

AOPC CONNECTED



Issue 2, 2023

In this issue

Read about the Pennsylvania Courts' enhanced focus on mental health, a new app for Veterans Treatment Court professionals, a department spotlight on Judicial District Security and more.

Pennsylvania Courts Enhance Focus on Mental Health

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, nearly one in five U.S. adults live with a mental illness.

State courts, including Pennsylvania, are adapting to meet the changing needs of the community and provide better outcomes for those with mental health issues who are involved in the criminal justice system by supporting specialized mental health courts, expanding diversion programs and implementing training programs for judges and court personnel.

In an effort to bring attention to and address the complex mental health issues that can arise in the justice system, the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) created the National Judicial Task Force to Examine State Courts' Responses to Mental Illness.

The Task Force spent two years developing tools, resources, best practices and policy recommendations culminating in its [Final Report and Recommendations](#).

Earlier this year, a Pennsylvania delegation of court and executive branch personnel, led by Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice **Kevin Dougherty**, was selected as part of a NCSC/State Justice Institute grant-funded initiative to learn more about Miami-Dade's innovative programs that address behavioral health for justice-involved individuals.

The two-day workshop in late January built upon the judiciary's earlier discussions and work at a CCJ/COSCA summit on court and community responses to behavioral health issues, held last June.

With growing funding opportunities and attention on these issues, the courts anticipate the development of pilot programs and additional resources dedicated to making systemic change.

As part of these efforts to better understand and address the needs of court-involved individuals with mental illness, the AOPC recently hired a Behavioral Health Administrator – **Mike Harper**.

The position was created in Pennsylvania, and in other states, because the court system is experiencing a marked increase in both the frequency and the intensity of behavioral health challenges of court-involved children, adults and families.

"This initiative arises from our Supreme Court's desire to examine and improve courts' responses to mental illness," said **Joe Mittleman**, director of Judicial District Operations and Programs.



Mike Harper, Behavioral Health administrator

"The Behavioral Health administrator is expected to lead this effort by monitoring and evaluating the quality of existing behavioral health court programs and services, providing technical assistance to local jurisdictions interested in establishing behavioral health programs, conducting training for judges, court employees and mental health professionals, and serving as liaison between the AOPC and judges, government officials, criminal justice professionals and others about mental and behavioral health matters."

As part of his duties, Harper will collect and analyze data on mental health issues in the courts; monitor and assess the quality of current programs; assist local jurisdictions seeking to improve their responses to individuals and families; and conduct trainings for judicial officers and staff on mental health issues.

"I am most looking forward to collaborating with the judiciary, professionals from other disciplines and branches of government and local communities, to ensure that children, teens, adults and families can access quality recovery supports when they are needed," Harper said.

"I am excited that the Court is taking a broad public health view that focuses on early intervention, deflection and diversion out of the court system when warranted, while at the same time working to build court processes and programs that utilize best practices and maximize positive outcomes for individuals with behavioral health issues and the community."

Prior to joining the AOPC, Harper worked as an attorney with the Office of the Public Defender of Delaware County for 22 years, where he created a mitigation unit to help

incarcerated clients with competency issues due to serious mental illness, intellectual disabilities or brain trauma.

He worked with others to develop and implement a drug court, mental health court, veterans court and crisis intervention training in Delaware County.

A founding member of the Pa. Treatment Court Association, Harper conducted legislative outreach and worked with the Pa. Supreme Court's accreditation committee to help establish high-quality specialty courts throughout the state.

In addition to having served on various boards, committees and work groups to assess, improve and advocate for justice and behavioral health services, he developed and operated a family advocacy program focused on early intervention, primarily helping children with issues related to mental health, special education, disabilities, bullying, school discipline and truancy.

"We are confident that Mike's background and experience in this field makes him the ideal person to lead this effort," said Mittleman.



(l) Councilman Bob Macey and Justice Donohue with the Allegheny County proclamation
(r) Justice Donohue receiving the award jewel box from Amen Corner President David Shrager

Justice Donohue Receives Award for Judicial Leadership and Excellence

On April 17, Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice Christine Donohue was honored with the Judge Robert E. Dauer Award for Judicial Leadership and Excellence at the Amen Corner's 61st Annual Judicial Reception.

In addition to the award, Justice Donohue received proclamations from the Governor, the Senate of Pennsylvania, U.S. Senator Robert P. Casey, Jr., Commonwealth of Pennsylvania House of Representatives, the City of Pittsburgh Office of the Mayor, Pittsburgh City Council and the Allegheny County Office of County Council proclaiming Mon., April 17, 2023 as "Honorable Christine Donohue Day."

Justice Donohue joins a growing list of past and present Supreme Court justices who have received this award including Chief Justice Ronald Castille (2014), Chief Justice Debra Todd (2015), Chief Justice Max Baer (2019) and Chief Justice Emeritus Thomas Saylor (2021).

