

PENNSYLVANIA'S COURT IMPROVEMENT PROJECT  
DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS GRANT  
PROGRAM ASSESSMENT REPORT FOR  
FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR  
2006



**AOPC**

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ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE  
of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

*Office of Children and  
Families in the Courts*

Pursuant to ACF ACYF-CB-PI-06-05, Pennsylvania's Court Improvement Project (CIP) hereby submits its annual Program Assessment Report for the CIP Data Collection and Analysis (Data Grant) for Federal Fiscal Year 2006 to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Administration of Children and Families (ACF) Regional Administrator Alan Ademski as well as to the National Child Welfare Resource Center on Legal and Judicial Issues. This report covers all activities supported by CIP Data Grant funds and how these activities help provide for the safety, Permanency and Well-Being of children and youth in Pennsylvania's foster care system.

**I. A description of the needs that the State court has addressed with CIP data grant funds, the programs and activities that the state court developed and implemented to address the needs, and the resultant outcomes**

The following list represents those needs that Pennsylvania's CIP has identified and addressed throughout the fiscal year. These needs were identified as a result of the recommendations of the 2005 CIP Reassessment produced by the National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ) as well as from the action plan formulated by the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC) and Department of Public Welfare (DPW) officials who attended the national Summit on Justice for Children held in Minnesota in 2005. Additional needs were identified by sessions of the Pennsylvania Bar Association Children's Rights Committee; discussions with Dependency Court Judges, ongoing meetings with DPW Officials; and information, suggestions and ideas gleaned from Pennsylvania's Children Roundtables Initiative. Some of these identified needs and issues related to data were:

- Lack of state leadership establishing performance measures and holding courts accountable for meeting those measures.
- Lack of reliable dependency court data in every court which would enable it to assess its performance on key performance measures
- No mechanism for collection of court data by the state.

Based on these needs and issues Pennsylvania's CIP then developed activities and the resulting outcomes for each of those activities.

**1. Develop a module into the Common Pleas Criminal Case Management System (CPCMS) to track Juvenile Dependency Data statewide.**

The Supreme Court has recently developed and implemented the Common Pleas Criminal Case Management System (CPCMS) across the Commonwealth. The purpose of CPCMS, which is managed by the AOPC's Judicial Automation Department, is to improve the efficiency of

the courts at the local level. CPCMS computerizes a wide variety of court functions for judges and their staffs, clerks of court, and county administrative staff including docketing, calendaring, accounting, collection and payment. The CPCMS is the latest and largest phase in the automation of Pennsylvania's courts, which was recently completed. The new system serves:

- as a central data warehouse, enabling staff in 67 Common Pleas Courts to electronically share case information and associated data not only between county courts but also with the state's 548 magisterial district courts and Supreme, Superior and Commonwealth Courts.
- as a link with Pennsylvania's Criminal Justice Network, an integrated public safety network developed by the executive branch to expeditiously exchange critical court information with local, state and federal authorities, as well as executive branch agencies, such as the Pennsylvania State Police, and the Departments of Transportation and Corrections.

The Judicial Automation Department along with the OCFC has initiated the development of a module into CPCMS to track Juvenile Dependency Data statewide. This module, when completed, would then be Pennsylvania's Statewide Juvenile Dependency Automated System and provide the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, AOPC and OCFC with necessary data regarding dependency cases.

Those counties who are not using CPCMS for dependency purposes and are using existing Juvenile Dependency systems which meet the county's needs and collect much of the information that CPCMS will track related to dependency cases. In these instances, AOPC will provide the county with adequate information and training to present them with the benefits of a single data system. If agencies chose to maintain their existing systems, interfaces will be established to allow AOPC to do a statewide and county-level analysis of dependency data in an AOPC standardized format.

One of the major functions of the CPCMS Juvenile Dependency case tracking system would be to report on the necessary statistical requirements. These requirements were identified with input from the OCFC, OCYF and from the core performance measures identified by the American Bar Association and National Council of Juvenile Family Court Judges.

## **2. Information Gathering/Sharing with the Department of Public Welfare (DPW), Office of Children, Youth and Families (OCYF)**

OCYF and OCFC will collaborate through the sharing of various data in order to reach our ultimate goal of providing the best possible services to youth in the foster care system. Data will be collected from a variety of sources to guide us in decision making and reaching positive outcomes in our efforts. OCYF is currently sharing AFCARS data, as well as CY 890 data, which will track all children with a goal of adoption through the steps in the adoption process.

Additionally, the OCFC has been heavily involved in the planning and preparation of Pennsylvania's Child and Family Services Review (CFSR), which is scheduled to occur in August of 2008.

## **II. Pennsylvania's overall progress towards the goals delineated in the strategic plan and results of the assessment of activities funded under this grant**

As mentioned earlier, the AOPC has initiated the development of the Statewide Juvenile Dependency Automated System. To accomplish this, staff from the Judicial Automation Department completed a phone survey to all Pennsylvania counties to determine at what level, if any, county staff were using CPCMS for dependency cases. These phone surveys were completed on April 30, 2007. Through this survey AOPC was able to determine that presently there are 57 counties in Pennsylvania using CPCMS in some way to document Juvenile dependency cases. Following the phone survey Six (6) County Site visits were scheduled for June 2007. The purpose of the site visit was to get a better grasp of how those counties currently using CPCMS were using the system in order to gain a local perspective. The counties that participated in the site visits were: Washington, Bucks, Clarion, Westmoreland, Armstrong and Berks.

