

# AOPC CONNECTED



Issue 1, 2023

## In this issue

Read about the formal installation of the state's first female chief justice, new upgrades to the Guardianship Tracking System, an autism environmental analysis tool, a department spotlight on Office of Children and Families in the Courts and more.

# Justice Debra Todd Formally Installed as First Female Chief Justice in History of Pennsylvania Supreme Court



Surrounded by family, friends and colleagues, Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice **Debra Todd** made history on Jan. 20, 2023, as she was formally sworn-in as Pennsylvania's 58th Chief Justice, becoming the first woman installed as chief in the Court's 300-year history.

"Today my heart is full of joy and gratitude," said Chief Justice Debra Todd. "Joy in arriving at this moment and gratitude for all the strong and determined women who paved the way and for those who supported me throughout my journey.

"It means the world to me to take the oath like so many distinguished jurists before me, while forging new ground for women and reaffirming my commitment to support, obey and defend the Constitution of the United States and of this commonwealth," said Todd. "My path to this point has been guided by a belief which was instilled in me at an early age, that with hard work and dedication, little girls could achieve anything.



"I share this historic moment with all Pennsylvanians, especially our children whose hopes and dreams will shape the future and make the world a place where nothing is out of reach. I realize I'm the first female chief justice, but I know I won't be the last."

The daughter of a steelworker and homemaker, Todd was born and

raised in Ellwood City, Lawrence County and at an early age developed a dream of becoming a lawyer after working as a filing clerk for a local private attorney. Reflecting on the earliest days of her career, Todd fondly recalls being fascinated by the legal process and inspired when her employer encouraged her to become a lawyer.



"It was at that moment that a light went on for me and it never went out," said Todd.

Todd would go on to attend Chatham College, now Chatham University, earning her undergraduate degree with honors in political science and theater, moving on to the University of Pittsburgh School of Law where she was a member of the Law Review, and finally earning her LL.M. degree in the Judicial Process from the University of Virginia School of Law.

Upon graduation, she began her career as an in-house litigation attorney for U.S. Steel Corporation before maintaining a trial practice in the city of Pittsburgh with an emphasis in complex civil litigation.

According to Chief Justice Todd, her path to the bench from private practice was "exciting and challenging."

"As a proponent of the legal process, I naturally started looking for the next step – to take my love of the law to the next level," Todd said.

After serving as a judge on the Superior Court of Pennsylvania from



2000 through 2007, Chief Justice Todd was elected to the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania in Nov. 2007 and was retained in 2017 for a second ten-year term.

"I am proud of this Court – of the work that we do and the commitment that we share to apply the law, honor the constitution and simply remain focused on doing the right thing," said Todd.

"Every case is of equal importance. While some may be more high profile than others, still others have greater consequences for people. We never lose sight of the impact that we have on the lives of all Pennsylvanians."

As the highest court in the commonwealth and the oldest appellate court in the nation, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court is the definitive authority in enforcing Pennsylvania's Constitution and interpreting its laws. The Court supervises the entire court system to ensure that Pennsylvanians' rights are protected and enforced through efficient judicial administration of the cases brought before them.

Congratulations to Chief Justice Todd!

# Pennsylvania Courts Host Webinar on Human Trafficking and the Court: The Survivor's Perspective

In recognition of January's National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month, the Pennsylvania Courts hosted a free, virtual panel with survivors of human trafficking in Pennsylvania to discuss how victims and survivors interact with the court; connections with domestic violence, trauma and substance use; and victim-centered approaches to address human trafficking.

Human trafficking, which includes exploiting persons for forced labor and/or commercial sex, occurs throughout Pennsylvania's urban, suburban and rural communities. It is a type of human rights abuse where people profit from the exploitation of others – through the use of force, fraud or coercion to manipulate victims into engaging in sex acts or labor/services in exchange for something of value.

More than 600 participants attended the webinar, which was open to all Pennsylvania judges, court managers, supervisors, staff and justice-system partners, including employees in filing offices, domestic relations, adult and juvenile probation, sheriffs, police, victim services, district attorneys and more.

Through the panelists, audience members heard candid discussion from survivor leaders about their experiences engaging with justice systems and the collateral consequences of human trafficking victimization, such as sustaining criminal convictions and the suspension of driver's licenses. The vulnerabilities that increase the likelihood of someone being trafficked, such as familial sexual abuse as a child, poverty and immigration status, were also discussed.

While there is much wider awareness about sex trafficking in the U.S., human trafficking also encompasses labor trafficking. In a labor trafficking situation, persons are exploited for cheap or unpaid labor and are sometimes forced to take on unreasonable debt as a condition of employment.

By far, the most prevalent belief about human trafficking is that it always involves kidnapping or otherwise physically forcing someone into a situation. In reality, most human traffickers use psychological means such as tricking, defrauding, manipulating or threatening victims into providing commercial sex or exploitative labor.

In order to best help potential victims, it is important to pay attention to the people who interact with our family, workplace and community. Understanding the vulnerabilities that can pave the way for victimization and being aware of situations that may raise red flags is key. Anyone can be trafficked, but it is no coincidence that traffickers recognize and take advantage of people in



vulnerable situations. One suggestion panelists offered to improve interactions with the justice system is asking "are you safe?"

