

Office of the Clerk of Courts

The Office of the Clerk of Courts is responsible for the preservation and maintenance of all criminal and juvenile records in Philadelphia. In addition to maintaining the criminal and juvenile records, the Clerk of Courts is responsible for staffing all criminal and delinquency courtrooms on a daily basis for the purpose of updating the criminal and juvenile dockets by recording the disposition of all court proceedings. This process includes entering notations on the docket to reflect continuances, scheduling conferences, bail modifications, bench warrants, motions made orally or orders issued orally in the courtroom, and a narrative of the disposition. The Clerk of Courts is responsible for generating the appropriate paperwork consistent with the disposition and for service/distribution of documents upon all required justice partners and participants.

The Clerk of Courts, formerly the Office of the Clerk of Quarter Sessions, operates under the jurisdiction of the President Judge of the Court of Common Pleas and the Board of Judges of the First Judicial District of Pennsylvania. Since assuming the functions of this office in April 2010, several significant changes were implemented, which are highlighted below:

Management and Staffing Restructuring

In keeping with our main purpose to protect and preserve the integrity of the docket and the official court record, as well as provide adequate coverage at all criminal and juvenile proceedings, it was necessary to establish a multi-layered supervision structure.

In anticipation of the Zone Court initiative of the First Judicial District, the Clerk of Courts instituted a clerk team system, each supervised by a Court Services Manager. Each team is responsible for the coverage of a block of courtrooms in accordance with the zones. This new management structure has allowed for the staffing of every courtroom on a daily basis. High-volume courtrooms are now staffed with two court clerks, while Specialty Courts such as DUI, Drug Treatment, and Mental Health Court are staffed with specially trained clerks for complex and advanced case processing procedures. Court clerks are cross-trained and rotated amongst the various programs and divisions of the Court in order to provide more flexibility in scheduling and coverage.

A major benefit of this new work structure is the ability of the managers to schedule assignments, train new clerks, quality control the work of their staff, quickly troubleshoot problems that may arise throughout the day, and provide assistance and coverage where necessary.

Quality Control

Quality control has been greatly enhanced to improve data integrity by promoting accountability, training initiatives, and increased job professionalism. Quality Control

staff work in conjunction with the Court Services Managers to thoroughly monitor recording and disposition of each court proceeding, including the disposition of all charges, imposition of financial information, and approvals by the appropriate judicial authority. The Criminal Document Management System is used as a tool to further this goal.

Financial Management

The Clerk of Courts immediately focused its attention on distributing accumulated funds to proper parties, including the City, victims of crime, and the Commonwealth. Since assuming the management and oversight of the Clerk of Courts, the First Judicial District has distributed \$16.5 million to the City in the last fiscal year ending July 31, 2011, an increase of 150% over the amount collected by the Clerk of Quarter Sessions in its last year of operation. Automatic bail refund processes have been instituted whereby refunds are processed 35 days after full and final disposition of a case and distributed forthwith to the appropriate recipient. An aggressive “Day Backward” approach was employed to process and distribute four (4) years of undisbursed bail deposits. In October 2011, the Clerk of Courts began another initiative of reviewing and disbursing bail deposits made prior to the implementation of CPCMS from its legacy system.

The Clerk of Courts has taken the necessary steps to improve security and accountability with the purchase and installation of a virtual safe and a remote check reader. This equipment allows for the immediate accounting and daily deposit of all bail deposits and payments of fines, costs, and restitution. The virtual safe accepts the deposit of cash funds received throughout the day into a secure vault that counts the deposit and immediately transmits the information to the bank making the funds immediately available in the Clerks’ accounts. This operation features a balance and audit function, providing an independent audit and quality control check by the bank apart from day-to-day processing operations.

Criminal Document Management System (CDMS)

In September 2011, the First Judicial District launched its Criminal Document Management System (CDMS). The Office of the Clerk of Courts has played a central role in its development, implementation, and expansion. The CDMS provides access to electronic documents and the paperless record. The Clerks office currently manages the scanning of records for hearings in the first phase of paperless courtrooms. Subsequent to the hearing, all final disposition documents are being imaged. The Clerk of Courts has made a significant investment of staff, time, equipment, and other resources deemed necessary to incorporate the scanning duties into daily business practices. This office provides both clerical and judicial training of the system, as well as continuous management of the accounts for all users. A user manual has been drafted which focuses on the procedures for scanning to provide consistency, quality, and

security of the data. The Administrative staff remains available to provide ongoing support in the courtroom.

