

AOPC CONNECTED



Issue 5, 2023

In this issue

Read about the new court administrator, the conversion of Allegheny County's Family Law Center into a trauma-informed courthouse, the recent courthouse restoration efforts in Lehigh County, the continued expansion of Pennsylvania's veterans courts and more.

Meet the New Court Administrator

Andrea Tuominen recently assumed the role of Court Administrator of Pennsylvania following the retirement of Geoff Moulton at the end of September.

A familiar face to many at the AOPC, Tuominen joined the court system in 1992 and since that time has served as special assistant to the court administrator, assistant court administrator and most recently deputy court administrator.

AOPCconnected sat down with Andrea to get to know a little bit more about her.

Q: Where did you grow up / have you ever lived outside of PA?

A: I have lived my entire life in Pennsylvania, except during my college years. I was born in Elkins Park, and grew up in Trevese, Camp Hill and New Castle, Pa. During my adult life, I've lived in New Cumberland, Philadelphia and West Chester.

Q: What are some things you like to do outside of work?

A: Cooking (I love trying new recipes), going to my gym, gardening (although it's an often quite humbling experience for me) and just being with my family.

Q: What has been the most challenging and/or rewarding thing you've ever done?

A: Raising two daughters with my husband, Olli, while building a career. Working full-time, long commutes and taking care of school-age children is definitely not for the faint of heart, but it certainly builds character and resilience. The reward is the lovely, talented adults our girls have become, and we look forward to seeing what paths they take in life.

Q: What are you most looking forward to in your new role?

A: Working with the many talented and dedicated individuals in the judicial branch and leading the terrific AOPC team. I want to ensure that coming to work for the AOPC is a place where people find satisfaction in their work and feel valued; and ultimately that as an organization we are being productive, thoughtful and responsive in all that we do.

Q: What is your leadership philosophy?

A: Integrity, collaboration and engagement are my guideposts. I view challenges as opportunities to



Andrea Tuominen

expand my skill set and that of my team, and I trust that our employees know how to do their jobs, can make sound decisions and will work with me to build a better future for the judiciary.

Q: What's the best advice you've received?

A: "Don't let the turkeys get you down" – Nancy Sobolevitch, Pennsylvania's 4th court administrator.

Q: What are your favorite things to do with your family?

A: I love playing games, going to the theater and traveling with my family.

Q: Who had the biggest influence on your life?

A: My mother, Nancy, modeled for me what it meant to be successful as a working mother, and as importantly, the values of integrity, courage and hard work. My dad, Howard, who is a constant source of support, taught me that "proper planning prevents poor performance." And finally, the nuns of Good Shepherd, St. Vitus and Villa Maria who instilled in me as a child a devotion to truth, compassion for our fellow human beings, and selflessness.

Rapid fire section:

- Favorite TV show – Schitt's Creek
- Favorite book or author – Too many to name, says the English major
- First car – 1987 VW Jetta
- First job – Cleaning houses "down the shore"
- Favorite season – Spring
- Favorite place you've traveled to – I love our national parks, especially the majestic Grand Tetons.



The governor with the 2023 Distinguished Daughters of Pennsylvania (l to r) Chief Justice Debra Todd, Dr. Kim Phipps, Marsha Perelman, Virginia McGregor, Governor Shapiro, Nancy Kukovic, Nina Jablonski, Julia Haller, Debra Caplan, Kendra Aucker

Chief Justice Todd Recognized as a Distinguished Daughter of Pennsylvania

In a ceremony on Oct. 11, Governor Josh Shapiro and First Lady Lori Shapiro recognized Chief Justice **Debra Todd** as one of this year's Distinguished Daughters of Pennsylvania, highlighting her extraordinary achievements and contributions to the commonwealth.

"For 75 years, the Distinguished Daughters have recognized the achievements of Pennsylvania women — leaders who make a

difference in our communities every day," said Governor Shapiro. "This new class of inductees builds upon that long tradition, and Lori and I are pleased to welcome an incredible group of women — leaders in public service, health care, business, and education — into the ranks of Pennsylvania's Distinguished Daughters. Your hard work showcases what we can accomplish for the good people of Pennsylvania when we all come together."

Distinguished Daughters of Pennsylvania was first instituted under Governor James H. Duff in 1949 to honor women who have shown distinguished service through a professional career and/or volunteer service. The women are nominated to receive the honor by non-profit organizations within Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania Courts Bring ‘Autism and the Courts’ Initiative to Attorneys



In Pennsylvania alone, the number of autistic individuals receiving services from the state has more than doubled in recent years, and research shows that those on the autism spectrum are almost seven times more likely to come into contact with the justice system.

A recent free Continuing Legal Education (CLE) event brought nearly 600 attorneys from across the state together to deepen their understanding of autism and explore how they can better serve individuals on the spectrum within the legal system.

The event, spearheaded by Pa. Supreme Court Justice **Kevin Dougherty**, was held on Oct. 25 in conjunction with the Pennsylvania Bar Institute, Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, the ASERT Collaborative and Drexel University.

"Our Autism in the Courts initiative is not just a program; it's a commitment to inclusivity and justice – and we are happy to be able to expand our efforts to include attorneys," said Justice Dougherty.

The sessions provided an in-depth exploration of autism, shedding light on its diverse characteristics and considerations that come into play when representing individuals on the spectrum.