Congratulations to Justice Donohue on this well-deserved recognition!

Editors

Stacey Witalec
Kim Bathgate

Writers

Casey Scheffler

Contributors

Patti Campbell
Rhonda Hocker
Stephen Baldwin

Graphic Design

Gretchen Smith

Photography

Kyle Kauffman

Court Administrator of PA

Geoff Moulton

Deputy Court Administrator of PA

Andrea B. Tuominen

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

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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

New Court Administrator Named

After a long career as a lawyer, and seven years working in the Pennsylvania judicial system, Court Administrator **Geoff Moulton** announced his retirement come the end of September.

Geoff has devoted the bulk of his career to public service. Before taking his current position in 2020, he served as counsel to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, an appointed judge on the Pennsylvania Superior Court, first deputy general counsel to Governor Wolf and as an assistant United States Attorney in Philadelphia.

In addition, he has been chief counsel to a United States Senator, taught for many years at Widener University Delaware Law School and represented media clients in private practice. Following his graduation from Columbia Law School in 1984, he served as a law clerk on both the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit and the United States Supreme Court.

On April 21, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court voted to appoint Deputy Court Administrator **Andrea Tuominen** to succeed Geoff as court administrator.

"On behalf of the Court, I express sincere thanks and appreciation to Geoff for his commitment and dedication to public service and the judiciary," Chief Justice **Debra Todd** said. "Geoff came to the judiciary as the pandemic was unfolding and led us through more than two years of uncertainty. Through his leadership, the court system remained open and accessible to the public.

"We are grateful for his professionalism and integrity and wish him and his family nothing but the best as he transitions to a well-deserved retirement."

"As always, when one chapter closes, a new one begins and as such, the Court looks forward to working with Andrea Tuominen, as she transitions



Andrea Tuominen and Geoff Moulton

to the role of court administrator. There is no one more prepared to step into this important role than Andrea, who has served in various roles as part of the court administrative offices for three decades. The breadth and depth of experience and expertise she brings to this role will serve the staff, the Court and all court users well."

Andrea 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.

An active member of the Pennsylvania Bar Association, she has served as co-chair of the Commission on Women in the Profession, various executive council positions and is currently co-chair of the Mentor Committee.

We wish the best to Geoff in his upcoming retirement and thank him for his time with the AOPC and welcome Andrea into her new role.



Legislative Roundup

by Damian J. Wachter, Esq.

While legislative action has been relatively light, the General Assembly, and most specifically the House, continues to deal with changing membership and razor-thin majorities. Coming on the heels of three special elections that were conducted on Feb. 7, the House addressed constitutional and statutory amendments – further discussed below – for victims of childhood sexual abuse. Thereafter, Rep. Mark Rozzi resigned as speaker of the House and Joanna McClinton was elected as the first female speaker on Feb. 28 by a vote of 102-99.

Since that time, two more House vacancies have occurred – a GOP vacancy in Northumberland County and a Democratic vacancy in Delaware County. Currently, the majority in the House favors the Democrats by a slim 101-100 margin, with the two vacancies scheduled to be filled in the municipal primary on May 16. In the Senate, the GOP maintains its solid majority at 28-22 with no current vacancies.

Constitutional Amendment Two-Year Civil Action Window

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

[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. Language passed by the Senate providing for two other constitutional amendments – repealing the requirement that legislative disapproval of regulations must be presented to the governor and voter identification – was removed by the House Judiciary Committee.

The original bill with the three amendments passed the Senate 28-20 on Jan. 11. The amended version including only the two-year window was reported from the House Judiciary Committee by a vote of 12-9 on March 1 and re-referred to the committee for the purpose of a public hearing, which was held on March 29.

[House Bill 1](#) amends Art. I, § 11, similarly opening a two-year window. The bill was reported from the House Judiciary Committee by a vote of 12-9 on March 1 and re-referred to the committee for the purpose of a public hearing, which was held on March 29.

[Special Session House Bill 1](#) amends Art. I, § 11, similarly opening a two-year window. It passed the House 161-40 on February 24.

Title 42 Amendment Two-Year Civil Action Window

[House Bill 2](#) amends Title 42, providing individuals with a two-year window to bring a civil action arising from sexual

abuse if the person was under 18 years of age at the time the cause of action accrued, and the limitation period has expired.

[Special Session House Bill 2](#) amends Title 42, providing for the same statutory change. It passed the House 134-67 on Feb. 24.

Determinate Sentence in Summary Traffic Cases

[Senate Bill 453](#) amends Titles 42 and 75, addressing *Commonwealth v. Eid*, 249 A.3d 1030 (Pa. 2021), *Birchfield v. North Dakota*, 136 S.Ct. 2160 (2016) and *Commonwealth v. Chichkin*, 232 A.3d 959 (Pa. Super. Ct. 2018). The bill allows a court to impose a determinate sentence for summary violations under Title 75 when the maximum sentence of total confinement imposed is 90 days or less. The bill was unanimously reported from Senate Transportation and is pending further action in the Senate.