On average, 2075 documents are scanned daily to the CDMS. Since the system was implemented in September 2011, more than 175,000 documents have been scanned collectively by the Common Pleas and Municipal Court Criminal Divisions and the Clerk of Courts.

Criminal Electronic Filing (CEFS)

In 2011 the design and development of a web-based system for the submission of filings electronically was initiated at the direction of the Court Administrator for the First Judicial District. This project aims to achieve the same user-friendly approach and internal efficiencies realized with the implementation of the Common Pleas Civil Electronic Filing System. Under the guidance of the Criminal E-Filing Committee a working group was established and is comprised of personnel from Municipal Court, Common Pleas Court, and the Clerk of Courts. The group has begun the arduous task of detailing the business practices and cataloging all filings to create detailed specifications for the electronic processing of each individual filing. The computer programmers from the Department of Innovation and Technovation of the First Judicial District are working in conjunction with this group to create the system based on these specifications.

Enhanced Education and Training Programs

The Clerk of Courts has established a centralized training facility to be utilized by the entire department and FJD personnel. This facility is located in the administrative offices of the Clerk of Courts and has hosted numerous planning and training sessions. This facility was established to ensure that all Clerk of Courts personnel are properly trained and updated with new processes and procedures in order to better perform the functions associated with their positions. These planning and training sessions are supported by the ability to project information from the computer for the audience.

Revised Communication Procedures

The Clerk of Courts instituted what was initially titled "Print-to-Prison," but has since evolved into an "Email-Notification-to-Prison" process. This process allows the required documents, such as the Sentencing Order and Commitment and Discharge orders to be electronically transmitted to the county prisons at the time of docketing. This allows for timely and efficient processing of the movement of individuals in and out of county custody.

The Clerk of Courts now has direct access to the prison computer system known as Lock and Track. This access has been highly instrumental in eliminating the many

delays formerly experienced in processing matters related to drivers' privileges with the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation.

Record Retention Project

Upon assuming oversight and management of the Clerk of Courts functions, it was immediately brought to the First Judicial District's attention that more than 23,000 boxes of files are currently housed at the City of Philadelphia Record Storage Center located at 30th and Market Streets. Additionally, it was realized that there had been no practice in place for the purging of criminal records for many years. As a result, in February 2011, the Clerk of Courts launched a monumental project to actively identify records for destruction that clearly fell within the parameters and guidelines set forth in the record retention schedule. To assist the Clerks office with this project, the Court contracted with two former Criminal Trial Division employees who possess many years of experience and unparalleled knowledge of criminal records.

Since this undertaking began more than one hundred (100) boxes of internal and financial records have been destroyed and more than 45,000 records from 1993 through 1997 have been purged from the Clerk of Courts Record Room. This project is ongoing and will expand to the City's Record Storage Center to conduct an assessment of the contents of 23,000 boxes currently stored at this facility and target those records ripe for destruction.

Paperless Courtroom

The Clerk of Courts assisted in the creation of the Criminal Court's first "paperless" courtroom known as the Accelerated Misdemeanor Program (AMP). AMP was the predecessor to criminal document management. This paperless process effected cost savings by eliminating paper, toner, and other costs associated with maintaining the additional documents normally stored in a case file. AMP is an example of how efficient this court will be when the information in our system is more thoroughly and accurately recorded and maintained.

The development, on-going monitoring, updates, and working relationships amongst all AMP stakeholders, including the District Attorney, Public Defender, Municipal Court Administration, and the Clerk of Courts has exhibited the goal of the Court to promote efficiency of operations and open communication and collaboration amongst the various justice partners.

The implementation of the Criminal Document Management System has fostered the expansion of additional paperless courtrooms, which has proven to be highly successful and embraced by the judiciary and courtroom staff.