During the event, three lawyers from across Pennsylvania served on a panel to discuss the intricacies of autism and its intersection with the legal system, while highlighting the importance of informed and compassionate representation.

Another session included an informative discussion between a parent of an autistic child and a clinician who shared their insights and experiences and offered advice to attorneys.

"It is my hope that attorneys who attended the session left with a deeper understanding of autism and a renewed commitment to providing inclusive, compassionate and informed legal representation," Justice Dougherty said.

The event was recorded and made available to anyone who may be interested. To watch, or to learn more about the Autism and the Courts initiative, visit <https://www.pacourts.us/learn/autism-and-the-courts>.

A Legacy Remembered



The family of the late Chief Justice Max Baer – including his wife, sons, daughters-in-law and grandchildren – surround his newly-unveiled Court painting.

On Oct. 17, the family, friends and colleagues of former Chief Justice **Max Baer** gathered for the unveiling ceremony of his official Court portrait.

The ceremony, held in the Pittsburgh Supreme Court courtroom, was a poignant reminder of Chief Justice Baer's distinguished service, unwavering commitment to justice and tireless advocacy for children and families across the state.

The event began with a moving tribute from Chief Justice **Debra Todd**, who spoke eloquently about Chief Justice Baer's legacy, emphasizing the indelible mark he left on the Court and the inspiration he was to countless legal professionals throughout his illustrious career.

Painted by renowned artist Joseph Routon, the beautiful portrait will grace the walls of the Pittsburgh Supreme Court courtroom and serve as a lasting tribute to his memory and a source of inspiration for generations of jurists to come.

Allegheny County Celebrates Opening of Trauma-Informed Courthouse

The courthouse setting can be an intimidating one – especially for children and those who have experienced trauma or who are experiencing the court system for the first time.

Recognizing this, the Allegheny County Courts began a years-long project to convert their Family Law Center into a fully trauma-informed courthouse. They recently held a special event on Oct. 16 to celebrate its official opening.

Initial efforts began following a trauma audit conducted by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges in 2015 and discussions through the local childrens' roundtable in 2016, both of which shed light on areas that needed improvement.

Following input from stakeholders, youth and families, the Court partnered with Allegheny County Department of Human Services and Carnegie Mellon University's human-centered design class to revamp the space and ultimately improve the family court experience.

After seeking funding from numerous foundations and gaining grants and private donations from more than 20 different organizations and donors, the Court in partnership with Allegheny County Facilities was able to implement many of the recommended changes.

Accessibility and comfort

To make navigation through the Family Law Center more accessible, every room was renumbered to be consistent by floor and in a chronological order, new room signs were installed with ADA accessible fonts and Braille, and additional signage was enhanced throughout the building.

The majority of waiting rooms and courtrooms were repainted to more calming colors and new furniture. Many areas also received new flooring to make traversing the space easier and more accessible.

The revamped facility also includes a new reading area with books that children can take home, and



Wellness center

conference rooms where litigants can meet privately with caseworkers, probation officers or attorneys. Additionally, a playground was installed in the courtyard along with picnic tables where individuals can wait for their court hearings.



Childcare center

Technological upgrades

The Court has utilized technology in further efforts to ease navigation and better accommodate court users.

Large electronic directories providing room numbers and courtroom assignments were installed on every floor at the elevators and in the waiting rooms. In the next phase of the project, screens will provide case tracking for those waiting to follow along and determine how long it will be until their hearing.

Kiosks have also been installed at the building's entrances to provide navigational support and will expand their services to include check-in ability that will interface with the case tracking boards.

Additionally, charging tables, USB outlets and a reliable Guest Wi-Fi network have all been installed.

(continued)



Children's area



Each courtroom has remote capability with large screens for individuals to participate in court hearings remotely if needed.

A final technological component of the project involved the Fifth Judicial District's website, which underwent a complete overhaul with numerous changes to better assist litigants in Allegheny County.

Support services

Beyond the physical changes to the building, the Family Law Center now offers a wide range of support services to help ease the burden on court users, as well as assist them with other critical needs.

Lack of childcare is a common barrier many people face when coming to court. To address this concern, a childcare center, operated by the National Council of Jewish Women, has opened in the courthouse providing a safe environment for adults to leave their children while they tend to business in the courthouse.

A Wellness Clinic, staffed by Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh providers and nurses, opened to provide physicals, other basic medical care, prescription gaps, care coordination and family planning while families are in the Family Law Center. The Court also partnered with outside agencies to provide on-site behavioral health assessments, service coordination assistance, drug and alcohol evaluations and crisis-response services.

Furthermore, an application was developed and implemented in the Protection from Abuse (PFA) department that allows petitioners to more easily complete the required paperwork and streamlines the behind-the-scenes process to allow litigants to come before a judge more quickly.

Various supports for individuals with language barriers and hearing impairments have also been implemented. These include "I speak" cards at entrances, translated forms, on-demand translation services throughout the building and advanced interpreter equipment in courtrooms.



Sensory room

An autism-friendly environment

Within the children's room, a sensory room was created to serve children with autism by offering a dedicated space for sensory integration and emotional regulation.

It was created to provide a quiet and calm space away from the hustle and bustle of the waiting room where anyone, especially those with sensory processing differences and autism, can find some solace and peace.

The room includes white noise, a projector, weighted blankets and vests, I-Pads with neurodiverse apps specifically for autistic individuals and a number of other items designed specifically for such spaces.

