

Traffic Court



Supreme Court Opinion Room, City Hall (artist Noël G. Miles)

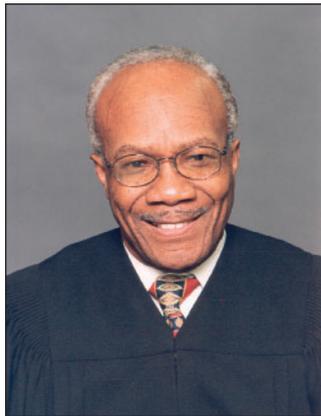
Traffic Court Bench



Judge Francis E. Kelly
President Judge



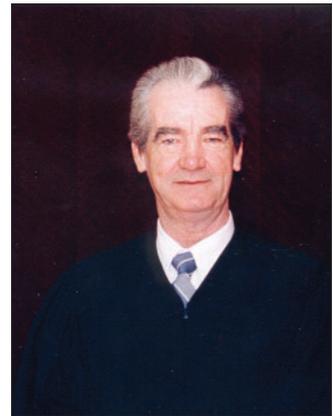
Judge Frank J. Little
President Judge 2001



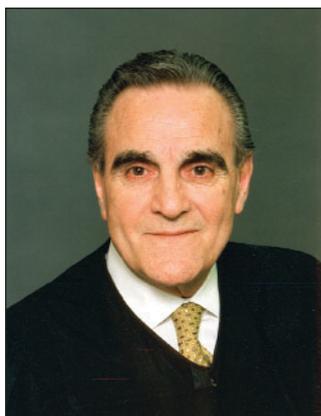
Judge Willie Adams



Judge Bernice A. DeAngelis



Judge Joseph A. Howlett



Judge Fortunato Perri, Sr.
Administrative Judge 2001 - 2002



Senior Judge Lillian Podgorski

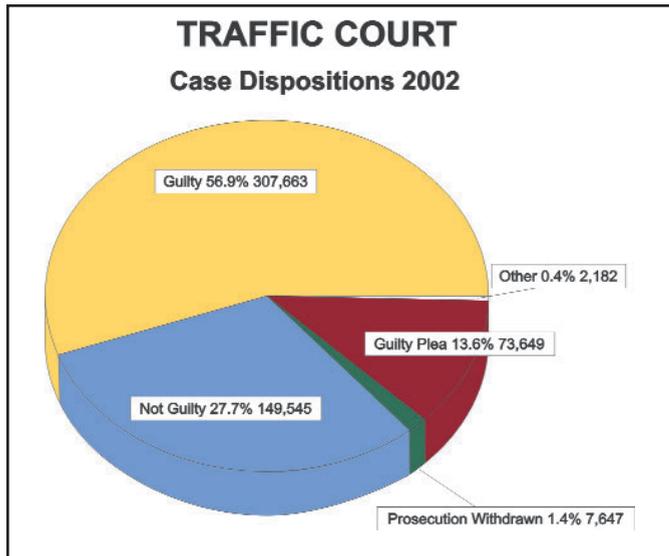
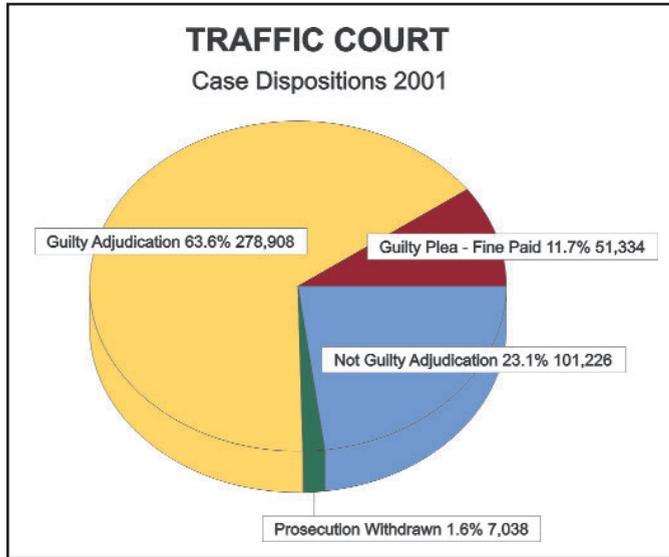


