

First Judicial District

1999 Summary & Achievements

BACKGROUND & ORGANIZATION

Although Courts of Common Pleas had already been in existence for years prior, the First Judicial District of Pennsylvania (FJD) was created with four other judicial districts in 1791. Today, the 67 counties of the Commonwealth are served through 60 Judicial Districts. The current FJD structure encompasses three major Courts: 1) the Court of Common Pleas; 2) the Philadelphia Municipal Court; and 3) the Philadelphia Traffic Court. Each is led by a President Judge and at least one Administrative Judge. The Common Pleas and Municipal Court President Judges are elected by their peers, but the Traffic Court President Judge is appointed by the governor. Administrative Judges are chosen by the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania.

At the next organizational level, the Common Pleas Court is divided into three Divisions: 1) the Trial Division, with Criminal and Civil Sections; 2) the Family Division consisting of the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Sections; and 3) the Orphans' Court Division that manages probate and cases involving incapacitated individuals. Each of these divisional components is overseen by an Administrative Judge.

Philadelphia Municipal Court is configured with two constituent divisions: 1) the Civil Division; and 2) the Criminal Division. Municipal Court has one Administrative Judge.

Traffic Court also benefits from the leadership of a President and an Administrative Judge.

Altogether, there are three President Judges and five Administrative Judges. They, along with the State Court Administrator, form the nine-member FJD Administrative Governing Board – the central management authority for the District and one of the three elements listed below.

MANAGEMENT

Three important components span Court or Divisional lines, and they are essential to the administration of justice in Philadelphia:

The Administrative Governing Board – Composed of the three President and five Administrative Judges with the State Court Administrator, the Administrative Governing Board manages the business of the Courts of Philadelphia.

The Office of the President Judge of the Court of Common Pleas – In 1999, Court Reporting and Procurement Services, the Office of the Prothonotary (the clerk of civil case management and source for filings), the Law Library, and mail services were under the auspices of the President Judge. The services affect the judiciary throughout the Courts and Divisions of the District. In addition, President Judge Alex Bonavita, and his successor, President Judge Frederica Massiah-Jackson, were named to chair the Administrative Governing Board.

The Office of the Court Administrator – Joseph J. DiPrimio, Esq., is the Court Administrator of the First Judicial District. The Office of the Court Administrator oversees many of the administrative and management services that benefit judicial administration in the FJD. Among them are Data Processing, Human Resources, Management Analysis, Facilities, Budget, and Administrative Services. He attends meetings of the Governing Board, develops solutions to problems, and implements improvement measures throughout the District.

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In 1999 ...

- ◆ The FJD website continued to improve and grow with expanded capabilities for access to court schedules, civil dockets, and more downloadable forms. The civil docket access display burgeoned to include about 17.5 million docket entries for 1.7 million civil cases.
- ◆ The entire body of FJD personnel regulations was revamped and brought into compliance with federal and state regulations.
- ◆ A new jury summons mailer was designed to include all the information formerly requiring two mailings, thereby cutting time, effort and expenditures in half. Another substantive result was seen in improved rates of return for the jury mailer program.
- ◆ Working through a collaborative effort with the City Administration and other branches of government, the Y2K “bug” was successfully squashed for a seamless transition to year 2000.
 - ◆ The FJD Newsletter, *The Courterly*, was redesigned to produce a sleek, graphically rich publication.
 - ◆ In Municipal Court, Phase I of an automated civil case management system project was completed.
 - ◆ An online archiving system was initiated to store notes of testimony. Adjunct components will provide for better management of Court Reporter and Interpreter resources.
 - ◆ For the first time, all court reporters became computer based; all transcripts were produced electronically; the DA, the Defender, and judges received notes of testimony via e-mail; and 30 reporters began real-time transcription training.
 - ◆ The first training seminar for language and sign interpreters was conducted.
 - ◆ A special access education web site for the Court of Common Pleas Bench was established.
 - ◆ A very successful in-house computer application training program began. The curriculum includes training in word processing, spreadsheet, and windows applications.
 - ◆ FJD building projects included total renovation of the FJD Law Library, the reconstruction of the Prothonotary records room, and new, larger, and more comfortable space for customers arriving for services in Domestic Relations.
 - ◆ Development of the first district-wide record retention schedule for Court records was begun.