(continued)

In addition to the sensory room, each courtroom offers fidget toys, noise cancelling headphones, sunglasses and color packets available for anyone to use during hearings.

Training

The final piece of this trauma-informed initiative is the human element and ensuring that everyone who comes into the Family Law Center is treated with dignity and respect and can access the aid that they need as an individual.

To that end, staff throughout the building have been trained on trauma-informed responses from the Center for Victims.

Judges, hearing officers and other staff have been trained in motivational interviewing, and court staff were also trained on Mental Health First Aid.

Further, judges, hearing officers and administrators participated in a Language Access training that educated them on the procedures to best support and understand those who are not able to communicate effectively in English.

All of these significant changes in Allegheny County exemplify a deep commitment to improving the family court experience and demonstrate creative ways that courts can help address the needs of their court users.

"The transformation of the Allegheny County Family Law Center into a fully trauma-informed courthouse is a remarkable testament to our commitment to justice. By prioritizing accessibility, compassion and the well-being of court users, we are not only building a more inclusive legal system, but also fostering a place where healing, trust and fairness can flourish. This innovative approach exemplifies the essence of our justice system – to remove barriers, embrace empathy and empower every individual in their pursuit of justice."

– Chief Justice of Pennsylvania Debra Todd

Editors

Stacey Witalec
Kim Bathgate

Writer

Casey Scheffler

Contributors

Olivia Antonucci

Graphic Design

Gretchen Smith

Photography

Kyle Kauffman

Court Administrator of PA

Andrea B. Tuominen

Deputy Court Administrator of PA

David Price

All content is collected, written and edited by the AOPC Communications Office unless noted.


You may reach the office by calling: (717) 231-3300 or by emailing:

CommunicationsOffice@pacourts.us

For more information about Pennsylvania's courts, visit:

www.pacourts.us

 [Twitter @PACourts](https://twitter.com/PACourts)

 [Facebook @pennsylvaniacourts](https://www.facebook.com/pennsylvaniacourts)

 [YouTube @PACourts](https://www.youtube.com/PACourts)

 [Instagram @pennsylvaniacourts](https://www.instagram.com/pennsylvaniacourts)

Supreme Court of Pennsylvania

Debra Todd

Chief Justice of Pennsylvania

Christine Donohue

Justice

Kevin M. Dougherty

Justice

David N. Wecht

Justice

Sallie Updyke Mundy

Justice

P. Kevin Brobson

Justice

Old Lehigh County Courthouse Dedicated and Renamed as Historic Lehigh County Courthouse After Extensive Renovations

After years of extensive renovations, the Old Lehigh County Courthouse, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, officially reopened as the Historic Lehigh County Courthouse. The Court of Common Pleas of Lehigh County held a dedication ceremony to celebrate the building's full restoration on Oct. 20.

"A walk through this building is a walk-through history," said Lehigh County President Judge **J. Brian Johnson**. "More than saving history by improving the structural and operational integrity of this building so that it can live on for another 200 years, we need the space it provides to conduct court operations."

Over the last several years, the Courthouse has undergone meticulous exterior repairs and historically accurate interior refurbishments to ensure its structural integrity and historical significance are preserved for generations to come.

The restoration project commenced in 2015 when the Courthouse, facing issues of overcrowding and deteriorating infrastructure, underwent a comprehensive audit that identified extensive renovations to meet modern building codes.

Since county officials committed funds in 2016, the building's systems and windows were



President Judge J. Brian Johnson speaks at the Courthouse's dedication ceremony

replaced, roofs and stone walls were made water-tight, security and safety systems were added, lighting and handicapped access were improved and existing historic features were carefully curated and enhanced. Additionally, a second Magisterial District Court has been relocated to the building to provide better security and save the county the monthly rental expense of that office.

Serving as a testament to the dedication and expertise that

the county has invested in this endeavor, the successful restoration efforts have been recognized by Preservation Pennsylvania – a prominent organization dedicated to preserving the state's rich history. The project has been selected as the recipient of the Construction Award (Rehabilitation) at the 2023 Pennsylvania Historic Preservation Awards on Oct. 19.

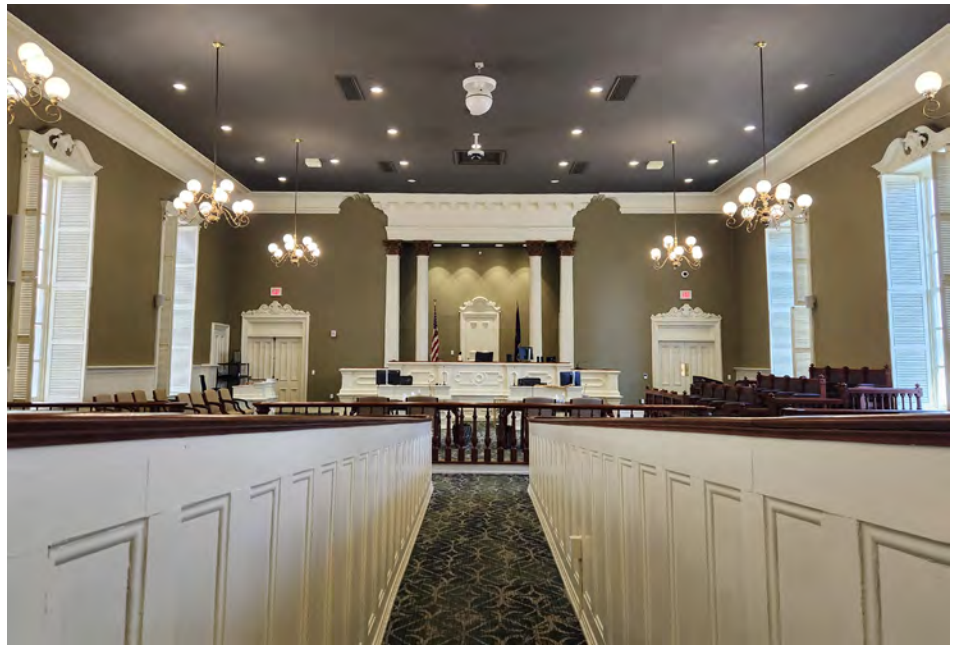
The dedication ceremony was attended by distinguished guests and community members who

