations Policy Committee, the AOC worked with Facilities Management and the United States Marshal to update the security study completed by the U.S. Marshal in 2005.

## COURT COLLECTIONS

The AOC's Office of State Court Collections Enforcement ("OSCCE") focused on efforts to improve its operational efficiency through the installation of five payment kiosks at Probation and Parole offices for court fines and Department of Correction supervision fees, and specialized collection efforts for the courts. OSCCE collected \$3.6 million for the courts and agencies in FY 2012, including tax intercepts totaling \$229,000.

## INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

The Judicial Information Center ("JIC") in the AOC experienced tremendous change and growth in its management and direction in 2012. During the past year, JIC focused on: staffing critical managerial positions including training, business solutions, helpdesk, and enterprise architect; enhancing staff skills; implementing critical systems stabilization and infrastructure improvements (hardware and software); improving business process analysis and helpdesk support and performance; and providing technical leadership to, and continued support of, the Delaware Courts Automation Project.