Judge Thomasine Tynes

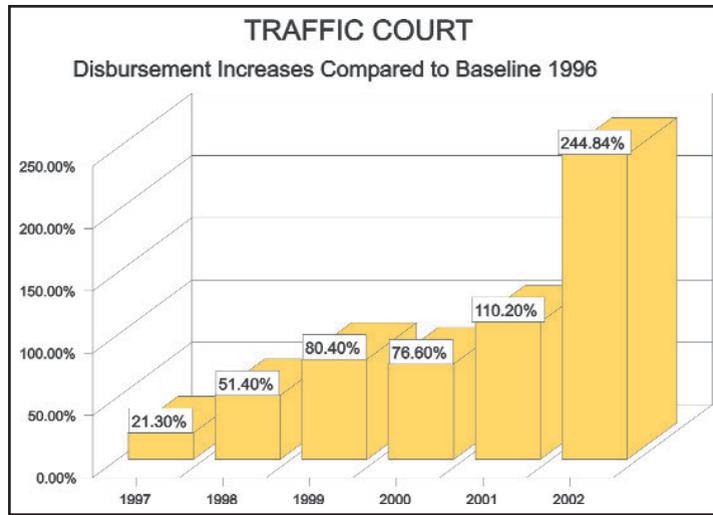
Traffic Court Operations

Philadelphia Traffic Court is a summary court of limited jurisdiction, and not a court of record. In 2001 Traffic Court was led by President Judge Francis E. Kelly and Administrative Judge Fortunato N. Perri, Sr. President Judge Kelly assumed a sole leadership role late in 2002. The Traffic Court Judiciary is composed of seven elected judges who are trained by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania specifically to preside over and adjudicate citations issued within the County of Philadelphia, as provided in Title 75 of the Motor Vehicle Code. Through extended evening hours and affordable payment plans, Traffic Court staff make resolution and payment of outstanding traffic citations as convenient as possible for responsible citizens.

The Traffic Court is primarily responsible for holding hearings requested by individuals who have been issued traffic citations by the Philadelphia Police Department and various other law enforcement agencies. While police officers that issue the citations are not required to be present at the Philadelphia Traffic Court trial, a liaison officer from the



same police department represents the issuing officers and prosecutes the cases. Upon appeal to the Court of Common Pleas, the original officer will be summoned to appear and testify at the *de novo* trial held by a Court of Common Pleas judge. A secondary purpose of the Traffic Court is the collection of fees and fines imposed upon the



adjudication or acknowledgment of guilt by violators. As permitted by rules of court, the Traffic Court may impose payment plans for outstanding fines; however, the entire amount becomes due if the payment plans are breached. Outstanding fines may result in the suspension of driving privileges. Moreover, the Traffic Court may issue

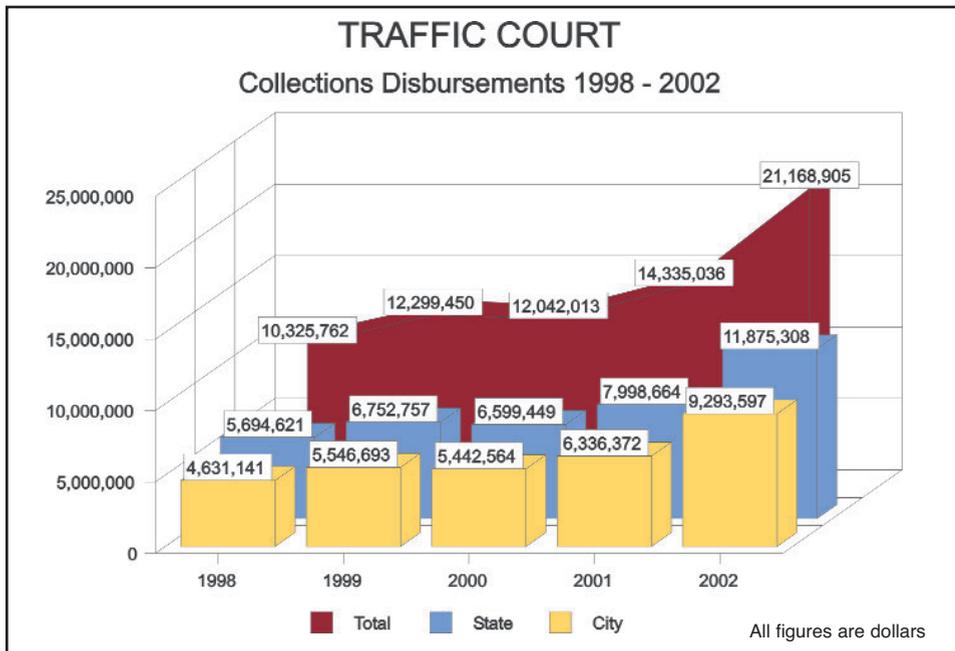
arrest warrants for unpaid citations and arrest scofflaws even with only one outstanding unpaid traffic violation.