Juvenile Justice Task Force

[Senate Bill 167](#) amends the Human Services Code, requiring the court upon a finding of dependency, to enter an order of disposition that is best suited for the safety, protection and physical, mental and moral welfare of the child, in accordance with the mandates of [42 Pa.C.S. Ch. 63](#). Upon a finding of delinquency, the court must enter an order of disposition that is consistent with protection of the public, the imposition of accountability for offenses committed and the development of competencies to enable the child to become a responsible and productive member of the community.

[Senate Bill 169](#) amends Title 42, requiring disposition review hearings at least every three months to ensure that a child committed to out-of-home placement is receiving necessary services and treatment, and terms and conditions of the disposition are being met.

[Senate Bill 170](#), amends Titles 18 and 42, reducing current timeframes for the expungement of juvenile records and opening the process to certain offenses not currently eligible. The legislation establishes new duties for juvenile probation officers (JPOs), requiring the JPO to notify the court to initiate expungement of juvenile records.

All three bills were reported unanimously from committee and are pending in the Senate.

Indigent Defense

[Senate Bill 371](#) establishes the Indigent Defense Advisory Committee (Committee) within the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency. Under the bill, the makeup of the Committee includes several *ex officio*

non-voting members, as well as judicial, legislative and executive appointments. The chief justice has eight appointments, including three judges, a chief public defender and four public defenders from different classes of counties.

The duties of the Committee include proposing minimum standards for the delivery of effective indigent defense services and attorneys providing indigent defense services and developing and submitting proposed standards for consideration by the Supreme Court. Additionally, the Committee is required to develop in partnership with the AOPC and the Juvenile Court Judges Commission data requests regarding criminal cases involving public defenders and analyze the data to identify trends and effectiveness of indigent defense services and the impact of adopted standards.

Finally, the legislation establishes the Indigent Defense Grant Program. Funding sources include appropriations and transfers from the General Fund, special funds, federal funds and other sources made available to the program. Permitted uses of the funding include grant and training activities outlined in the bill. The Committee reviews and comments on grant applications and ensures that funding or services provided are geographically dispersed. Grants awarded must be consistent with the standards established by the Committee and those adopted by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court.

The bill was reported unanimously from the Senate Judiciary Committee and is pending further action in the Senate.

TikTok Ban

[Senate Bill 379](#) prohibits the downloading or installation of, or the accessing of an unauthorized application, on state-owned electronic devices or networks. The term unauthorized application is defined as “the social networking service TikTok or any successor application or service ...” The bill passed the Senate 49-0 and was referred to the House State Government Committee.



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

AOPC Hires New Distance Learning Coordinator

At the end of February, AOPC Judicial Education welcomed a new member to their team.

Jim Beeghley will be responsible for assisting in the design, development and delivery of distance learning programs for judges across the state.

"I am looking forward to playing a role in delivering high-quality distance learning programs that enhance the skills and knowledge of judges and improve the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the court system in Pennsylvania," said Beeghley.

In collaboration with subject matter experts, Beeghley will help the Judicial Education Department create engaging and interactive programs using various delivery methods – including live online sessions,

pre-recorded videos and eLearning modules.

One of his first tasks will be to research and implement a learning management system that will ensure the smooth delivery of educational and training content.

Having previously worked in K-12 and higher education, as well as for the Pa. Department of Education in the Bureau of Educational Technology, Beeghley has over 25 years of experience providing leadership to schools in the area of educational technology.

He holds a bachelor's degree in Computer Science from California University of Pennsylvania, a master's degree in Educational Technology from Waynesburg University and

a doctorate degree in Instructional Technology at Duquesne University.

Please join us in welcoming Jim to the AOPC!



Jim Beeghley, distance learning coordinator



AOPC Holds Donation Drives

Throughout the month of March, the AOPC held simultaneous donation drives to collect items for two different organizations. The first drive coincided with Fun Fest, where adoptable dogs from Canine Rescue of Central Pennsylvania came to visit, and items went directly to their organization. The second drive was held in honor of Women's History Month and collected items for the Shalom House in Harrisburg – a 28-day shelter for women and children that aims to help them find permanent housing, jobs and resources for assistance. Thank you to everyone who brought in donations!

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AOPC/IT Disaster Recovery Team

AOPC/IT – Ready to Respond

By Larry Lichty, senior enterprise IT infrastructure architect

In today's always connected world, we all rely on consistent access to our computer resources. We check email while waiting in line, or retrieve a forgotten file over the weekend, or log on to a system while working remotely.

Providing a high level of availability, AOPC/IT equips our secondary data center with the computer resources needed in case the primary data center experiences a problem. But besides the equipment, AOPC/IT also ensures that staff members have documented and exercised the steps necessary to keep data available and systems running.