Evidence Room

The Clerk of Courts is responsible for the protection and maintenance of the evidence room located in City Hall. Due to the nature of the contents contained in this space it was necessary to install security cameras and implement strict safety procedures. The Clerk of Courts has organized the contents of this room in a manner which promotes the expedited fulfillment of requests for the production of evidence.

Information Technology

In order to provide appropriate resources and promote shared information amongst the various departments of the Clerk of Courts, an Intranet page was added to the Court's Intranet site. This site contains links to various agencies in Pennsylvania such as the Federal Bureau of Prisons Directory, which is widely used by the court clerks. The site also contains announcements, a calendar of events within the department, and a document center which contains numerous documents necessary for the court clerks and administrative staff to more efficiently perform their assigned duties. Many members of the Clerks staff have highly praised this effort as they have come to rely on the information contained on this site.

Internal documents such as trial sheets are being scanned in order to allow for more accessibility and space. In addition, requests for copies of court orders and other documents contained in the court file are scanned and e-mailed to the requesting agency. This has made a huge difference in the way we process such requests in that fewer people are waiting at the information counter for files to be pulled and copied. We have worked with these agencies to implement a procedure whereby they notify us via e-mail in advance of the files and/or documents needed for their operation. The files are then able to be retrieved, scanned, and e-mailed accordingly.

Juvenile Division

The Clerk of Courts is responsible for maintaining the official court file and docket for all delinquency matters, as well as staffing all courtrooms on a daily basis for the purpose of recording the outcome of all proceedings. Similar to the adult criminal cases, this process includes real-time docketing of the disposition of each court event and completion of an "outcome" order which is served forthwith at the time of the hearing upon all parties and agencies.

Since undertaking the functions of the Clerk of Courts, numerous changes have been made to the juvenile section of this office, some of which are highlighted below:

Migration to CPCMS:

Delinquency matters in Philadelphia were made part of the Pennsylvania Common Pleas Case Management System (CPCMS) in June 2010. All court clerks assigned to the Juvenile Division received extensive training in this program and are fully functioning

in CPCMS. This is a monumental task given the fact that the juvenile court record was hand-written and manually processed until the introduction of CPCMS. Almost immediately after CPCMS rolled out in Juvenile, this office assisted in the re-write and implementation of the new juvenile outcome order. The outcome order has been designed to be all-inclusive in that all conditions entered by the Court will appear on one document and served at the time of the hearing on all necessary parties, departments, and agencies without the need to create separate hand-written documents for specific conditions and/or orders. Additionally, after selecting the appropriate conditions and information for the outcome, and upon saving the document in CPCMS, all entries are automatically written to the docket, which greatly narrows the margin for error and increases efficiency and timeliness of docketing dispositions of court proceedings.

Renovation of Facilities and Filing System:

The Clerks main office in the Juvenile Division was completely remodeled and upgraded to include new, more efficient work stations, computer equipment, and filing cabinets. The filing system was revamped and the physical case file folders replaced by bar coded and color coded files by year. This has proven to be effective in providing accountability and significantly diminished the number of occurrences of “missing” files and/or the need to create “dummy” files.

In order to improve accessibility of archived juvenile petitions, bench warrants, and disposed petitions, the file room containing these documents and files was reorganized and clearly labeled; disposed files for 2006 were relocated to the basement so as to allow for the storage of 2007 and forward disposed files. The file room in the basement of 1801 Vine was also cleaned and reorganized, again, to provide efficiency in locating files upon demand.

Juvenile Expungement Petition Procedures:

The Petition for Expungement process was reorganized to align it with legal requirements and Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts’ standards for removal from the electronic file contained in CPCMS and destruction of the physical file.

Goals and Challenges

- Expansion of the Criminal Document Management System to include Juvenile Records
- Implementation of the Criminal Electronic Filing System for the Criminal Division
- Continue to provide adequate coverage for every court proceeding
- Continue to improve and upgrade the services currently provided by the Clerk of Courts
- Incorporate specific services currently provided by the Clerk of Courts into the First Judicial District’s planned E-Commerce system
- Expansion of the “Email to Prison” process of prison paperwork

- Continue to exercise stringent quality control of the outcome of all court proceedings
- Continue to process bail refunds in a timely fashion