(continued)

have supported the project. It served as a platform to express gratitude to all those who contributed to the successful restoration efforts and featured a history presentation by the Lehigh Valley Heritage Museum.

To recognize this important milestone in the Courthouse's history, the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts released a [video](#) where key stakeholders involved in the restoration efforts sat down to discuss the project and to describe the building's historical significance.

Originally built between 1814 and 1819, the Historic Lehigh County Courthouse is a prominent and iconic county landmark. Over time, the building underwent several modifications and additions due to population growth, including a significant expansion in 1864,



Newly-renovated courtroom

followed by further enhancements in 1914-1916. A courtroom added in 1863 was renovated in 1996, which led to the eventual full restoration of the Courthouse today, a project

spearheaded by former President Judge Edward Reibman in collaboration with government and community partners.

Bradford County Treatment Court Implements CPR Policy

Sudden cardiac death has been identified as the leading cause of death in substance-abuse autopsies. With concerns around the accessibility of emergency medical services in a rural county, it is imperative that those most impacted by substance use know what to do in a crisis.

Understanding this, Bradford County Treatment Court recently partnered with the American Heart Association to institute a new initiative aimed at decreasing deaths by drug overdose and cardiac arrest by creating an opportunity for program participants and their family and friends to gain exposure to CPR training.

The Court officially adopted the new policy in March 2023, outlining the integration of CPR, AED awareness and Narcan training as requirements for completing the program.

Under the new policy, each participant must successfully complete a Heartsaver course, and/or Hands-Only CPR training with AED awareness in addition to Narcan Training, as a condition of their treatment court program.

"Our goal with this new program is to increase the knowledge and skills needed among a population disproportionately impacted by cardiac arrest and equip them to respond to a cardiac event or overdose and ultimately save lives," said President Judge **Maureen Beirne**. "The participants have been receptive, and it has gone really well so far."

To further expand the reach of

this initiative, Bradford County Treatment Court plans to create an opportunity for family and friends of program participants to participate in Hands-Only CPR demonstrations.



American Heart Association.

Based on the success of this initiative, the American Heart Association plans to bring this program to all 13 counties within northeastern Pennsylvania.

This proactive approach shown in Bradford County not only ensures that those affected by substance use are not only given a second chance through rehabilitation, but also allows them to gain valuable knowledge to help others who may be in crisis.



Ruth Strauss and former Chief Justice Ronald Castille

Reflections on a Long Career with the Pennsylvania Supreme Court

Ruth Strauss first began working for the Pennsylvania Supreme Court in 1967 when she was 39 years old. Throughout her 47-year tenure with the Court, Ruth served as a trusted right hand to nine different chief justices.

What began as a modest entry into the judicial system soon blossomed into a lifelong career that would span nearly five decades, shaping the course of her life and leaving an indelible legacy on the Court and her colleagues.

Prior to working for the Court, Ruth worked in a law firm doing administrative work. After leaving the workforce to raise her young children, she had just recently returned to the law firm when former Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice **Michael Musmanno** called and asked for someone reliable to work for him for a week.

"It was a very long week!" Ruth joked in a recent conversation.

When Justice Musmanno passed

away the following year, she was asked to continue working for the Court, under Justice **Benjamin Jones**. Ruth remembers it was that same year in 1968 when the Unified Judicial System was officially established.

"Depending on the personalities, in the early days, it was very informal," she recalled. "Each member of the Court was very different, but it was a privilege to work under all of them."

Her role as an administrative judicial secretary, which evolved over the years as new technology continued to be introduced, encompassed duties ranging from managing court documents and liaising with legal professionals to ensuring the seamless functioning of the Court's daily operations.

"I enjoyed the nature of the work and the challenges very much – I've always loved law," she said. "I was not blessed with a college degree, but if I had been,

I would've probably wanted to become a lawyer. Although, some could say this was a better experience, getting to be involved in the inner workings of the Court."

Over the course of her career, Ruth witnessed the evolution of the Court and the ever-changing legal landscape, and was privy to landmark decisions that shaped the state's history.

At 85 years old, Ruth made the decision to retire following the departure of former Chief Justice **Ronald Castille**, closing a chapter on a notable career that spanned nearly half a century.

Her friends and former colleagues fondly remember her as an embodiment of dedication, professionalism and a true passion for law and service.

At 94 years old, Ruth is doing well today and enjoys spending time with her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.