*"Trafficking victimization is complicated, and victims do not always self-identify. The fear, shame, trauma, isolation and manipulation inherent in human trafficking can prevent a victim from seeking help or attempting to leave an exploitative situation, no matter how dangerous," said Amy Kehner, AOPC Judicial Programs administrator.*

In Pennsylvania, trafficking survivors can petition the court to vacate convictions for prostitution, criminal trespass, disorderly conduct, loitering and prowling at night, obstructing highways and other public passages, and simple possession of a controlled substance if their convictions were sustained because of trafficking victimization.



front row l to r: Hon. **Margaret T. Murphy**, administrative judge, Family Court Division; **Christy Stanek**, deputy director, Office of Children and Families in the Court; Sabra Townsend and Dr. Wendy Ross, JeffCAN; Hon. **Deborah L. Canty**  
 back row l to r: Hon. **Wendi D. Barish**; Hon. **Walter J. Olszewski**, supervising judge, Family Court Division; Hon. **Cateria R. McCabe**; Hon. **John P. Sabatina, Jr.**; Juvenile Court Hearing Officer, **Jalaine Stokes, Esq.**; Hon. **Brian E. McLaughlin**; **Lisa Harvey, Esq.**, chief, Juvenile Division; **Katherine Grasela**, deputy court administrator, Family Court Division; and **Regina Trabosh**, Juvenile Training administrator.

## Autism and Dependency Court Taskforce Creates Autism Environmental Analysis Tool Being Tested by Philadelphia County

By **Christy Stanek**, deputy director, Office of Children and Families in the Courts

In December 2021, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated that 1 in 44 children have Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). With approximately 14,000 children in Pennsylvania’s dependency system, children and parents with autism are likely in every dependency court within the commonwealth.

As a result, in 2021, the Pennsylvania State Roundtable (SRT) adopted autism as a priority dependency court issue and prioritized the issue for the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania’s Office of Children and Families in the Courts (OCFC).

That same year, the SRT convened the Autism and the Dependency

Courts Taskforce. The Taskforce, led by Supreme Court Justice **Kevin M. Dougherty**, is examining how the dependency court system could become more aware and responsive to the needs of children and parents diagnosed with ASD.

The Taskforce is also creating helpful resources including multiple educational events and county tools. This article focuses on one of those resources – the Environmental Analysis tool.

The Environmental Analysis tool provides a systematic method to examine the physical environment in courts and child welfare agencies that serve children and families with ASD.

*“The first step in effectuating any systemic change is communication and preparation. The Environmental Analysis tool was developed with that purpose in mind. It was also developed with an understanding of the diversity of courtrooms across Pennsylvania. I encourage all counties to use the tools being created by the Taskforce, including this one,” said Justice Dougherty.*

The tool helps identify potential environmental sensory experiences and processes that may trigger a negative reaction for those with ASD. It also provides potential adjustments that can eliminate or mitigate negative experiences and triggers.

In September 2022, the Hon. **Margaret T. Murphy**, administrative judge, Family Division, Court of Common Pleas of Philadelphia, and Taskforce member, volunteered to test the Environmental Analysis tool in Philadelphia's Family Court Dependency Division. This testing included staff from Philadelphia's Family Court Dependency Division, the Office of Children and Families in the Courts (OCFC) and the Jefferson Center for Autism and Neurodiversity (JeffCAN).

"Philadelphia Family Court has fully embraced the Autism and the Dependency Court's initiative, as a means to identify and better serve children and parents with ASD in all aspects of their Family Court experience. By participating in the Environmental Analysis, we aim to create a friendlier environment for individuals with autism upon their entrance to the courthouse and continuing throughout the entire court process so that they are provided with meaningful access to the courts," said Judge Murphy.

Under the leadership of nationally recognized expert Dr. Wendy Ross, MD, director, Center for Autism and Neurodiversity, a team of seven JeffCAN staff created a two-part analysis for Philadelphia's Family Court.

Part one of the analysis examined the physical space of the Family Court, including the entrance, security checkpoint, elevators, various waiting areas and nine dependency courtrooms.

Based on the team's recommendations, multiple sensory items were purchased to support a neurodiverse waiting room in the courthouse and provide sensory items for each dependency courtroom.

Part two of the analysis occurred on Dec. 8, 2022. Dr. Ross and her team provided an individualized ASD support session to the Philadelphia dependency court judges, juvenile court hearing officers and court staff. Dr. Ross highlighted practical ways to implement the recommendations identified through the Autism Environmental Analysis tool.

"The number of families impacted by autism keeps rising. Autism, even in a subtle form, impacts every aspect of individual and family functioning. Justice Dougherty's leadership and comprehensive approach to educating the courts and providing resources regarding autism is necessary, pioneering and inspirational. We were thrilled to be a part of this effort," said Dr. Ross.

"I'm grateful to Judge Murphy and the Philadelphia team for testing this tool and their commitment to creating a more inclusive court environment," said Justice Dougherty.

The Autism and Dependency Court Taskforce's primary goal is to provide a positive dependency court experience for children and parents with ASD. To accomplish this goal, the Taskforce has focused on the following:

- Enhancing awareness and understanding.
- Identifying children and parents with a diagnosis of autism.
- Creating a "Road Map" resource that any county can use to begin their ASD system analysis and reform.
- Implementing practice and system reform that support positive experiences for all children and parents diagnosed with autism within the Pennsylvania dependency system.

