

MESSAGE FROM THE STATE COURT ADMINISTRATOR

FY 2014 was an eventful year for the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC). Chief Justice Leo E. Strine, Jr. joined the Court in early 2014 followed by the appointments of Justices Karen B. Valihura and James T. Vaughn, Jr., who took the place of two long-serving Delaware Supreme Court Justices, Jack Jacobs and Carolyn Berger. The AOC is (and I am personally) grateful for the wonderful guidance and dedication of those who have left us, and we are excited for the new opportunities that lie ahead.

Chief Justice Strine brought a new approach and “call to action” for the Judicial Branch to meet the challenges for the future. Initiatives begun in the second half of 2014 include: the establishment of the Supreme Court’s Access to Justice Commission; a survey of attorneys and others about the court system conducted by the Delaware Chapter of the American College of Trial Lawyers, in conjunction with the Delaware State Bar Association; the formation of the Criminal Justice Council for the Judiciary, created by Administrative Directive 186 signed by Chief Justice Strine on October 15, 2014, to review the efficiencies of Delaware’s problem-solving courts, rethink ways to deploy scarce treatment resources to reduce recidivism, and recommend ways to enhance the effectiveness of the criminal justice system; and the Court Facilities Improvement Working Group, which was set up to consider solutions for the long-standing serious inadequacies with Family Court downstate facilities. We are privileged to have the AOC serve a key role in working with, and staffing, all of these initiatives.

A new initiative aimed at increasing the court’s efficiency and doing more with limited resources, was instituted in October 2014 when the Delaware Judiciary entered into a long-term partnership with the University of Delaware’s Alfred Lerner College of Business and Economics, along with the Division of Professional and Continuing Studies, to bring proven private sector methods and management techniques to the court system. Specifically, the collabora-

tion will institute the Lean Six Sigma management program (a well-validated tool in process improvement) to maximize the Judiciary’s and the justice system’s efficiency, and manage growing caseloads with limited staff resources. Additionally, we will leverage our technology to aggregate and analyze information in order to improve the judicial process and better serve litigants. Over the next several years, training will be provided to Judicial Branch employees at all levels to develop skills

in process improvement techniques. This partnership between the courts and the University of Delaware will focus on installing a common management culture that encourages all managers and employees to look for ways to serve those who use the judicial system – litigants, the Bar and the public – more effectively, promptly and conveniently.

The fine-tuning of court operations through process improvement will support our efforts to implement one high quality e-filing system for all court (civil and criminal) processes. AOC, through its technical division, the Judicial Information Center, is charged with leading this effort. In addition to the e-filing initiative, other technology enhancements, including efforts to strengthen our technological infrastructure by replacing outdated hardware and software, are in process and will take precedence for the next few years. Those projects will focus on improving court opera-



Honorable Patricia W. Griffin



Participants from the Judiciary sponsored Process Improvement Champion Training. Faculty from the University of Delaware led a class that included Court Administrators from Justice of the Peace Court, Court of Common Pleas, Family Court and Superior Court, as well as representatives from the Attorney General’s office, office of the Public Guardian, Department of Correction, Division of Youth Rehabilitative Services and from the Governor’s office.

Photo provided by the University of Delaware

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tions' efficiency and ease of practice for litigants, minimizing archiving and staff costs, and maximizing the ability of the Judiciary and policymakers to analyze information.

In addition to focusing on new downstate Family Court facilities, the vision for long-term facilities established by Chief Justice Strine includes addressing critical space needs faced by the four courts in the New Castle County Courthouse (NCCCH), and locating all of the Wilmington Supreme Court Chambers together with the AOC in close proximity with the trial courts. To that end, in August 2014 the Administrative Office of the Courts relocated its offices from the 11th Floor of the NCCCH to join the Chief Justice's Chambers at the Renaissance Centre across the street from the NCCCH. This move opened up space in the NCCCH, which will enable the relocation of the Register in Chancery, and the expansion of the Court of Common Pleas (CCP)'s Clerk's Office, in the NCCCH. Those renovations will address serious space deficiencies in the NCCCH, including in CCP's Clerk's Office, and the need for conference rooms to accommodate mediations in the Court of Chancery.

In a more high-profile renovation serving as a part of the Judicial Branch's security initiative from the previous year, security upgrades and major changes to the lobby of the New Castle County Courthouse were completed in the summer of 2014. These upgrades and renovations stemmed from long-recognized critical security needs of the Judiciary, and the new awareness of those needs which was raised with the tragic NCCCH shooting in February 2013. These changes to the lobby were the final part of the broader security action plan that also boosted the number of Capitol Police assigned to the Judicial Branch facilities, increased the number of cameras and intrusion devices at courthouses across the state, installed additional ballistic and Kevlar materials at various facilities, and created courthouse security committees and a statewide emergency notification system, as well as enhanced training for court security officers.

Delaware's First Lady Carla Markell returned to present the keynote address for the second annual Sisters in Success Conference on May 12, 2014 at Baylor Women's Correctional Institution. First Lady Markell, a long time advocate of volunteerism, added her voice to the team of professional women from the local community who came together to offer a series of workshops designed to provide women who have been incarcerated with the skills necessary to make a successful transition back into the community. The theme for the 2014 conference, which was sponsored by a number of agencies including the Administrative Office of the Courts, was "Find Your Voice" and focused on a range of topics related to expressing yourself for success.

The Administrative Office of the Courts also provided support, at the request of United States Senator Tom Carper, for arranging pro-bono legal assistance for the unprecedented wave of unaccompanied minors that had crossed into the United States from Mexico and ended up in the custody of the U.S. government. More than 160 children, many of whom were fleeing crime and violence in Mexico and Central America and crossed the border alone, ended up being placed in Delaware, often with family members residing in Delaware, only to face pending deportation proceedings. The AOC helped arrange a training session in November 2014 for close to 150 attorneys who were interested in providing free legal help to these unaccompanied immigrant children to see if they were entitled to relief under U.S. immigration laws.

In addition to supporting these new initiatives, the AOC continued its work on many different fronts this past year. The AOC's on-going responsibilities include: court collections (the Office of State Court Collections Enforcement is in the process of implementing court judgment payment kiosks at Division of Motor Vehicles locations); staff training; NCCCH court filing and payment services; court security; NCCCH facility operations; court language access services statewide; grant implementation (including the Office on Violence Against Women grant to support the Victim Awareness and Safety Enhancement Project in the New Castle County Superior Court Mental Health Court and the Court of Common Pleas Trauma Informed Probation Court); community outreach programs, such as the Delaware High School Mock Trial Competition and the Miracle on 34th Street programs; media relations for the Judicial Branch; the Summer Volunteer Youth Program; oversight of the Judiciary's budget and financial initiatives, and human resources policies; acting as liaison to the legislature and the executive branch; preparation of the Judiciary's annual report and semi-annual Dockets; and staff support for different committees and initiatives, including the Mental Health and Criminal Justice Task Force.

And finally, on a personal note, I had the honor this year to join the Board of Directors of the National Center for State Courts, a non-profit organization that aims to improve the administration of justice through leadership and service to the nation's state courts. I will serve a four-year term on the board. In addition, I was humbled to be elected Vice President of the Conference of State Court Administrators, an organization that was established in 1955 to provide a national forum to assist state court administrators across the country in developing a more just, effective and efficient system of justice. I am the first state court administrator from Delaware to serve in either position and am in line to assume the position of President of COSCA in August 2016.