Since 2009, to ensure business continuity with minimal impacts, AOPC/IT has executed biennial disaster recovery exercises in the spring. For some applications, the verification of this process is relatively straightforward and only requires the coordination of one or two teams.

However, this is a much more complicated situation for our statewide case management and public facing systems, including MDJS, CPCMS, PACMS and UJS Web Portal (which includes PAePay, PACFile, GTS, DA Link and Docket Sheets). Keeping these complex systems working efficiently requires the orchestrated skills of over a dozen specialized teams within AOPC/IT.

In March 2023, over 50 AOPC/IT staff worked on two full Sundays and late one weeknight to exercise these plans and keep them updated and accurate. These exercises included simulation of both a complete and partial failure of

the primary data center, and systems successfully handled full days of processing from the secondary data center.

As in previous years, the results were positive, as the exercises were completed successfully with no unexpected issues and within the targeted time ranges.

AOPC/IT Director **Russel Montchal** is a long-time advocate of performing these exercises to keep his teams ready to respond to any situation.

"These disaster recovery exercises are essential in ensuring that we can run successfully from either one of our data centers should the need arise," he said.

"Testing has direct impacts on the efficiency and speed in which we can perform the disaster recovery tasks. It also ensures that all documented steps are up to date and accurate, as the architecture and infrastructure of the systems change over time, as do some of our staff supporting them."

Regardless of whether the threat is natural, biological or technical, AOPC/IT is confident that it has everything in place to continue to provide a high level of availability, for all work locations, systems and applications.

This gives each person in the AOPC the reassurance that we can check our email, retrieve that forgotten file, or log on to a work system no matter when and where we need to accomplish our tasks.

Pennsylvania Disciplinary Board Attends Annual NCLDB Conference

By Lauren Chavey, Disciplinary Board communications coordinator

Each year, the [National Council of Lawyer Disciplinary Boards](#) (NCLDB) holds its annual conference, bringing together disciplinary adjudicators and staff from around the country.

This year's conference, held in New Orleans from Feb. 7-9, featured educational sessions on a myriad of subjects ranging from expungement to the use of technology in the disciplinary system.

One of the largest NCLDB member jurisdictions, Pennsylvania has a unique perspective from which to approach its operations. It is also a leader in its utilization of technology in disciplinary proceedings and in providing expanded public access to its work.

Pennsylvania Disciplinary Board Executive Director **Jesse Hereda** and Board Prothonotary **Marcee Sloan** currently serve as President-Elect and Secretary, respectively, of the NCLDB Board of Directors.

Hereda led programming for this year's annual conference where Pennsylvania's delegation included various Disciplinary Board members, hearing committee members and staff, as well as Executive Director of Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers of Pennsylvania, Laurie Besden.

The Honorable John L. Weimer, chief justice of the Louisiana Supreme Court, delivered this year's keynote address. A volunteer firefighter, former educator and amateur painter, Chief Justice Weimer impressed the value of diversity of thought and experience in state disciplinary systems and legal communities at large.

Three conference sessions featured members of the Pennsylvania delegation.

Along with representatives of the Maryland and District of Columbia disciplinary bodies, Hereda sat on a panel which explored both the challenges and opportunities presented by technology compelled by the COVID-19 pandemic and its transformation of the workplace.

Disciplinary Board members David S. Senoff and Shohin H. Vance led a thought-provoking discussion on collateral estoppel within the



Top: Raul Esquivel, executive counsel of the Office of Chief Justice John L. Weimer; Honorable John L. Weimer, chief justice of the Louisiana Supreme Court; and Jesse G. Hereda, executive director of the Disciplinary Board of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania

Bottom: Disciplinary Board Members David S. Senoff (left) and Shohin H. Vance (right) present on collateral estoppel.



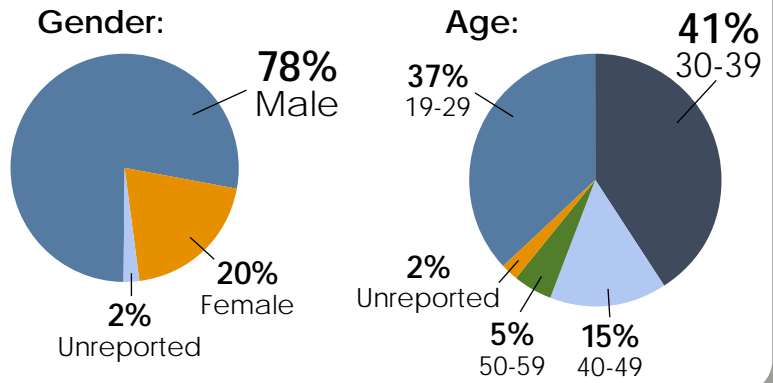
disciplinary process, and Laurie Besden kicked off a session on lawyer mental health and well-being that also included directors of the Arkansas, Louisiana and Texas lawyer assistance programs.