Additional Taskforce activities include an expansive education campaign, data collection via the Common Pleas Case Management System and a step-by-step County Autism Road Map.

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#### **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

## Chester County Problem-Solving Courts Hold Collaborative Retreat

On Jan. 27, the Chester County Problem-Solving Courts held a retreat for its core team members.

Under the leadership and guidance of Judge **Ann Marie Wheatcraft**, Chester County has four problem-solving courts: Pretrial Drug Court, Recovery Court, Mental Health Court and Veteran's Court.

The retreat included over 35 core team members from the Probation Office, District Attorney, Public Defender, Chester County Drug and Alcohol, Chester County Human Services, City of Coatesville Police Department, Community Drug and Alcohol and Mental Health treatment providers, along with other essential service providers.

The retreat was a successful team-building event that clearly reinforced the passion and momentum this group puts forth on a daily basis. Participants said the highlight of the day was a motivational drum circle lead by one of the probation officers.

The continued teamwork and collaboration by all involved within the program is quite evident as Chester County has a long-standing history of successful problem-solving courts dating back to November 1997. To date, the county's problem-solving courts have served in excess of 3,800 justice-involved individuals.



## Westmoreland County Holds Drug Treatment Court Graduation Ceremony

On Jan. 12, Judge **Meagan Bilik-DeFazio** and President Judge **Christopher Feliciani** oversaw a ceremony celebrating the graduation of three participants from Westmoreland County Drug Treatment Court at the Westmoreland County Courthouse.

"We are so proud of the outstanding accomplishments of our graduates," said President Judge Feliciani. "Each of them have demonstrated that where there is a will to change, with perseverance and commitment, anything is possible."

"This graduation also reflects an incredibly dedicated drug treatment team of professionals guiding our participants each step of their journey."

Since Westmoreland County Adult Drug Treatment Court's inception in Sept. 2015, 64 participants have graduated from the program.



Judges Feliciani and Bilik-DeFazio congratulating a treatment court participant.

# Northumberland County Uses Grants to Expand Court Programs and Services

In the private sector and nonprofit community, grant funding can be a lifeline to the success and future of the organization – county governments and the courts are no different. Since employing a grant writer, Northumberland County has been able to secure over \$10 million in grant funding for various county projects.

The largest grant that has been obtained for services was the ultra-competitive Rural Response to Opioid Pandemic Grant from the federal government. The process and the grant came to fruition from involvement in the county's opioid coalition.

"These types of grants are extremely important. This is especially so for places like Northumberland County which is limited on financial resources to properly address these issues," said Justin Skavery, the county's grant writer.

The grant pulled different partners together to work towards a common goal. The courts, probation, county drug and alcohol and the United Way all worked together to start the program and expand into several different programs that have been developed from this grant.

"The programs that are funded through these grants usually have some public engagement component. This is important because it shows the public that different levels of government (local, state and federal) and government partners are working together for the well-being of the community," he said.

Using grant funds, the county has been able to provide mental health assistance for prisoners, establish a vivitrol program to treat prisoners struggling with alcohol or opioid addiction and help secure transitional housing.

The county has also been awarded grants for diversionary programs like the Law Enforcement Treatment Initiative – a collaborative effort through the Pennsylvania Attorney General's office, local police and county drug and alcohol department to connect individuals suffering from substance use disorder with treatment options.

"Successfully obtaining grants allows us to provide services to individuals that need them the most but realistically would not gain access," said Northumberland County District Court Administrator **Kevin O'Hearn**.

*"The grants have allowed the courts to have access to different assistance and diversionary programs with the intent to help people and keep them from being incarcerated. The goal is to provide opportunities to people to make them productive members of society."*

The collaboration with the United Way, Central Susquehanna Opportunities and different county departments has led to numerous successful grant awards through the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) and other entities.

The courts, specifically juvenile probation, are also working with county Children and Youth (C & Y) through grants and other funding to provide truancy programs in all the local school districts. Juvenile probation assigns a probation officer to each school through funding provided by C & Y in conjunction with school administration to combat the truancy problems in schools.

In addition, a Magisterial District Truancy Court has been established to hold formal hearings as a last resort prior to dependency placement.

The work that has been done in the truancy program along with participating as a Family Engagement Initiative county, has allowed the number of individuals in care through C & Y to be reduced from around 300 to less than 100.

Lastly, additional grants were obtained by the county to renovate the county courthouse.

Grants were utilized to conduct a feasibility and engineering study for renovations, offset the actual cost of renovations to keep the historical nature of the courthouse and provide ionized clean fresh air through the central air system throughout the building.

The grant funding allowed the county to maximize county dollars so that the law library could also be converted into a much-needed fourth courtroom and unused space outside Courtroom No. 1 could be transitioned into a conference room.

"Success breeds success. If you can get one grant and show you did a good job implementing it, that opens the door for other funding. The grantor likes to see their funds spent appropriately and if you can demonstrate that, then they likely will continue to give you funding," Skavery said.



# Legislative Roundup

by Damian J. Wachter, Esq.

