



Honorable Patricia W. Griffin

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS

This year, as we celebrate several court anniversaries, we also mark the 10th anniversary of the Delaware Court Interpreter Program which is administered by the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) under the direction of the Court Interpreters Advisory Board. The program, which was established in response to recommendations of the Supreme Court Task Force on Racial and Ethnic Fairness, is critical in ensuring equal access to justice for non-English speaking litigants. In the last several years, the courts have experienced a dramatic rise in the number of non-English speaking litigants, making the efforts of the Program to ensure the availability of qualified court interpreters increasingly important. Recent and upcoming initiatives, such as a rate increase for court interpreters (implemented in FY 2007), skills building training programs, and a pilot program providing for telephonic interpretation by Delaware certified interpreters in certain court proceedings, support and strengthen Delaware's court interpreter program. With the addition of a new interpreter coordinator position for the program in the upcoming year, it is anticipated that additional enhancements to the program will be im-

plemented in the near future.

During the past year, the Administrative Office of the Courts has undertaken a number of new initiatives. For example, under the leadership of the Courthouse Operations Policy Committee, the AOC has focused efforts on improving safety and security in the New Castle County Courthouse (NCCCH), working with the Fire Marshal to complete a fire safety and emergency evacuation plan for the building and with Capitol Police to revise procedures both for screening of packages in the mail room and for screening of persons entering the courthouse.

The AOC has also worked with the Budget Office to solve ongoing recruitment and retention problems in the indigent defense services program. As a result of these efforts, substantial progress has been made in resolving shortages of conflict counsel and work is ongoing to resolve similar issues for other indigent contract counsel.

In the area of human resources, a streamlined procedure for handling career ladder requests has been developed and implemented, greatly reducing the time and effort

involved for the courts. *Pro se* services initiatives have included assistance to the Justice of the Peace Court and the Court of Chancery in revising forms and in supporting informational forums for *pro se* litigants. AOC-sponsored educational programs for judges and staff were offered on a statewide and county-by-county basis throughout the year, covering topics such as security, fire safety, mail handling, and pandemic concerns, among others.

Another new initiative during the past year has been the establishment of a court system-wide newsletter, the Delaware Docket, which is published on a semi-annual basis. The newsletter is designed to highlight Judicial Branch achievements and to provide information on the court system to members of the other branches of government and the public.

The Judicial Information Center moved to new office space in the Corporate Commons. The new space will provide more room for staff and better training facilities for court users. The COTS case management system has continued to be a major focus for the Judicial Information Center with extensive staff support being provided to this critical court system-wide initiative. The hard work of all of the COTS participants – both from the Administrative Office of the Courts and from the individual courts – culminated in the first phase of implementation in the Justice of the Peace Court in November of 2006.

During the past year, the JIC has also worked with the Government Information Center and the courts on several e-government projects including delayed web casting of Supreme Court oral arguments, on-line access to older Supreme

Court orders and opinions, online access to trade name information (Superior Court) and setting up interactive accounting forms for guardianships (Court of Chancery).

Finally, the Office of State Court Collections has streamlined its operations this year by creating a centralized office in Kent County for mail payment, processing, calls, archives, and research. This reorganization will assist the Office in improving services by providing for more equalized distribution of workload among staff, improved oversight, and greater fiscal security.

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 services are:

- Judicial education and staff training – works with individual courts and the Judicial Conference as a whole to sponsor educational programs for all Delaware judges, commissioners and court staff.
- Budget and accounting assistance – coordinates the development of the Judicial Branch budget, monitors spending, and works with the Budget Office to resolve problems. The AOC also provides accounting services to the Supreme Court and judicial branch agencies.

- Support services for the New Castle County Courthouse - operates the information desk, the filing and payments center and the mailroom for the Courthouse. AOC support staff at the NCCCH entrance provided information to 213,866 persons in FY 2006.
- Coordination services relating to the Courthouse — providing staffing for the Courthouse Operations Policy Committee, the Security Operations Committee, and the New Castle County Courthouse Art Committee. Another related function is working with Facilities Management to resolve ongoing building issues.
- Management of the New Castle County Courthouse Pro Se Center – operates the self-help center located in the New Castle County Courthouse which assists unrepresented litigants. This includes recruiting and training attorney and law student volunteers who assist in the Center. NCCCH Self Help Center staff provided assistance to 19,947 persons in FY 2006, representing a 17% increase in services provided from the previous year.
- Administration of the statewide court interpreter program — provides interpreters in numerous languages, as well as for hearing impaired persons.
- Court security and safety coordination – works under the direction of the Courthouse Operations Policy Committee to ensure the safety and security of the New Castle County Courthouse.
- Human resources assistance – assists with a variety of human resources issues including coordinating career ladder applications, position reclassifications and establishments, as well as assisting with related policy issues.
- Research and analysis – coordinates the production of the annual report of the judi-

cial branch and maintains statistics relating to the courts and their caseloads.

- Policy coordination/development and staffing of committees concerning issues affecting the courts.
- Legislative coordination – serves on the judicial branch’s legislative team.
- Technology coordination – assists in the coordination of technology-related projects, including the COTS integrated case management program that is currently under development.
- Technology problem solving – administers the Helpdesk function for technology problems experienced by court users.
- Website assistance – supports development and maintenance of websites for courts and judicial branch agencies.
- Business analysis, program development, and data integration/administration for technology-related initiatives.
- Statewide collections enforcement – using a variety of State and private sector sanctions, collects court-ordered financial assessments including restitution, statutory surcharges, fines, and court costs.

While the primary focus of the AOC is on service to the courts, it also provides limited fiscal and administrative services to several agencies, many of which receive policy direction and oversight from boards and governing bodies outside the judicial branch. These agencies are: the Office of the Public Guardian; the Violent Crimes Compensation Board; Child Placement Review Board; Educational Surrogate Parent Program; Office of the Child Advocate; Child Death, Near Death and Stillbirth Commission; the Delaware Nursing Home Residents Quality Assurance Commission, and the Law Libraries.