

Greetings from the Chair



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Today, on the threshold of the new millennium, the Courts of Philadelphia are advancing into the exciting realm of the future. While First Judicial District (FJD) judges, administrators, and employees are stepping boldly forward, we are nonetheless progressing deliberately from solid foundations. The members of our workforce are mindful of this court's rich history that extends back to the time before the Pennsylvania judicial districts were created in 1791. In fact, William Penn himself presided over Orphans' Court in Philadelphia as early as 1683.

In the more than 300 years since, the world has changed and so have our courts. Judicial service delivery has evolved from labored reliance on quill and inkwell to efficient and cost effective networked PCs; and from plodding horseback document transport to instantaneous e-mail. Moreover, the FJD continues to capitalize on Internet opportunities and looks forward to new and growing web-based enterprises to come. Improved organization and scheduling solutions address expanding public access demands. To support these and other decision making processes, mainframe computer applications replace hand-written dockets and ledger books with innovative programs replete with analytical, monitoring, and accountability mechanisms. In turn, space and facilities upgrades complement new program developments. Better working conditions are in place while we maintain the dignity of the buildings that house the venerable institution of the courts.

These improvements are only a few of the latest manifestations of a crusade begun centuries ago — to provide justice. Modern automation initiatives, as remarkable as they may be, are simply tools to allow us to better execute our duties. The commitment to uphold, cultivate, and proclaim the principals of justice was made long before our time. We are honored to be charged with the stewardship of that promise.

For trial courts, performance standards were established in 1989 through the efforts of the National Center for State Courts under the aegis of the United States Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Assistance. The standards comprise five broad categories: 1) Access to Justice; 2) Expedition and Timeliness; 3) Equality, Fairness, and Integrity; 4) Independence and Accountability; and 5) Public Trust and Confidence. Together, they define the ideal for optimum trial court performance. The First Judicial District team strives to embody this paradigm. Our hard work and dedication have produced impressive results. We have gained the remarkable achievements contained in this report aided by innovative thinking supported by technology. The result: FJD judges and employees have built and instituted many creative solutions to problems that had once seemed insurmountable.

While problem solving is an important aspect of justice delivery, affirmative steps are required to attain the envisioned court model. The standards for judicial administration are constantly being raised. In the First Judicial District, we not only respond to those demands but also aim toward even greater successes.