**Members of the House and Senate were sworn in on Jan. 3 to commence the legislative session that will run until Nov. 30, 2024. The partisan makeup of the Senate is 28-22 in favor of the GOP. Readers should note that this includes the result of a special election won by the GOP, but the new senator is not yet sworn in.**

In the House, the makeup is 102-101 in favor of the Democrats. Like the Senate, it reflects the results of special elections, three of them, won by Democrats, but the new members are not yet sworn in. Importantly, the Senate special election referenced above was won by a House GOP member. Therefore, when the member resigns from the House to take the Senate seat, the makeup will be 102-100 and another House vacancy will occur.

Further uncertainty exists in the House as Republican leadership voted with the entire Democratic Caucus to elect Rep. Mark Rozzi (D-Berks) as Speaker of the House. Rozzi is not caucusing with either party, and his affiliated or independent status will be an important factor in the partisan makeup of the House when it reconvenes on February 21.

The uncertainty in the House has resulted in the inability to appoint committee chairs, currently the prerogative of the speaker, or compose committee membership, done via the rules. Thus, legislation cannot be introduced, referred to a committee, or considered.

The Senate was able to organize, adopt rules, appoint chairs and members of committees, and debate and

consider legislation during the only week the chamber was in session. Legislation of interest is discussed below.

## **Separate and Distinct Constitutional Amendments**

### **Two-Year Window to Commence and Action Arising from Childhood Sexual Abuse**

#### **Concurrent Orders and Resolutions**

#### **Voter ID**

Prior Passage: [J.R. 2021-2](#) and [J.R. 2022-1](#)

[Senate Bill 1](#) amends Art. I, § 11, opening a two-year window to commence an action arising from childhood sexual abuse that would otherwise be barred by a statutory limitation period. Additionally, the resolution seeks to amend Art. III, § 9, adding “disapproval of regulations” to the list of exceptions to the requirement that concurrent resolutions passed by the House and Senate must be presented to the governor for approval. Finally, the bill amends Art. VII, § 1, requiring valid identification to vote regardless of voting method.

Under the resolution, the Secretary of the Commonwealth is required to submit the amendments to the qualified electors as separate ballot questions at the first primary election at least three months after being agreed to by the legislature. Given that the deadline for notice and publication of the amendments has passed for the May 2023 municipal primary, this language would delay the ballot questions until the April 2024 general primary and will likely be removed if further action on the bill is taken.

The bill passed the Senate [28-20](#) on Jan. 11. It awaits referral to a committee in the House.

## Constitutional Amendment Election Audits

Prior Passage: [J.R. 2022-1](#)

[Senate Bill 130](#) amends Art. VII, adding a section to require the General Assembly to legislatively provide for the auditing of elections by the auditor general. The bill was reported from the Senate State Government Committee [8-3](#) on Jan. 9 and awaits further Senate action.



{*Damian Wachter, Esq.  
is the director of  
Legislative Affairs.*}

## Movin' on up

Several familiar faces within the Appellate Courts and the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC) have been promoted into new positions.

**Chris Nace** has been named the executive administrator for the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania. He has spent 18 years working in the court system, with the last four as the executive administrator of the Superior Court.

"I am honored and excited about my new role with the Supreme Court, and I look forward to working with the chief justice, justices and staff members," said Nace.

Succeeding Nace as the new executive administrator for the Superior Court is **Jennifer Traxler**. Traxler previously worked as a York County assistant public defender prior to moving to the AOPC legal department in 2008. Since 2014, she served as the deputy prothonotary of the Superior Court's Middle District.

**Damian Wachter** has recently been named director of Legislative Affairs. Wachter has been with the AOPC for just over ten years, serving first as assistant director and then this previous year as acting director. Prior to joining the AOPC, he held staff roles in leadership and committees in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives and spent time in the private sector in the government relations field.

With the retirement of Administrative Services Manager Bill Hollenbach in December, AOPC employee **David Jones** has stepped into the role of manager. Jones has been with the AOPC for nine years in administrative services, leading the facilities team with a strong focus on providing service to AOPC/IT and maintaining the AOPC's data center. Jones has extensive facilities experience with large organizations including Sunoco, Volvo Construction Equipment, CBRE and Oki Data Americas.

Congratulations to Chris Nace, Jennifer Traxler, Damian Wachter and David Jones!



(top to bottom) Chris Nace, Jennifer Traxler,  
Damian Wachter, David Jones

# New Upgrades to the Guardianship Tracking System

By **Amy Whitworth**, AOPC/IT analyst manager



The Guardianship Tracking System (GTS) has recently received a comprehensive upgrade that provides updated security, enhanced user experience and system enhancements centered around court business and operations.

The changes were released on Dec. 11, after months of work from AOPC/IT.

Users will experience streamlined navigation and usability by viewing through tabs, working with icons and reviewing result sets on scrollbars.

Additional system enhancements were made to Case Actions, Guardian Alerts, Notifications and Ad hoc Reports that provides updated case processing for court staff.

An important aspect of this upgrade is that the AOPC was able to offer essentially a new statewide system, with enhanced features and greater performance, without the need to expend time and funds to train staff on a new system.

New tutorial videos, detailed reference documents and free webinars were made available to guardians and court users to help them navigate the new system without disrupting their daily operations.