Additionally, Special Counsel Kimberly M. Henderson expounded useful tools for managing obstructionist respondents and ensuring efficient and fair proceedings.

Human Trafficking in Pennsylvania

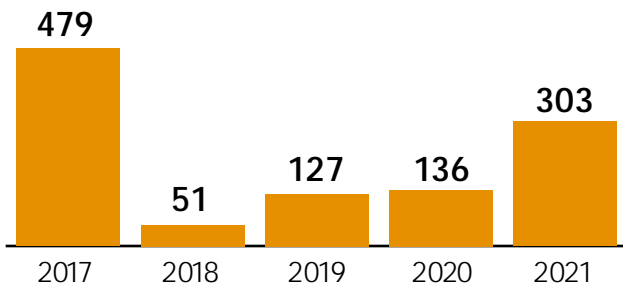
Human trafficking is a type of human rights abuse where people profit from the exploitation of others – mainly through the use of **force**, **fraud** or **coercion** to manipulate victims into engaging in sex acts or labor/services in exchange for something of value. Those under age 18 who exchange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

Demographics of defendants convicted:

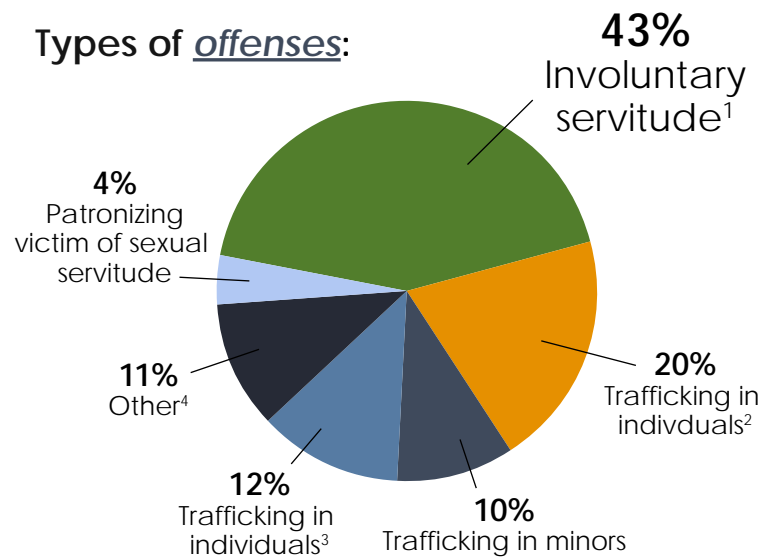


259 human-trafficking cases were filed over the past five years.

1,096 total human-trafficking offenses were filed:



Types of offenses:



¹ duress through force, debt coercion, physical restraint, etc.

² recruits/entices/solicits

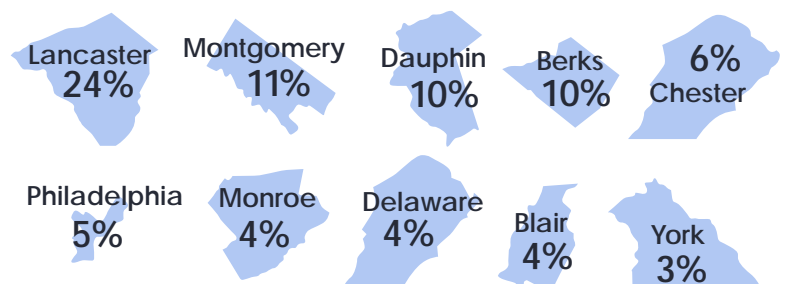
³ benefits financially

⁴ 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:



Kohberger case puts Pennsylvania Courts in the spotlight

A shocking and disturbing high-profile case involving the murders of four University of Idaho students in November recently put Pennsylvania Courts in the national spotlight.

After a weeklong police investigation and thousands of tips, Brian Kohberger was arrested in late December at his parents' home in Pennsylvania – nearly 3,000 miles from the crime scene.

The world watched as Kohberger made his first court appearance on Jan. 3 in the Monroe County Courthouse where he waived his extradition to Idaho.

President Judge **Margherita Patti-Worthington** presided over the hearing where AOPC Communications was onsite to help coordinate and credential over 100 local and national members of the media who attended.

New details about the case emerged soon thereafter when the probable cause affidavit was released outlining key pieces of evidence that placed him at the scene.



Just a few of the national and local media outlets covering the proceedings.

Months later at the end of February, the unsealing of the search warrants generated another round of media attention as they detailed the items that were of the most interest during the investigation.

With the unsealing of the warrants, Pennsylvania's involvement in this case drew to an end as the Idaho courts took over the case. A preliminary hearing is scheduled for June 26.

New Veterans Treatment Court App for Professionals



The AOPC recently released a new app designed to help guide Veterans Treatment Court (VTC) professionals in Pennsylvania through the administration of the program.

The app was partially supported by a Bureau of Justice Assistance subgrant that the AOPC received from the Center for Justice Innovation as part of a VTC strategic plan.