Northampton County Establishes Veterans Court

On behalf of the Court of Common Pleas of Northampton County, **Jennifer R. Sletvold**, Administrative Judge of Problem-Solving Courts, recently announced the establishment of Northampton County Veterans Court.

"Treatment courts are the most innovative solution for veterans caught up in the criminal justice system due to substance use,

mental health issues and/or trauma. The Northampton County Veterans Court will connect veterans to the benefits and treatment that they have earned and deserve," Judge Sletvold said.

The Court is creating an interdisciplinary team which will work together to afford each veteran the opportunity to achieve recovery and get their lives back on

track, while maintaining accountability for their actions and decisions."

The Veterans Court joins Northampton County's Recovery Court and Mental Health Court, which were established in 2015 by President Judge **Craig Dally**. To date, there have been 87 successful Recovery Court graduates, and 100 successful Mental Health Court graduates, and while veterans have been

Northampton



among the graduates of these courts, the Northampton County Problem-Solving Courts are proud to now be offering veterans a court designed to meet their particular needs.

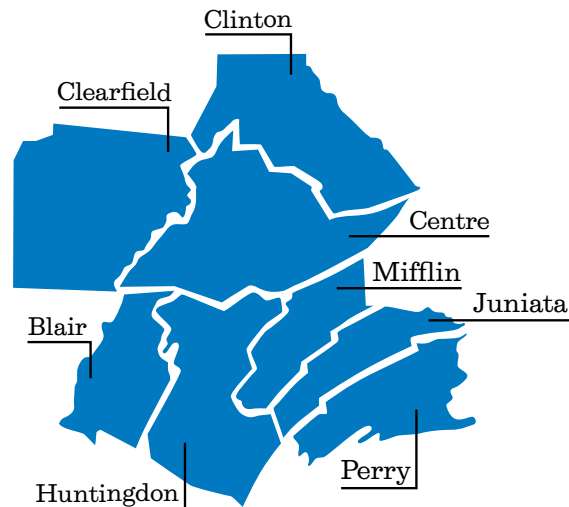
Coming Soon: Regional Veterans Court to Serve Eight Counties

The Pennsylvania Courts have announced the establishment of a Regional Veterans Treatment Court which will serve eight central Pennsylvania counties. The Court is anticipated to begin proceedings in early 2024.

Currently, Blair, Clinton, Centre and Mifflin counties host treatment courts within their judicial districts – and among them, only Clinton County has an existing veterans court program. The new Regional Veterans Court initiative aims to extend this crucial support to previously underserved areas.

The inclusion of Huntingdon, Perry, Juniata and Clearfield counties will expand the veterans treatment court network to cover 32 of Pennsylvania's 67 counties.

"The creation of the Regional Veterans Court underscores our commitment to ensuring that our veterans receive the specialized treatment they rightfully deserve. By extending court services to these additional counties, we are taking a significant step towards supporting justice-involved



veterans' rehabilitation and successful reintegration into their communities," said Chief Justice **Debra Todd**.

Blair County Court of Common Pleas Judge **Wade Kagarise** and Clinton County Court of Common Pleas Judge **Michael Salisbury** will both preside over the new regional court.

"The collaboration among our counties exemplifies the power of partnership in effectuating positive change. By unifying our efforts, we are sending a clear

message about our commitment to honoring veterans' contributions and aiding them in overcoming obstacles on their path to recovery," said Judge Salisbury.

"This expansion reflects a dedication to addressing the unique needs and challenges faced by veterans, fostering rehabilitation and encouraging reintegration into society," said Judge Kagarise. "It's an honor to preside over a court that represents a profound commitment to my fellow veterans and a deep belief in their potential to thrive once more."



Chief Justice Debra Todd, Court Administrator Andrea Tuominen and Secretary of Aging Jason Kavulich serve on a panel during the Summit.

OEJC Hosts First Pennsylvania Guardianship Justice Summit

The Advisory Council on Elder Justice in the Courts and the Office of Elder Justice in the Courts (OEJC) hosted the first Pennsylvania Guardianship Justice Summit on Sept. 20-22, 2023, in State College, Pa.

An interdisciplinary group of stakeholders from across the Commonwealth, chosen based on their professional involvement with guardianship and related topics, participated in the Summit. The 165+ attendees included orphans' court judges and clerks, professional guardians, staff from state agencies involved with elder justice, elder law and legal aid attorneys, legislators, disability advocates, medical providers and evaluators, long-term care providers and adult protective services.

Featured speakers included Pennsylvania Supreme Court Chief Justice **Debra Todd**, Pennsylvania State Senator Maria Collett, U.S Deputy Assistant Secretary for Aging Edwin Walker, Esq. (Administration for Community Living), Secretary Jason Kavulich (PA Department of Aging), Dr. Mark Lachs (Weill-Cornell Medicine), Michael Gamel-McCormick, PhD (U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging), and Jim Berchtold, Esq. (Justice in Aging), along with several judges, attorneys and other subject-matter experts.

Topics discussed at the Summit included:

- Assuring due process in guardianship proceedings, advancing improvements in monitoring guardians

- Promoting alternatives to guardianship
- Increasing the development of collaboration between state and local organizations.

Notable and featured sessions included:

- What is incapacity?
- Assuring due process in guardianship
- Alternatives to guardianship – legal and community alternatives
- Limited guardianship
- Assisting adults with decision-making
- Preventing financial exploitation
- Guardianship in long-term care/hospitals.