Every enhancement made to GTS has the dual goal of enhancing the guardian or court user experience, as well as leveraging the power of our systems to keep vulnerable people safer and to better secure their assets under court supervision.

One of the significant changes to GTS functionality allows a judge issuing an alert on a guardian to delay the electronic notification of the alert to the guardian.

Prior to this enhancement, at the moment an alert was recorded in GTS, an electronic notification, accompanied by an email, was immediately sent to all court office staff with an active case for the guardian, as well as to the guardian him/herself.

Now, this enhancement provides greater flexibility in who is immediately notified of the alert, allowing judges to communicate this critical information without potentially interfering with an ongoing investigation.

The delivery of the new GTS was a coordinated release in alignment with changes to the annual reports guardians must submit. These report changes were adopted by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court at the recommendation of the Orphans' Court Procedural Rules Committee, working in conjunction with the GTS Governance Committee led by Senior Judge **Paula Francisco Ott**.

An example of the changes to the mandatory reports facilitates the collection of the incapacitated person's physical location at the time the inventory of assets is filed. The collection of this information at the inventory filing provides for greater understanding of the incapacitated person's wellbeing and circumstance much earlier in the monitoring process.

Continuing to hone our statistical capabilities better informs the Advisory Council on Elder Justice, and other stakeholders responsible for guardianship reform, leading to data-driven solutions aimed at improving the lives of those living under a guardianship.

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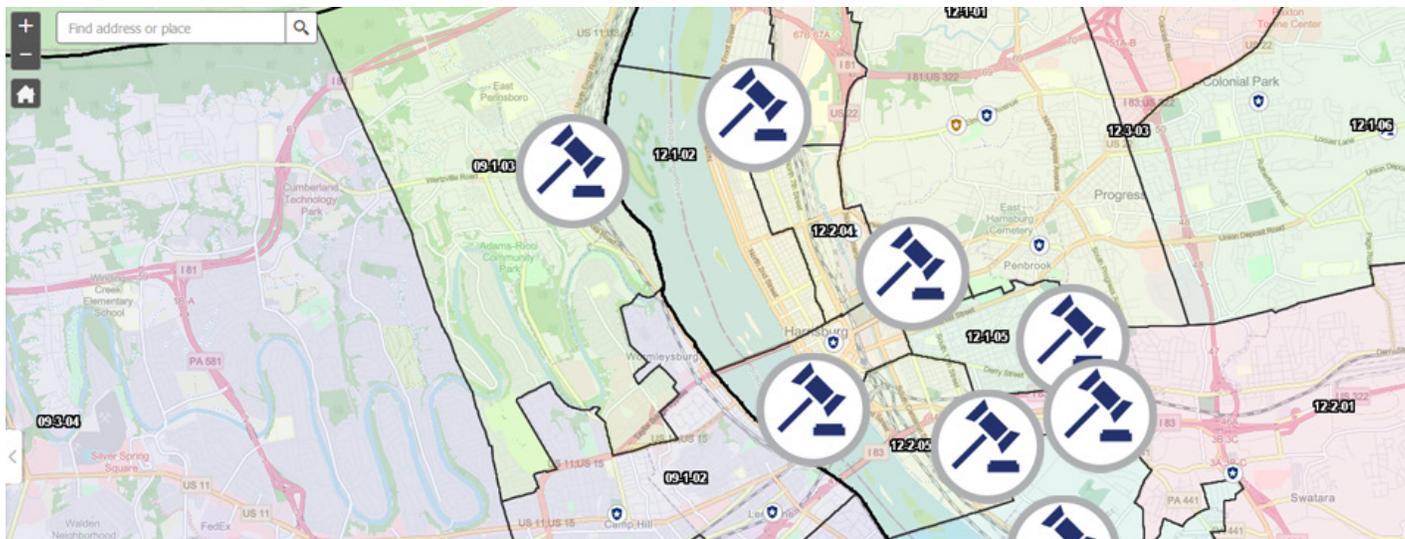


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# Re-establishing the Magisterial Districts



The Pennsylvania Supreme Court, with the assistance of the AOPC, is in the final stages of completing the magisterial district re-establishment project – also referred to as realignment or redistricting.

Re-establishment is the process by which Pennsylvania's judicial districts, according to statute, review the number and boundaries of the magisterial districts within each of the Commonwealth's 60 judicial districts. It takes place following the official reporting of the decennial U.S. census. Only the First Judicial District (Philadelphia), which has no magisterial district judges (MDJs), does not participate.

This comprehensive and demanding analysis helps ensure the effective administration of justice in the magisterial districts throughout the commonwealth, and that the current configuration of each magisterial district will appropriately serve its residents over the next decade.

While many proposals recommended maintaining the status quo, others recommended the shifting of boundaries to more equitably distribute the workload among the MDJs in a county. Likewise, some requested to eliminate one or more districts in their county or, where necessary, add a district.

Some summary takeaways from the 2021-22 re-establishment project are as follows:

- 38 counties re-established, or maintained the existing boundaries of all magisterial districts.
- 18 counties opted to re-align some or all of their magisterial districts.
- Seven counties eliminate at least one magisterial district.
- One judicial district (Lehigh County) added a magisterial district, to be filled in the municipal election of 2023. Lehigh County is also one of the seven counties eliminating a magisterial district.