Users of the app will benefit from a video library that holds videos on VTC overviews,

team dynamics, summits and volunteer mentors.

VTC professionals will also find FAQs, newsletters, a PDF library full of helpful resources and an electronic library housing easily downloadable guides full of information that supports and helps veterans and military personnel.

The app is now available in the Apple app store, and will be available in the Android app store shortly.

DEPARTMENT SPOTLIGHT:

Judicial District Security

AOPC/Judicial District Security provides technical expertise and resources to promote an environment of safety and security within Pennsylvania's court system.

Rob Granzow has led the security team since 2019, working closely with **Kyle Ramberger**, who serves as the assistant administrator.

Security staff directly collaborate with judges, court staff and federal, state and local law enforcement regarding security incidents that occur in county courthouses or the magisterial district courts.

Staff are responsible for the evaluation and management of emerging threats, and the implementation of innovative protective measures and security protocols.

All threats to judges are managed in a thorough and consistent manner, providing for a qualitative and quantitative risk assessment based on information that has been entered into the same system used by the U.S. Secret Service and the Supreme Court of the United States.

In addition to managing threats, the office evaluates security needs and requests for security enhancements and administers ongoing grant programs to provide judicial districts with essential security equipment – including CCTV systems, magnetometers, access control devices and alarm technologies.

Focusing on the specific designation of various essential security features for magisterial district court facilities and county courthouses, the office provides for the equitable distribution of legislative funding and a formalized process for targeting site-specific opportunities for security enhancements.

To remain proactive and vigilant, the office completes on-site vulnerability



*front row (l to r): Shannon Schoedler, Rob Granzow, Rebecca Ramberger, John Liken
back row: Kyle Ramberger*

and security self-assessments for county courthouses, magisterial district court facilities and judicial residences – providing judicial officials with a convenient means of identifying opportunities for enhancing security postures, especially for facilities experiencing special risks, major renovations, or contemplating capitol expense security projects.

Championing emergency preparedness for all courts, the office also assists judicial districts in the development of Emergency Action Plans (EAP) and relevant tabletop exercises for local court security committees wishing to assess their emergency readiness.

Thoroughly engaged in the deployment of protective technologies, staff review security policies and procedures, develop training and educational materials to enhance situational awareness and incident avoidance and provide regional workshops for local court security committees throughout the state.

The office regularly provides training to judges and court staff on a variety of security-related topics, a few of which include De-Escalation Strategies for Volatile Encounters, Active Attacker Emergency Readiness and Enhanced Situational Awareness for Judges.

Lastly, and very importantly, staff manage and oversee the courts' electronic security incident reporting system – PAJIRS 2.0. Judges and staff in judicial districts should report any security incidents or threats to AOPC/Judicial District Security using this system.

Security incidents are reported to the office where the information is confidentially managed and analyzed to evaluate risk and identify trends in incident activity, frequency or location. The office addresses in excess of 750 security incidents each year.

This not only allows for the accurate documentation of the incident, but for a timely review by security staff who routinely provide guidance and direction to court personnel.

Fun Fest — Round 2

On March 15, the AOPC held its second Fun Fest staff appreciation event at the Pennsylvania Judicial Center – this time with a March Madness theme. Employees had a great time participating in a variety of activities including an appetizer cookoff, trivia, trashketball and cupcake decorating. Staff were also able to help themselves to a candy bar and meet some of the adoptable dogs from Canine Rescue of Central Pennsylvania.



MARCH MADNESS FUN FEST





MARCH MADNESS *FUN* **FEST**



Take your Child to Work Day – Pennsylvania Courts Style

The Pennsylvania Courts hosted a very successful Take your Child to Work Day (TYCWD) on Wed., April 26, at the Pennsylvania Judicial Center in Harrisburg.

TYCWD is celebrated as a way to give kids a glimpse into the working world, highlighting the value of education and opening their eyes to possible career opportunities.

As a judicial system, holding an event like this allows for us to teach our children about the work and role of the court system – furthering Chief Justice Debra Todd’s focus on civics education.

Nearly 60 children and their parents joined judges and staff for the half-day program to learn more about the key role the judiciary plays in the lives of Pennsylvania families. During the event, participants “rode the judicial circuit,” hearing from judges at various levels of the bench, learning about a day in the life of a judge while also exploring court artifacts and experiencing first-hand how judicial rules are created and why they matter.





Pennsylvania Courts Celebrate Autism Acceptance Month





Allegheny County Focuses on Autism in the Courts

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

On April 20, 2023, one of two western regional summits was held on Autism 101, diagnosis and community support to educate and train local courthouse personnel, child welfare professionals and dependency court partners.

The regional summit is an extension of Allegheny County's ongoing efforts to increase systemic awareness and responsiveness to individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

The summit also included a local panel of professional members of the Allegheny County Autism in the Courts Workgroup, led by Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas Judge **Hugh Fitzpatrick McGough**.

