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# Press Releases

## Giving Kids a Better Chance

**Linda Metz**

For nearly two months, Washington County has been developing a new system that ultimately would reduce the time abused and neglected children spend in foster homes.

The new automated dependence tracking module is the first of its kind in the nation.

“It’s good for the kids, and it’s good government,” said Washington County Judge Mark Mascara, who took on the job of implementing the new system at the request of state Supreme Court Justice Max Baer.

According to Mascara, the new system uses the Common Pleas Court Management System that allows the court to quickly look at a case and take the needed steps to speed up the process of getting a child into a permanent home.

“State law mandates that we take a look at each case every six months. But six months is a lifetime for a child,” said Mascara.

The judge added that this way, “children are less likely to languish in dependency.”

Mascara said it could possibly cut months off the average time it takes to review a case.

It took cooperation from the staffs at Mascara’s office, and the offices of Clerk of Courts Barbara Gibbs and Children and Youth Services. The team worked with members of the state Office of Children and Families in Courts.

“On any given day in Pennsylvania, there are tens of thousands of dependent children in foster homes or temporary residential settings because they have been abused or neglected,” said Sandy Moore, administrator of the OCFC.

She added, “They can wait, in some cases, for years before being placed in a permanent home. That’s too many children in the court system, and it’s far too long for dependent children to wait to be placed in a permanent home where they have a better chance for successful lives.”

The new system is now being used in Bucks and Northampton county courts. It’s expected to be implemented statewide by year’s end.

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