It's important to note that proposals can become effective immediately upon issuance of the final order, or in the future, when a sitting MDJ's term expires, or he or she reaches mandatory retirement age.

The AOPC and the Judicial District Operations and Programs department would like to recognize the time and hard work that the president judges, court administration and magisterial district judges put into their plans to ensure balanced and equitable workloads within their districts.

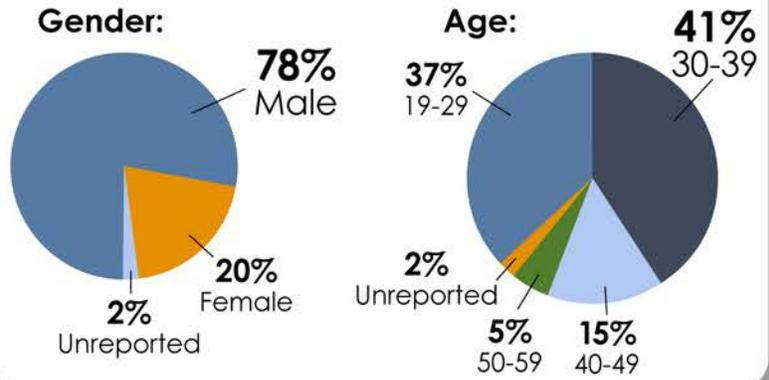
County proposals and final orders are available for review at [www.pacourts.us/courts/minor-courts/realignment-orders](http://www.pacourts.us/courts/minor-courts/realignment-orders).

# Human Trafficking in Pennsylvania



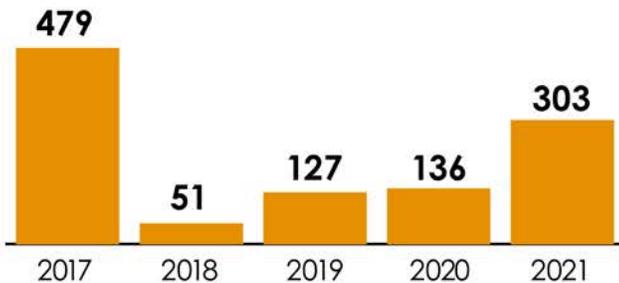
**Human trafficking** is a type of human rights abuse where people profit from the exploitation of others – mainly through the use of **force, fraud or coercion** to manipulate victims into engaging in sex acts or labor/services in exchange for something of value. Those under age 18 who exchange sex for something of value are human trafficking victims, regardless of whether force, fraud or coercion is involved.

## Demographics of defendants convicted:

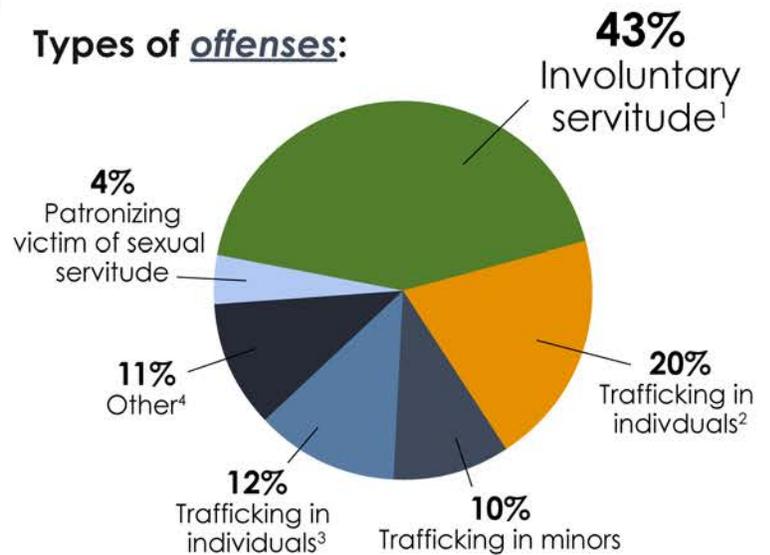


**259** human-trafficking cases were filed over the past five years.

**1,096** total human-trafficking offenses were filed:



## Types of offenses:



<sup>1</sup> duress through force, debt coercion, physical restraint, etc.

<sup>2</sup> recruits/entices/solicits

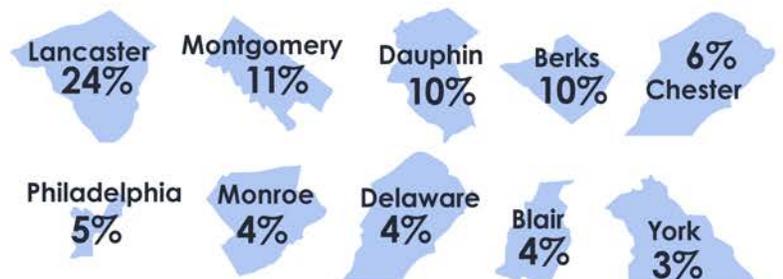
<sup>3</sup> benefits financially

<sup>4</sup> obstruction of justice, unlawful conduct, nonpayment of wages etc.