This workgroup brings together more than 50 local officials, advocates and community members committed to improving the experience and ensuring justice for court-involved individuals affected by ASD.

The workgroup is an offspring of the statewide Autism in the Court's Initiative started three years ago by Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice Kevin Dougherty on behalf of the court.

Over 100 attendees, representing 18 different organizations, including local children and youth, courthouse personnel, juvenile probation, schools and community services providers, were present at the summit.

The western regional summit is the third summit aimed at expanding locally on the work that the statewide Autism and the Dependency Courts Taskforce has undertaken. A fourth summit is being held in the western region on June 2, 2023.

In September 2022, as part of a two-year effort led by Administrative Judge **Kim Eaton** and Judge **Jennifer McCrady**, a new sensory room was recently created in the Allegheny Family Law Center to serve children with ASD.

The sensory room was part of a broader effort to improve the overall physical space, technology, language access and wayfinding for families coming to court.

"As a member of the Autism and the Dependency Courts Taskforce, Judge McCrady has demonstrated Justice Dougherty's vision for increased awareness and responsiveness to individuals with autism," said Judge Eaton.

"Over seven years ago, Judge McCrady had a vision that the Family Law Center needed to be more welcoming and less traumatic for everyone. With a Carnegie Mellon study as a roadmap, she made it all happen including the sensory room and other courtroom aids. I support her efforts as she works toward continued progress on behalf of children and families."



A recent Center for Disease Control report estimates that 1 in 36 children have a diagnosis of autism.

The primary goal of the Autism and Dependency Court Taskforce is to provide a positive dependency court experience for children and parents with ASD by increasing professional awareness and responsiveness.

Caring for the Caregiver

Excerpt reprinted with permission from BHS Focus 2023



Most families and households have that person — the caregiver whom others lean on to provide the lion's share of care when a loved one is stricken by illness, injury, disability and the like.

But who's looking out for the best interests of the caregiver? As heavily as some families depend on that person during times of need, it's vital that they not only take the necessary planning steps to protect the family financially should the caregiver need care, but also recognize and address the needs of the primary caregiver.

"Often women are the caretakers and they expend all their resources — monetary, time, emotional — taking care of others," says Maggie Kirchhoff, CFP®, vice president at Wisdom Wealth Strategies in Denver, Colo. "They want

to help everybody else, but they neglect themselves. Caregivers and their families need to create a plan to balance the needs of the family and the needs of the caregiver. You don't want them to run themselves ragged, so there's nobody left to pick up the pieces and take up the caregiving job."

The plan to which Kirchhoff refers, a "care plan," essentially details how to protect the most important asset in this situation — the caregiver herself or himself — as well as the family's financial assets, Kirchhoff explains. It should include preventive steps to help the caregiver maintain some semblance of a balanced life while still fulfilling their responsibilities, in addition to steps specifying how the family plan to proceed if the caregiver is no longer able to provide care and/or needs care themselves.

Here are several priority items that personal finance experts suggest families consider in drawing up a care plan:

1. **Accommodate the caregiver's need to have time for themselves.** Caregivers need regular breaks from caregiving. A service such as respite care can provide them that much needed and well earned temporary relief. "It gives a caregiver time off to focus on themselves," explains Kirchhoff. Try searching "respite care" on Google to find local public and private respite care providers. Adult daycare is another viable option for giving a caregiver a break.
2. **Realize the caregiver needs support and reach out for it.** "It's important for the caregiver to understand what their own capabilities are — what they can and can't do, and to understand it's okay to ask for help and support," Kirchhoff says. "It's also important for the caregiver's loved ones to realize the caregiver needs support, and to help them get it."

Bill-paying, housekeeping and personal concierge types of services are just a few of the ways to relieve some of the caregiver's burden. The failure to pay bills on time is one of the strongest indicators a caregiver may be overburdened, notes Kirchhoff.
3. **The caregiver support network is strong. Tap into it.** Kirchhoff recommends caregivers turn to local, state and national organizations for help. That includes local caregiver support groups, religious/church groups, social workers and organizations, which offers free one-on-one professional consultations to caregivers, plus a range of other resources. "The reality is, if you're

a caregiver who's trying to balance caring for a loved one with a full-time job, running a household and raising kids, it's important to know these resources are there," says Kirchhoff.

4. **Take stock of insurance coverage — and bolster it if necessary.** Does the caregiver have life insurance, healthcare insurance, disability insurance, long term care insurance, Medicare supplement insurance and the like? What's the family's responsibility for out-of-pocket health/medical/care expenses? "It's important to understand the types of insurance coverage a caregiver needs, and what each policy does and doesn't cover," Kirchhoff asserts. For insurance guidance, and for help figuring out how insurance fits in the broader context of a care plan and a financial plan, enlist a certified financial planner. To find one in your area, visit the Financial Planning Association's searchable national database of personal finance experts at www.plannersearch.org.
5. **Be sure the caregiver's vital documents and directives are in place and up-to-date.** That includes a will, durable power of attorney for healthcare as well as for property, plus an advanced healthcare directive (living will).
6. **Don't wait.** Put a care plan in place before a crisis hits, so crucial decisions aren't clouded by panic and emotion.