Several of the presentations were recorded and are available on OEJC's [website](#).

In addition, attendees collaborated within regional groups to discuss the needs and challenges their regions face. A second Pennsylvania Guardianship Justice Summit will be held in 2025. The regional groups will continue to meet to facilitate dialogue and collaboration between stakeholders in advance of the 2025 Summit.

Attendees reported that they will discuss the information provided at the recent Summit within their professional networks, incorporate and apply the knowledge gained to their day-to-day work, and cultivate the new partnerships and collaborations that were established during this Summit.

(continued)

The Elder Justice Innovation Grant

The Summit was funded through a grant (approximately \$3 million) awarded to the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts by the federal Administration on Community Living (ACL). The ACL's Elder Justice Innovation Grant program provides financial assistance to states working to assess and improve their handling of adult guardianship cases. Pennsylvania is one of three states that received funding. The OEJC oversees the work of the grant, which runs from Sept. 1, 2022, through Aug. 31, 2025.

The Summit is one of several grant projects supporting the grant's three overarching goals: (1) to assure due process for the alleged incapacitated person, (2) to improve guardianship monitoring capabilities to prevent abuse and exploitation and (3) to promote alternatives to guardianship.

The Summit was supported by the Administration for Community Living (ACL), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$2,458,957 (\$1,145,290 for Year 1 + \$1,313,667 for Year 2), with 100 percent funding by the ACL/HHS. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement by, ACL/HHS, or the U.S. Government.

Testimonials heard from attendees included:

"I learned so much at the Summit and got to hear perspectives from people I don't normally interact with (guardians, health care workers, psychologists)."

"We have outlined a lot of ideas and thoughts for improvement of the process and most importantly, for protecting the rights of our elder population."

"I learned a lot at the Summit, connected with many people and hope that I can be an ally in guardianship reform in PA."

AOPC Holds Donation Drive

In preparation for the back-to-school season, the AOPC held a donation drive in August to collect requested items for a local elementary school.

Mountainview Elementary in the Central Dauphin School District, a small public school with approximately 350 students, expressed a need for certain school supplies and related items.

Teachers and administrators at the school were thrilled to receive our contributions. Thank you to everyone who brought in donations!



Sept. 2023
Office of the Courts,
Thank you so very much
for all of the generous
donations you provided to
Mountain View Elementary
School! We appreciate your
kindness. Our students and
staff will certainly benefit
from all of the supplies
we received. It is so
wonderful that you were able
to fulfill so many wishes!
Thank you,
Ms. Gladys
Principal

Thank you for all the
donations to Mountain
View! Our staff and
students greatly appreciate
your support!
Amy

Thank you to the Administrative
office of PA Courts for all
the generous donations to
my classroom from my Amazon
Wishlist! Everything will be
well loved in my first grade
classroom at Mt. View!
Thank you! ~ Pamela
Saylor



t h a n k s

Minor Court Administrators Workshop Offers Opportunity for Networking, Peer Learning and Leadership Development

By AOPC Judicial Programs Administrators **Mike Passiment** and **Kathy Sauter**

In early October, minor court administrators and district court administrators from across the commonwealth came together in Harrisburg to network, share ideas and feedback on emerging challenges in the minor courts and do some self-reflection on their leadership styles.

This workshop, hosted by AOPC Judicial District Operations, is held annually and presents a unique opportunity to assist minor court administrators in developing their skills and add value to court administration.

Workshop attendees benefited from the insights and perspective of representatives from the Special Court Judges Association of Pennsylvania, who offered their support and encouragement while drawing attention to timely issues they see facing the minor judiciary.

The minor court administrators also received key updates from AOPC and court personnel, including Director of Legislative Affairs **Damian Wachter** and the Pennsylvania Judicial Conduct Board's Chief Counsel **Melissa Norton**. These presentations offered attendees the chance to connect with these centralized departments, ask questions and share feedback.

A key component of this event is ample time for peer learning and small group discussion. This year, a new format was piloted to ensure there was both breadth and depth to discussions.

Minor court administrators were divided into four groups which aligned with four overarching



subject areas:

- Case Management and Financials
- Office Administration and Facilities
- Personnel and Human Resources
- Rules of Court and Legal Procedure.

Within each of these subject areas, participants engaged in a wide-ranging discussion of relevant sub-topics with their peers and were able to document ideas, strategize solutions to pressing problems and bring valuable insight back to their judicial district.

The peer learning session received positive feedback from participants:

"This was outstanding. We had great discussions, sharing of information and groups with a mix of experience and backgrounds."

"This was very interesting and helpful. It was nice to network in this way."

The second day of the workshop, focused entirely on leadership development, was hosted by two professors of project management from Harrisburg University of Science and Technology, Dr. Joseph Marc Zagerman and Dr. Dan Jensen.

This interactive session explored how organizational culture and leadership climate impact organizations, how court administrators could examine organizational issues from four perspectives and how court leaders can take initial steps to resolve a current leadership or team issue.

Workshop attendees participated in a tower building activity to assess their leadership traits.

(continued)

The leadership session also offered attendees time for self-reflection. Participants were encouraged to complete assessments measuring their trustworthiness, defining their leadership style and evaluating their ability to see and manage change.

Attendees left this session with a variety of tools and new approaches to take in handling the day-to-day challenges of their work environment.