## Victims of human trafficking may:

1. Not have access to their own **travel or ID documents**
2. Not be in control of their own **financial records, money or bank account**
3. Have very few **personal possessions**
4. Work excessively **long/unusual hours** with little or no pay
5. Not able to clarify **their address/living situation**

## Counties with highest number of human-trafficking offenses filed:



# Northampton Judge Wins Title for Harness Racing

Northampton County Common Pleas Judge **Anthony Beltrami** was recently voted United States Harness Writers Association's Amateur Driver of the Year for 2022.

Beltrami was first introduced to the sport of harness racing in childhood by his father, who would take him and his three brothers to watch the races.

"I fell in love with the sport the first time I saw a race," Beltrami said.

His interest continued to grow when his father got his driver's license to race and bought a stable of his own horses. During college summers, Beltrami kept his passion alive by taking care of and training racehorses for a stable at Pocono Downs.

"I was considering harness racing as a career, but decided to go to law school as something to fall back on. When I did well in law school, I decided to pursue a career in the law, with harness racing as something to fall back on," he said.

He was reintroduced to the sport in 2013 when a trainer friend opened a harness racing training center in Northampton County. He got his driver's license the following year.

He explained that each horse is an individual that responds differently to things, so you have to figure out how to communicate with each of them by the way you handle them.

"In the beginning, it was hard to get owners and trainers to give me a chance to drive. Once I started winning races though, I started getting better horses to drive and more opportunities to drive."

Beltrami said that some things he learned in racing have naturally spilled over into his role as judge.

"To be a good driver, you have to be alert, intuitive, focused and patient. I think you need the same qualities to be effective in your role as a judge," he said.



*Northampton County Common Pleas Judge Anthony Beltrami*

Beltrami had his best year as a driver in 2022, visiting the winner's circle 36 times in amateur competition, racing with the top clubs in the Northeast.

As for his future plans, he plans on racing as long as he is physically able to.

"My parents always taught me that you can succeed in anything if you commit yourself to success. Driving racehorses is definitely the hardest thing I've ever learned to do, and I was not that good in the beginning. But like anything else, I committed myself to succeeding, and it all worked out."

Beltrami received the United States Harness Writers Association's Amateur Driver of the Year for 2022 Award at the Dan Patch Awards Banquet on Feb. 19 at Rosen Shingle Creek Resort in Orlando, Florida.



## DEPARTMENT SPOTLIGHT:

# Office of Children and Families in the Courts



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The Office of Children and Families in the Courts (OCFC) seeks to ensure that every child grows up in a safe, nurturing and permanent family.

OCFC assists and supports judicial districts in the **identification and implementation of best practices that promote safety, wellbeing and timely permanence for dependent children.** Since 2006, OCFC has helped save \$83 million annually through a 30 percent decrease in the number of children awaiting permanency.

In addition, OCFC supports the Children's Roundtable Initiative – a three-tiered infrastructure that allows for effective administration and communication between local, regional and statewide representatives with expertise in dependency matters. This includes local Children's Roundtables, Leadership Roundtables and a State Roundtable.

This structure facilitates the identification of statewide issues that impact child permanency. When a statewide issue is identified, statewide roundtable workgroups are

convened to study and relay consequent findings and recommendations about a specific area of dependency and child wellbeing. Recent workgroup areas include: autism, kinship care, hearing officer education, trauma, drug and alcohol, dependency bench book and congregate care.

In recognition of the integral role courts play in charting the course for children who are the subject of abuse, neglect, foster care, termination of parental rights and adoption proceedings, OCFC is primarily funded via a federal Court Improvement Program grant. The program provides resources and technical assistance to enhance and promote innovation in court operations and practices.

Major areas of focus include supporting judicial leadership, collaborating with interdependent systems, educating the bench and bar, enhancing decision making with data and promoting the use of alternative dispute resolution.

### **more information**

For more information, visit <https://ocfcpacourts.us/>.

# Tips for More Effective Time Management



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When daily tasks build up and you feel overwhelmed, it's difficult to know where to begin. To make things more complicated, you may find yourself easily distracted by activities that are more fun or help you avoid doing what must be done.

You may also be struggling to focus on completing one task at a time, instead trying to accomplish too much all at once, which can prevent you from succeeding.

There are many fast and easy ways to help you reorganize, prioritize, and start being productive. If you incorporate even a few of the recommendations below into your attempts to better manage your time, you'll start creating small successes that lead to big changes and even more time to spend on the things you enjoy most!

## **For better time management:**

1. Create a list of priorities on a daily, weekly, and/or monthly basis.
2. Be sure your list is organized so that the most important and time pressing items will be completed first. For example, before you decide to do a task, think to yourself, "What should I be doing right now?" Let that thought be your guide as you look for which task to do next.
3. If you're having trouble getting started, pick an easy task and when you're done, check it off your list. After one or two of these, you will begin to feel the accomplishment that comes with completing a task and will have the motivation to approach the more difficult items.
4. Arrange your work day so that you can keep interruptions to a minimum. Try to turn on your voicemail at certain times to avoid getting off task.
5. Schedule a specific time to check and reply to emails to avoid frequent interruptions.
6. Set deadlines and create a daily/hourly workflow schedule to ensure your task will be completed before that deadline.
7. Be realistic about your daily energy patterns. Complete important tasks when your energy is at its peak, and then save more routine tasks for when your energy is lower.

