



library

- [Press Releases](#)
- [Acronyms](#)
- [Materials & Resources](#)
- [Glossary](#)
- [Links](#)

Press Releases

Washington County First in State to Implement Child Dependency Data Tracking System

HARRISBURG — The state Supreme Court today announced that the Washington County Common Pleas Court was the first to begin detailed tracking of dependency cases as part of a statewide effort to make Pennsylvania’s courts more responsive to the needs of children and families and to reduce the time abused and neglected children spend in foster homes. This new computer system is the first of its kind in the nation, and will move Pennsylvania far ahead of other states in understanding what is occurring within its child welfare population.

This represents one of the first innovations of the Office of Children and Families in the Courts (OCFC), which is coordinating Pennsylvania’s efforts to improve the lives of its abused and neglected children. State Supreme Court Justice Max Baer, a former administrative judge of family court in Allegheny County, who is guiding these efforts on behalf of the Supreme Court, said, “We will enhance and standardize the collection of child dependency information throughout the state, assuring that judges and other child welfare professionals are given the necessary data and resources to solve the local and state-wide problems which are impeding efforts to assure that every Pennsylvania child grows up in a quality permanent home.”

Sandy Moore, administrator of the OCFC, added, “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 and/or neglected. 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.”

Washington County Judge Mark Mascara, who hears dependency cases, said, “It is an honor to be the first in the state to begin collecting and tracking details regarding child dependency cases. I applaud our court staff, our Clerk of Courts, Barbara Gibbs and our agency personnel assigned to this task, all of whom spent weeks with the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts’ computer staff to pilot this effort. Our President Judge, Debbie O’Dell Seneca, has also been very supportive. It has been a collaborative effort which has improved how we handle these important cases.”

In addition to Washington County, the system is being piloted in the common pleas courts of Bucks and Northampton counties. The statewide county rollout of the dependency tracking system begins with this effort, and is scheduled to be completed by the end of the year.

For more information on Pennsylvania’s overall Dependency Court Improvement Project, court officials and dependency advocates can contact the OCFC at 717-295-2000 ext 4255.

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Editor’s Note: The OCFC joins other recent initiatives of the Supreme Court designed to modernize and improve the court system throughout Pennsylvania. Those initiatives include, among others, programs that provide trained court interpreters; assist in the establishment of specialty — or problem-solving — courts, such drug and DUI courts; and train judges in general and specialized areas of jurisprudence, using the most advanced educational techniques available.

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- [Home](#)

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