As they departed Harrisburg to return to their judicial districts, court administrators

were reminded of the critical importance and power of collaboration. Embracing a collaborative mindset, they can be confident that, as new challenges emerge, they have the support of their neighboring counties and the AOPC.

New Superior Court Prothonotary

After more than 35 years of judicial service, **Joseph Seletyn**, Esq., retired as prothonotary for Superior Court at the end of September.

“My first day with the judiciary was May 11, 1988, when I took my first clerkship in the Court of Common Pleas of Allegheny County. I never could have dreamed that 25 years and a move to Superior Court later, President Judge Emeritus **John Bender** would ask me to assume the role of prothonotary. I understood immediately that if a job could be made just for me, this was it,” Seletyn said.

I’ve loved my work and



Joseph Seletyn

I am deeply gratified that the Court entrusted me with it. I have had the opportunity to work with extraordinary public servants, both jurists and staff, and I’ve had the chance to make a difference. For that, I will always remain grateful.”

Seletyn will be succeeded by **Ben Kohler**, Esq., who has served as the Court’s



Ben Kohler

deputy prothonotary in the Philadelphia office for seven years.

Prior to serving as the Court’s deputy prothonotary, Kohler worked under Superior Court Judge **Jack Panella** as a law clerk from 2005-2008 and then as deputy judicial clerk from 2009-2016.

“It has been a privilege to work for the Superior

Court of Pennsylvania over the past 17 years – most recently as deputy prothonotary for the Court’s Eastern District Office. I am humbled and honored to have the opportunity to continue serving the commonwealth as the prothonotary of the Superior Court of Pennsylvania,” Kohler said.

Kohler has a Bachelor of Arts in Public Relations from Temple University and a Juris Doctor from Beasley School of Law at Temple University.

Please join us in thanking Joe for his many years of service and wishing Ben good luck in his new role!

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT PENNSYLVANIA’S COURTS, VISIT:



www.pacourts.us



Facebook
[@pennsylvaniacourts](https://www.facebook.com/pennsylvaniacourts)



YouTube
[@PACourts](https://www.youtube.com/PACourts)



Twitter
[@PACourts](https://twitter.com/PACourts)



Instagram
[@pennsylvaniacourts](https://www.instagram.com/pennsylvaniacourts)



Jennifer Love (pictured right) being guided by a fellow veteran

A Never-Ending Call to Service

After guiding vision-impaired children down the Conestoga River for a day filled with joy and kayaking, AOPC Legal Assistant **Jennifer Love** recently reflected on how her experiences in the military shaped her future as a volunteer.

Prior to joining the AOPC legal department nearly 10 years ago, Love served as a medical assistant for the U.S. Air Force for roughly three years and now uses the leadership skills she gained while serving her country to help serve her community in an inspiring way.

Over the summer, she participated in a leadership program with Kids Are OuttaSight! (KAOS) that trains veterans to become kayaking guides and provide extra support to families.

KAOS connects children who are blind or visually impaired and their families with military veterans from Team River Runner – a non-profit organization which Jennifer belongs to that provides healing, community purpose and new challenges to veterans through kayaking.

“It’s about giving hope and helping others grow,” Love said. “It’s about giving independence back to those

who don’t have the physical capabilities to live a fully independent life. We are showing people that they can have independence again, albeit, they just have to do it a bit differently. Life is about adapting to your situations and living your life to the fullest.”

Love recalled some of the similarities between her military and volunteer service, explaining that in both of these environments, she was able to create a deeper connection between herself and her team members and establish an indescribable level of trust.

“I was motivated to see my team members take risks in a controlled environment, allowing them to experience what it’s like to fear something, only to overcome that fear and grow individually,” she said.

She went onto explain why service has played such an important role in her life.

“Contributing to make the lives of others better is a noble endeavor. By selflessly offering our efforts, we weave a tapestry of compassion, kindness and progress that brightens the path for all. Enabling those with disabilities to live a more fulfilling life is all of humanity’s responsibility.”

AOPC Holds Fall Employee Appreciation Events



Makin' Waves 7
Charging the digital wave



FUN
FEST
STAFF APPRECIATION EVENT



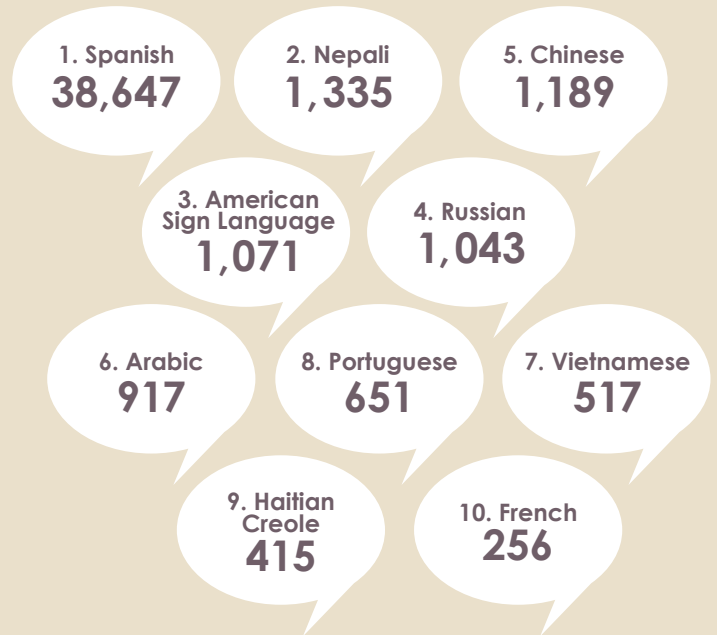
PA Court Interpreters - Removing Language Barriers



Court interpreter –

A trained language professional who facilitates communication and access to court services for a person with limited English proficiency or who is deaf or hard of hearing by orally interpreting or signing.

