

PENNSYLVANIA'S COURT IMPROVEMENT PROJECT  
DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS GRANT  
PROGRAM ASSESSMENT REPORT FOR  
FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR  
2008



**AOPC**

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ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE  
of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

*Office of Children and  
Families in the Courts*

Pursuant to the Administration for Children and Families Program Instructions ACYF-CB-PI-07-09, the Office of Children and Families in the Courts (OCFC), Pennsylvania's Court Improvement Project (CIP) hereby submits its annual Program Assessment Report for the CIP Data Grant for Federal Fiscal Year 2008 to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Administration of Children and Families (ACF) Region III. This annual program report addresses all Data Collection and Analysis Activities of Pennsylvania's 2008 CIP; the outcomes of court improvement activities; and how they help provide for the safety, permanency and well-being of children and youth in Pennsylvania's foster care system.

**I. Description of needs and activities undertaken with CIP funds to meet those needs during the program period**

The following list represents those needs as identified by the OCFC and addressed throughout the fiscal year. These identified needs are a result of the 2005 CIP Reassessment produced by the National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ); The Pennsylvania Children's Roundtables Initiative; and ongoing meetings with Department of Public Welfare/Office of Children, Youth and Families (DPW/OCYF) Officials. Some of these identified needs include:

- Lack of an automated capacity to track dependency caseloads at the local level or reliable dependency court data to enable courts to assess its key performance measures;
- No mechanism for collection of court data statewide;
- Lack of court performance measures/indicators;
- The need for local courts to become more involved in the day-to-day scheduling, operation and management of the dependency docket;
- The need to track timelines of cases through the system from the initial hearing to TPR; and
- The need for new/updated equipment to access the CPCMS Data System

**II. Activities and progress towards the goals delineated in the 2008 strategic plan and results of the assessment of activities funded under this grant**

Implementation of CPCMS – Dependency Data System

The AOPC Judicial Automation Department has developed a Dependency Data System with OCFC staff providing ongoing programmatic support to the Judicial Automation Department and local jurisdictions. Roll out to counties commenced in March 2008. As of November 2008, 65 of the 67 counties are live on the system. Due to the complexities, the remaining two counties (Allegheny and Philadelphia) are scheduled to "go-live" by summer of 2009.

To implement this system the AOPC Judicial Automation Department added a module to the current Common Pleas Case Management System (CPCMS) and collaborated heavily with the OCFC, Office of Children, Youth and Families (OCYF), Juvenile Court Judges Commission (JCJC) and the Juvenile Rules Committee. The forms and court orders that are a part of the system to be utilized statewide by Dependency courts were reviewed by our partners.

In September 2007 and again in December 2007, several county child welfare agency directors, court administrators and other local staff from across the state were selected to participate in a Joint Application Development (JAD) meeting. This group was the equivalent of a focus group to help guide IT staff in the development of the project. In February 2008 three counties (Northampton, Bucks and Washington) were selected as pilot counties. Feedback from these pilot counties provided further information regarding system development.

The forms and court orders that are now part of the system were created using Pennsylvania Model Court orders, originally developed by JCJC, as well as information from other states. These forms and orders were reviewed by JCJC, OCYF and the Juvenile Rules Committee for accuracy and functionality.

During the 2008 Spring Leadership Roundtables (March & April), AOPC's Judicial Automation Department provided a brief overview of the system, including forms and court orders. Comments and feedback from each Leadership Roundtable were used to further improve the CPCMS Dependency Module.

In March 2008 the Judicial Automation Department began site visits to counties to assess their needs for implementation of the Dependency Module. As of September 2008, all counties have been visited. During the site visits a "go-live" date was determined for the county. At go-live the Judicial Automation Department sent a team of staff to the county for a week of training and technical assistance on the system. Additional comments and feedback aided in the customization and improvement of the system. Comments related to the forms and orders are captured and reviewed by the Juvenile Rules Committee.

#### Mini-grants for Data input and backlog clean up

While development of the overall CPCMS Dependency Module was done using state only funding, the OCFC provided counties, who requested services for data entry, with CIP funding and support to allow each county to input backlog data and clean up any current data in Dependency Data System. This allowed each jurisdiction in the Commonwealth to be online using the Dependency Data System with all case data entered correctly.

As a result of the mini-grants provided by OCFC, the 65 counties currently on the system will be able to receive completed county specific data reports beginning in February 2009.