Under the leadership of Administrative Judge Fortunato N. Perri, Sr., the Traffic Court approached improvements to court operations from several aspects. Physical renovations of the Traffic Court premises were performed, relocating all correlating units, such as the courtroom, disposition units and payment and processing centers, so as to streamline operations. An information booth was erected to provide necessary assistance to consumers and facilitate expedited case processing. Security measures were improved by the deployment of seven Deputy Sheriffs, and by affording Police Academy training to Traffic Court Warrant Officers. Upgraded employee facilities, together with substantive employee training, regular meetings between employees and administration, and the appointment of three new directors brought about greater efficiency, improvements in morale and a substantial decrease in sick time usage.

These improvements were instrumental in enabling Administrative Judge Perri to establish various programs designed to more easily accommodate the public's needs in scheduling and adjudicating cases. They include:

Motion Court, which provides walk-in access to court hearings for violators on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday at 9:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m., and on Wednesday at 9:00 a.m., 1:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m.

Protracted (DA) Court is held bimonthly at Philadelphia Traffic Court. Violators who have been arrested for scofflaw and/or Traffic Court bench warrants are scheduled to appear for trial. The Office of the District Attorney of Philadelphia prosecutes violators on behalf of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Defendants have the right to an attorney or to represent themselves. Public defenders may be assigned to represent defendants at their request in these special court proceedings. Defendants are subject to incarceration and fines as directed by the presiding judge.



Vehicle Overweight Court operates twice monthly. Drivers receiving violation citations under Chapter 49 of the Motor Vehicle Code will be scheduled to appear for trial in Overweight Court. These violations are directed primarily toward trucks and towed vehicles operated on the highway.

Boot and Tow Court has successfully removed dangerous motor vehicles, including trucks, from the streets of the City of Philadelphia. Unclaimed towed vehicles have been sold and, in some cases, have been destroyed. The Traffic Court will shortly implement Boot and Tow of all vehicles whose owners owe more than \$250 in fines or costs.

Under the leadership of Administrative Judge Perri, Fiscal Year 2001 was a banner year for Traffic Court dispositions and collections.

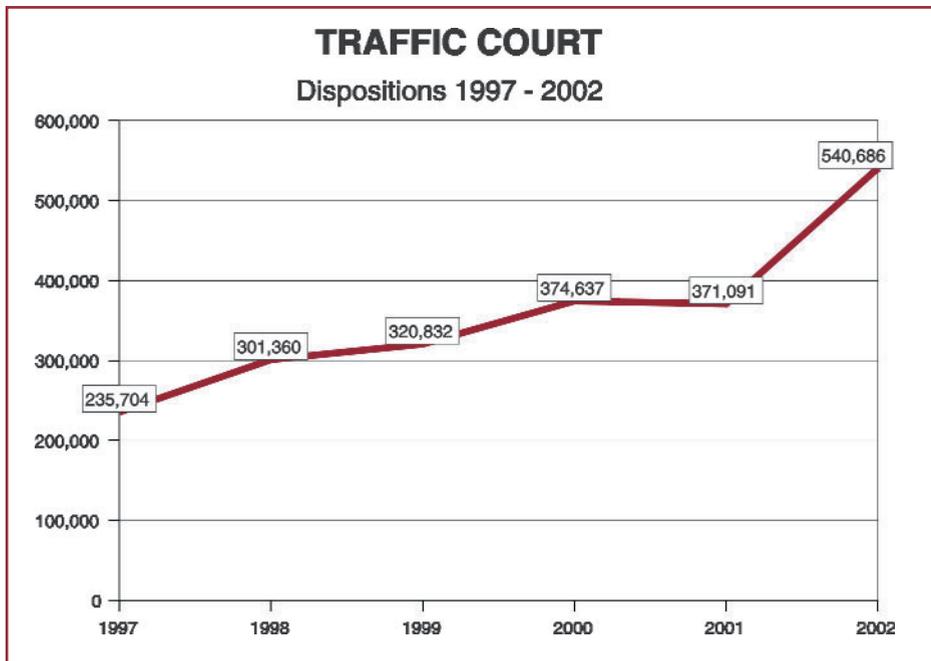
In Fiscal Year 2001, a total of 292,690 new traffic court citations were issued by 14 different law enforcement agencies. Violators responded to a total of 440,116 traffic citations, i.e. either pleaded guilty and paid the fine (51,334 citations), pleaded not guilty and requested a hearing (381,744 citations), or were administratively withdrawn as provided in the Motor Vehicle Code (7,038). Out of the 381,744 citations scheduled for hearings, a total of 278,908 resulted in guilty dispositions.