## **Factors that can hinder productivity:**

1. Don't be too much of a perfectionist as you move through tasks. Focus on getting the task done, rather than always getting it done perfectly.
2. Don't take on everything yourself; delegate duties to appropriate coworkers or people in your life, when possible.
3. Don't get off track. Learn to say "no" instead of sacrificing valuable time.
4. Don't spend too much time on minor decisions. Save nit-picking for bigger things.
5. Don't burn yourself out. Take breaks and go for a quick walk, talk to a friend, eat a nice lunch, etc. Giving your brain a rest and rejuvenating your body will make you more productive in the long run.

Try out the tips and see which ones help you most. Do you recognize any that have helped before? Mix and match or add your own; either way, it's time to increase your productivity, knock those items off your to-do list, and let go of unnecessary stress.



## COSCA offers new guidance for courting public trust and confidence through communication

To help courts establish themselves as a trusted source for information, the Conference of State Court Administrators (COSCA) has published new guidance for developing timely, accurate and understandable communication.

In "[Courting Public Trust and Confidence: Effective Communication in the Digital Age](#)," COSCA examines three types of "bad information"—disinformation, malinformation, and misinformation—and provides guidance on how to respond without compromising the integrity of the court.

"Now, more than ever, it is critical for courts to take a proactive approach to communication," said Karl R. Hade, COSCA president and Executive Secretary of the Supreme Court of Virginia. "It is up to us as judicial leaders to position the court as the trusted source of information."

The paper suggests that courts need to break away from traditional responses, such as silence, allowing orders/opinions to speak for themselves, an indirect response through a proxy, and limiting public information officers to "no comment" replies.

Instead, COSCA says, courts should look to these guidelines for effective communication with today's audiences:

- Use summaries directed to a general audience.
- Provide transparency in more cases but particularly in high-profile or high-stakes cases.
- Respond promptly to bad information.
- Use a restrained response to undue criticism of the court system or of a specific judicial officer.

- Increase social media presence.
- Continue to expand civics education activities.

Additionally, COSCA provides several recommendations for combating bad information:

- Consider judicial code of conduct amendments that would allow judicial officers to directly respond to bad information and targeted campaigns based on bad information.
- Provide best practices training for court staff and judges on how to respond to bad information and defuse heated media coverage.
- Develop a communications plan and trained team to help courts monitor and respond to bad information and publicize positive information in a variety of formats.
- Consider establishing a media committee with media organizations, journalists, attorneys, and representatives of the court.
- Offer plain language summaries of appellate opinions and high-interest trial court cases.
- Provide greater transparency in all cases, but particularly for high-profile cases.

For more information on this paper and others, visit the [COSCA website](#).

# Around the Judiciary



A proud moment as a judge and a mother, Lehigh County Common Pleas Judge **Michele A. Varricchio** participated in the swearing-in ceremonies for the opening day of the 2023-2024 Legislative Session on Jan. 3. Included in the group was her son, Nick Miller, the newly elected senator in the 14th District.



In Fayette County, Judge **Steve P. Leskinen** was sworn-in as President Judge by Judge **John F. Wagner, Jr.**, who also unveiled his portrait that will hang in Courtroom No. 2.



Supreme Court of Pennsylvania Justice **P. Kevin Brobson** met with Kentucky Supreme Court Justice Christopher Shea Nickell and his wife, Dr. Carolyn Sue Watson, as well as members of the Pa. Lions State Council, as they toured the state capitol, including the Supreme Court Courtroom. Justice Nickell was in Pa. to attend a Pa. Lions State Council dinner in Hershey as a special guest.



Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice **Sallie Mundy** swearing in members of the Senate Republican Caucus on Jan. 3.



City and State Pennsylvania recently recognized Superior Court Judge **Carolyn Nichols** as one of the state's most influential leaders in the 2023 Power of Diversity: Black 100 list.

This list recognizes the most influential Black Pennsylvanians in politics, nonprofits, business and other arenas.

Nichols began her term on the Superior Court in early 2018 after serving as a judge on the Philadelphia County Court of Common Pleas since 2011.

Her public service experience spans decades, including time as Philadelphia Housing Development Corporation's legal counsel, deputy secretary of external affairs for the Philadelphia Mayor's Office and assistant city solicitor.

Nichols is a member of the International Association of Women Judges, the National Association of Women Judges, the National Bar Association Judicial Council and the Philadelphia Bar Association.



Love is in the air! For the third year in a row, Berks County Magisterial District Judge **Eric Taylor** spent Valentine's Day officiating back-to-back weddings – a tradition he hopes to continue for years to come.



On Feb. 1, AOPC's Data Governance Committee conducted a training for departmental data stewards and data users at the PJC. The objective of the training was to update data users on the policies and procedures for data management, and to launch the AOPC Technology Sharing Library – a new internal platform that acts as a central repository of data visualization/graphics tools and related software.



AOPC staff **Kelly McClain, Andrew Ginder, Kim Nieves and Ami Levin**



In October, a father and son duo worked simultaneous shifts at Pittsburgh Municipal Court. Senior District Judge **Randy Martini** adjudicated cases in domestic violence court, while his son, District Judge **Nicholas Martini**, adjudicated criminal court cases at the same time.

## 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](mailto:CommunicationsOffice@pacourts.us).



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