## Development & initiation of Data Reports

The AOPC-OCFC is developing data reports that can be pulled from the Dependency system. These reports will provide statewide aggregate Dependency data information as well as county specific data. Data will be provided to local jurisdictions as well as Children's, Leadership and Statewide Roundtables. OCFC staff will support counties by sharing data trends within the county and support strategic planning, development of programs and implementation of practices that may correct any concerns.

## Equipment

The OCFC purchased equipment for counties, as needed, to aid in accessing and utilizing the CPCMS Dependency Data System. Various counties requested new or replacement equipment to access the data system for the purposes of accessing data and information on the bench; reviewing cases and providing court orders immediately following the conclusion of the hearings. The equipment purchased for the 2008 Federal Fiscal Year includes:

- Laptops – portable desktop computers that provide all the function of a desktop computer and can be moved between various hearing rooms
- Thin Clients – These are similar to laptops, used solely for the purpose of accessing the Dependency Data System.
- Printers – Printers are provided in the courtrooms and allow for the printing of court orders following hearings.
- LCD Monitor – computer monitors

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

The OCFC and OCYF arranged to share various data reports. The Dependency Data system will provide information related to children and families involved with the court system. Additional data can be gathered from OCYF related to abuse/neglect and services provided prior to court involvement. The mutual sharing of data will offer a wider picture of the dependency system in Pennsylvania and show the need of improvement.

One of the ways in which OCYF and OCFC have collaborated has been through the sharing of data for the purposes of the National Governor's Association (NGA) – Policy Academy. Staff from the OCFC will be part of the local teams that provide support to counties in meeting their NGA goals. Each county participating as an NGA county has received extensive data packets regarding children in care.

### **III. Pennsylvania's overall activities and progress towards meeting the recommendations delineated in the 2005 CIP Reassessment**

Recommendation # 3: The Pennsylvania Statewide CIP Committee should examine ways to encourage and support local efforts to develop an automated capacity to track its dependency caseload. This may include developing a common automated solution that can be offered to local counties – especially medium and smaller sized counties – that currently have little on tracking capabilities in this area. – The CPCMS Dependency System has been implemented in 65 of 67 counties with the two largest jurisdictions (Allegheny and Philadelphia) scheduled to go live in 2009.

Recommendation # 5: Statutory changes should be considered to expand jurisdiction in the juvenile court to include any termination of parental rights (TPR) and adoptions matters resulting from an original dependency filing. In addition, specific timelines should be established for the filing of the TPR petition after the court has determined a goal change to adoption is appropriate, for the scheduling of the initial hearing on this petition, and for the scheduling and completion of TPR proceedings. - Currently TPR matters are heard in front of a Dependency Court Judge, while adoption matters go to the Orphans Court Judge, unless one judge hears both types of cases (which is permissible under current law). Although at this time it is not anticipated that this process will change, the OCFC is aiding coordination and communication between the two courts to prevent any barriers that may occur. Additionally, as a requirement of the Pennsylvania Permanency Practice Initiative, courts are expected to enhance coordination between Dependency and Orphans Court. Scheduling hearings can be completed using the CPCMS Dependency Data System, which can be accessed by all judges.

Recommendation # 8: The Statewide CIP Committee and AOPC should examine ways to encourage the judiciary and court administration – particularly in medium-sized courts – to become more involved in the day-to-day scheduling, operations and management of the dependency docket. –The implementation of the CPCMS Dependency Data System allows local courts to be more involved in the day-to-day operations of dependency courts. The local courts will now have access to all dependency information in the county and have the ability to schedule various court hearings; send notification to parties; and complete orders all within the system.

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

During the 2007 State Roundtable meeting (June 24, 2007) the lack of dependency data was a great concern. At the direction of the Statewide Roundtable, AOPC's Judicial Automation Department created a dependency module for CPCMS. Many suggested changes have been made to the system,

based on input from the Statewide Roundtable, Leadership Roundtable and counties. At this point, all change requests are being reviewed by the Juvenile Rules Committee, OCFC staff and the OCYF (those that have potential fiscal implications) prior to changes being made.

At the State Roundtable in June 2008, Mr. Ralph Hunsicker, Senior Projects Manager, AOPC Judicial Automation Department provided an update as to the progress thus far in rolling out the Dependency Data System. Mr. Hunsicker provided a brief overview, discussed system functionality and updated members of the roundtable to the progress of site visits, training and county implementation of the system. After the presentation, Roundtable members provided comments and feedback related to the 48 hour timeframe to complete orders, as well as concerns about “roll-out”; training and general system concerns.

**V. Results of any Assessments of Activities Funded Under this Grant**

There have been no assessments related to activities under this grant.