A new disbursement record was also established. In Fiscal year 2001, the Traffic Court disbursed \$14,335,037, of which \$6,336,372 was disbursed to the City of Philadelphia general fund, and \$7,998,664 to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. This sum represents a \$2.3 million increase from the Fiscal Year 2000 disbursements, or a 19% increase from the previous fiscal year. New milestones are also being seen in 2002. Traffic Court disbursed more revenue in January, 2002, than it ever has in its history. The sum of \$1,199,190.67 was distributed to the Commonwealth and \$923,103.35 went to the City of Philadelphia for a total disbursement of \$2,122,249.02. The trend is expected to continue with new overall disbursal records for Fiscal Year 2002.

The above listed special programs were instrumental in the disposition of traffic citations, and in collections and disbursements. Traffic Court employees processed a total of 433,078 new and old citations. In their work, 223,418 licenses were suspended due to non-payment of fees, fines and costs, and accumulation of points; and 174,331

licenses were re-instated due to payment of outstanding fees, fines and costs. A total of 432 warrants were issued, of which 88 (for 1,761 citations) were served, and these generated approximately \$324,000 in revenues. Traffic Court also supervised 15,584 payment plan cases; and perhaps more importantly, reduced the time between request for hearing and hearing date from five months to three weeks. A number of initiatives were successfully inaugurated during Fiscal Year 2002 which directly benefitted the citizenry in terms of convenience and improved traffic safety.

Foremost in significance is the On-Line Payment Plan which simplified the payment of motor vehicle citations for the public by allowing them to satisfy their motor vehicle citations via credit card through the Internet. For the period of July, 2002 through December, 2002, almost \$140,000 in payments was collected via the Internet.



More drivers responded to citations during the last fiscal year, producing dramatic increases in revenue, which augmented City and State treasuries. FY 2002 revenue was at an all-time high of \$23,516,930 – which is \$9,181,894, or 64.1% higher than the previous total of \$14,335,036, set in fiscal year 2001. (\$2,348,025 of the 2002 total was disbursed to parties other than the City and State.)

Plans are underway to introduce an “electronic citation.” Under the current system, Philadelphia Police Officers manually write tickets for moving traffic violations. Under the proposed system, officers will be availed of personal digital assistants (“PDAs”) pre-loaded with an electronic form of the ticket used for moving traffic violations. The issuing officers will fill out the information on their PDAs, sign the forms electronically, print the tickets, and give them to the offenders.

The electronic system will both increase the efficiency of Philadelphia Police Officers in issuing citations, and facilitate the transfer of information from the paper citation to the court ticket processing system. Instead of manually transcribing ticket information to the database (as is currently the practice), the police officer will transfer all violation information through an electronic interface from the PDA directly into the court database.

Under the leadership of President Judge Francis E. Kelly, the Boot & Tow Department streamlined its operations, thereby expediting hearings for defendants whose vehicles had been immobilized for live stop violations. Said hearings are now granted within 24 hours of the initial visit to Traffic Court.

Looking to the future, the Traffic Court is considering implementation of a community service program in conjunction with the managing director’s office involving the release of non- violent traffic offenders. This will alleviate much of the burden placed on the prison system because of a dire lack of space.

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Courtroom 296 City Hall (artist Noël G. Miles)

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About the Artist • Noël G. Miles

Born and raised in Philadelphia, Noël G. Miles brings to life in his paintings the City's magnificent architecture.

Mr. Miles received his first art training at the Salvation Army Center at Broad Street and Fairmount Avenue. He was educated in the City's public school system and graduated from the University of the Arts.

A national historic landmark, Philadelphia's City Hall is considered the finest example of French Second Empire architecture in the United States. Mr. Miles has captured its glory and beauty in watercolor in his book, *The Splendors of Philadelphia's City Hall: An Artist's View*. Some of these paintings grace the cover and pages of this Biennial Report.