Top 10 languages requested in 2022:



In 2022...

49,229 interpreter requests were made.

252 interpreters representing **44** languages were on the AOPC's statewide roster.

\$6.1 million was spent on county language access and interpreter expenses.



of interpreter requests were for **Spanish interpreters.**

Top 10 counties for language access and interpreter expenses:



Experts delve into the evolving world of AI



Some courts have been using AI, or artificial intelligence, in limited ways such as automating the accepting and docketing of eFiled documents or simulating human conversation with chatbots. However, the evolution of generative AI, a technology that uses artificial intelligence to generate new content (such as in ChatGPT or Bard), raises both new opportunities and new issues and concerns.

Last month, NCSC launched its first webinar series exploring the emerging technology of AI and its impact on courts.

Developed at the request of Conference of Chief Justices' President Anna Blackburne-Rigsby of the D.C. Court of Appeals, the series, "The Promises and Perils of AI in the Courts," provides a general introduction to AI and promotes dialogue about more specific issues facing courts and the practice of law.

"The chief justices and state court administrators need to understand how it will impact all of us," Chief Judge Blackburne-Rigsby explained during her Aug. 16 webinar introduction.

During the webinar, Jennifer Leonard, chief innovation officer and executive director of the Future of the Profession Initiative at Penn Carey Law at the University of Pennsylvania, discussed how AI and generative AI work and provided an overview of the current landscape.

Retired Michigan Chief Justice Bridget McCormack and Casey Kennedy, director of information services for the Texas Office of Court Administration, spoke about the issues generative AI can pose to courts and offered guidance on considerations and steps courts should take to ensure they're educated and prepared.

"Humans still need to go look at the output of these tools if you decide to use them," Kennedy said. "As courts, you have to decide what, when and where is it acceptable to use (AI) by not only judges but your staff and other judicial officers; and how do you come up with that decision on what you can use and what you can't use."

Court Consulting Services Managing Director Shay Cleary said the webinar series is just one way NCSC is helping courts explore the impacts of AI. In addition to presentations and speaking engagements, the center is testing new AI-related technologies and working to develop guidance and resources for the court community.

Visit the NCSC website for the webinar playbacks and materials.

Reprinted with permission from the National Center for State Courts newsletter - @ the Center

Have a photo or story idea?

We are always looking for story ideas or photos of staff and judges out and about in the community. Send us an email with the scoop!
CommunicationsOffice@pacourts.us.



Miss an issue?

Check out our [newsletter archive!](#)

Around the Judiciary



Pa. Supreme Court Justice **David Wecht** spoke at Villanova University on Sept. 12 at a presentation titled *Lawyers and the Holocaust*.



Staff said congratulations and farewell to former Court Administrator **Geoff Moulton**, who retired at the end of September.



The Pennsylvania Interbranch Commission for Gender, Racial and Ethnic Fairness announced in August that **Maraleen Shields, Esq.** was formally installed as Executive Director. She was selected to lead the Commission following the retirement of Lisette M. McCormick.



Washington County Magisterial District Judge **Louis McQuillan** recognized the young men from his jurisdiction who played on the county's Pony League World Series team and advanced to the championship, presenting them with certificates of outstanding service and dedication to their communities.



Photo credit: Tommy Leonardi

Former Commonwealth Court Judge **Robert W. Williams, Jr.**, received special recognition at the Philadelphia Bar Association's 2023 Summer Quarterly. Williams recently celebrated his 100th birthday is one of the oldest living members of the famed Tuskegee Airmen.



(l to r) President of the Franklin County Bar Association Anthony Cosentino, Hon. Jeffrey Schmehl, Franklin County President Judge Shawn Meyers

On Sept. 15, Franklin County President Judge **Shawn Meyers** observed the Adoption of the U.S. Constitution in a special ceremony with featured speaker, U.S. District Court Judge **Jeffrey Schmehl**.



Dan Levering, PA CLE Board administrator, **Candice Komar, Esq.**, PA CLE Board chair, Pa. Supreme Court Justice **P. Kevin Brobson**, **Tuan Samahon, Esq.**, PA CLE Board vice chair & professor of law at Villanova University Charles Widger School of Law

On Oct. 6, the Continuing Legal Education (CLE) Board held a symposium in collaboration with Villanova Law and the American Association of Law Schools Legal Journal.

The event was attended by over 300 in-person and remote participants who share a common goal to provide high quality educational opportunities to Pennsylvania lawyers.



As part of the Pa. Department of Drug and Alcohol's statewide stakeholder engagement tour, Secretary Davis-Jones visited the Columbia/Montour Drug Treatment Court in early September to observe the court in process and engage in a roundtable discussion with Senior Judge **Thomas James** and other program officials.



On Oct. 10, Pa. Supreme Court Justice **David Wecht** visited the University of California – Berkeley Law School where he participated in a special event hosted by the Jewish Student Association to discuss his judicial journey, the influence of religion on decision-making and the evolving religious doctrine within the First Amendment.