Around the Judiciary

February 2023 Trial Judges Conference



Philadelphia County President Judge **Idee Fox** and Philadelphia County Judge **Dan Anders**



Chief Justice of Pennsylvania **Debra Todd** with her husband, **Steve Todd**



Supreme Court Justice **Christine Donohue** and PCSTJ President, Allgeheny County Judge **Christine Ward**



Bucks County Judge **Robert Baldi**, Bucks County Judge **Jordan Yeager**, Bucks County Judge **Denise Bowman**, Bucks County Judge **Charissa Liller**, Bucks County Judge **James McMaster**, Jefferson County President Judge **John Foradora**



Philadelphia County Judge **Josh Roberts**, Philadelphia Municipal Court Judge **Gregory Yorgey-Girdy**, Philadelphia Judge **George Twardy**



Chief Justice **Debra Todd** with Chatham University President Dr. David Finegold

Pennsylvania Supreme Court Chief Justice Debra Todd received an honorary degree of Doctor of Laws from the Trustees of Chatham University.



In early March, Chief Justice **Debra Todd**, Justice **P. Kevin Brobson**, and Court Administrator **Geoff Moulton** presented at the Conference of County Bar Leaders, alongside Judge Mark A. Kearney of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania.



Monroe County President Judge **Margherita Patti-Worthington** reading to kindergartners for Read Across America Day on March 2.



Pennsylvania Supreme Court Chief Justice **Debra Todd** participated in a Take Your Child to Work Day event in Pittsburgh.



On April 14, Pa. Supreme Court Justice **David Wecht** participated in a virtual panel discussion on antisemitism with the Pennsylvania Bar Institute.



Members of the Minor Judiciary Education Board at their April meeting at the Pennsylvania Judicial Center.

(l to r) Judge **Douglas Bell** (Vice Chair), **Deborah Gross, Esq.**, Judge **Thomas Miller**, **Kimberly Booth**, Judge **Richard King** (Chair), Judge **Bonnie Carney**, **Nicholas Wachinski, Esq.**



On April 12, 2023, Judge **Maria McLaughlin** of the Pennsylvania Superior Court was recognized for her years of work and impacting the lives of children. The award was named in the memory of attorney **Stephen J. Anderer**.

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.

On April 13, Commonwealth Court Prothonotary **Michael Krimmel** was awarded the James S. Bowman Award by the Pennsylvania Bar Association's Administrative Law Section.

The award is named in honor of the Commonwealth Court's first president judge and honors a lawyer who is making a significant impact on the practice of administrative law and who is demonstrating leadership in mentoring administrative law practitioners.

For more details, [read the release issued by the PBA.](#)



Commonwealth Court Senior Judge **Bonnie Brigance Leadbetter**, Commonwealth Court Judge **Michael Wojcik**, **Michael Krimmel**, Commonwealth Court President Judge **Renée Cohn Jubelirer, Pa.** Supreme Court Justice **P. Kevin Brobson**, Commonwealth Court President Judge Emerita **Mary Hannah Leavitt**



PBA President Jay Silberblatt, Michael Krimmel, Jonathan Koltash, chair of the PBA Administrative Law Committee.

Photos courtesy of the PBA.



On March 3, the PA Bar Association recognized President Judge **Shawn Meyers** and the Franklin County Bar Association at their annual Conference of County Bar Leaders, honoring their efforts to provide a series of valuable civic engagement ceremonies throughout 2022.



Miss an issue?

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<https://www.pacourts.us/judicial-administration/office-of-communications-and-intergovernmental-relations>



On April 25-28, 25 district court administrators and deputy court administrators gathered outside Harrisburg to receive an orientation on many facets of the profession of court management. Seasoned district court administrators and deputy administrators accompanied by AOPC professionals provided the three and one half day instruction.

Judge **Lois Murphy**, Court of Common Pleas of Montgomery County and Administrative Judge of the Orphans' Court Division, testified before a joint hearing of the Senate Judiciary and Aging and Youth Committees on strengthening guardianship laws and preventing elder abuse. Murphy submitted formal remarks to the committees and participated in a lively question and answer session with committee members on pending legislation, the Guardianship Tracking System, and the Advisory Council on Elder Justice in the Courts.



Members of the Pa. Supreme Court stand with students from Chief Justice **Debra Todd's** alma matter, Lincoln High School in Ellwood City, after argument session on March 8.



Mifflin County Treatment Court participants were grateful to receive baskets containing nonperishable food, laundry detergent, cleaning supplies and personal hygiene items that were purchased using participant assistant funds.