This information was presented to the Statewide Interdisciplinary Advisory Committee at the first meeting of the Committee in June. AOPC Judicial Automation staff with input from OCFC have continued to move forward on the project by developing the project organization; identifying goals; completed the initial requirements gathering; organized focus groups and user testing. Pilot testing for the system and county training are set to begin in January 2008.

In September 2007 a Joint Application Development (JAD) Session was held to solicit input from those who may be using the system and those who may be able to receive data reports from the system. The JAD session was attended by several users from a variety of counties throughout Pennsylvania.

The attendees represented juvenile probation staff; clerk of courts staff; court administrators and child welfare directors.

Until this system is completed, Pennsylvania has a variety of ways in which it currently shares and will continue to share and analyze data. As previously indicated, 57 or the 67 Pennsylvania counties are currently using CPCMS to track dependency cases while those that do not use CPCMS have systems that are already in place. Additionally, the AOPC collaborates heavily with the OCYF in a variety of areas including data and information sharing. Some of the data that is currently provided by OCYF includes, but is not limited to:

- Adoption and Foster Care Analysis Reporting System (AFCARS) data
- Data reports from the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network (SWAN)
- Pennsylvania Independent Living Outcomes Tracking System
- American Bar Association reports provided to SWAN as part of the Barriers to Permanency Project
- Child and Family Services Review (CSFR) Outcomes data.

It is our expectation that the projects and activities planned under this grant will produce improved outcomes for children in the following ways:

- Reliable data will enable us to better target technical assistance to courts of greatest need, thus producing better results in the lowest-producing courts.
- More complete data will enable us to spot where in the process delays are most common, and enact rule changes or training initiatives to eliminate those problems.
- Better data will enable us to better convince state funding authorities where the needs lie in the child welfare system, thus increasing the resources that can be used to assist children.
- Comparison of the results among the judicial districts will illustrate to judges how they fare with regard to the time it takes for them to terminate parental rights. Hopefully, this comparison will encourage them to ensure permanency for children at the earliest stages of their development.
- Court data in conjunction with child welfare data will provide a more holistic perspective and an educational tool in all child welfare cases.

### **III. Recommendations of the Statewide Interdisciplinary Advisory Committee (State Roundtable)**

This Committee, chaired by Justice Baer, is comprised of Pennsylvania's leaders who each play a unique and vital role in making the system responsive to the issues facing the children and families of Pennsylvania. The group will meet annually to develop policy with regard to effectuating best practices and programming as vetted through the Children's and Leadership Roundtables.

The membership of the Advisory Committee includes the following individuals:

- AOPC Leadership, including Court Administrator of Pennsylvania, Zygmunt Pines;
- Department of Public Welfare Deputy Secretary Richard Gold, Office of Children, Youth and Families;
- James Anderson, Executive Director, Juvenile Court Judges Commission;
- Chairperson, Pennsylvania Bar Association Children's Rights Committee (Kenneth Horoho);
- A parent's attorney who has been active (John Perrott);
- Representatives from each of the regional interdisciplinary groups described above;
- The Administrative Judges of the Family Division of the Court of Common Pleas of Philadelphia and Allegheny Counties, the two largest jurisdictions in the state that combined have approximately 60% of the dependency cases in the state;
- Other individuals as are subsequently identified with substantial knowledge of and interest in the child welfare system in Pennsylvania.

The Juvenile Dependency Data System information was presented to the Statewide Interdisciplinary Advisory Committee at the first meeting of the Committee in June. As part of the CIP initiative, we are in the process of designing our data system around performance outcomes based on safety, permanency and well-being. In addition, our judicial training will also incorporate the CFSR outcomes of safety, permanency and well-being.

Data provided to us through the Juvenile Dependency Data System will be provided to the committee as reports when it becomes available. Until the system is functional, OCFC will continue to work with OCYF to collect relevant court data and reports to keep the committee abreast of dependency issues throughout the Commonwealth.

#### **IV. Summary**

The Pennsylvania CIP has developed a new statewide infrastructure with the aid of a very visible and active Supreme Court and the creation of the OCFC, which is dedicated solely to dependency court improvement statewide; developed and maintained partnerships with DPW/OCYF as well as with other child welfare agencies/organization; fully participated in the CFSR/PIP process and has committed itself to the best possible handling of cases involving dependent children. CIP continues to be committed to improving the lives of children and families as they progress through the Pennsylvania Court system.

The OCFC will carry out its mission in a multi-faceted way. Each judge, each judicial district and the Supreme Court will be provided information about which

dependency courts in Pennsylvania are doing well and those that need improvement. Working together with DPW we will devise methods of data collection that will not only assist the courts, but provide DPW and county child welfare agencies information that will enable them to address issues within their purview.

In addition to gathering data, the OCFC will help judicial districts by identifying and implementing best practices from Pennsylvania and the nation. We will also support the work of the local courts through disseminating information, offering technical assistance, and presenting training programs.