



Alan K. Silberstein
President Judge

Letter From the President Judge

The Philadelphia Municipal Court is truly the “People’s Court” of Philadelphia. During the 1996 and 1997 calendar years, the Court handled over 200,000 filings per year and disposed of over 200,000 cases per year. I think we can all agree that this is an impressive accomplishment.

The reason our Court functions so effectively is threefold: Judges who are willing to listen and to be fair; good top and middle level management; and excellent employees who work together almost as a family in attending to the day-to-day needs of both the public and the Court. I continue to be very proud of the Philadelphia Municipal Court and the service that it renders to the citizenry of our City.

My colleagues on the bench join with me in congratulating all of our employees for the superb job they did during these past two years. We all can and should be proud to work for the fourth largest Court in the country.



Robert S. Blasi
Administrative Judge

Letter From the Administrative Judge

Municipal Court is the indispensable avenue to justice and legal relief for the vast majority of Philadelphians who experience the formal process of the judicial system. We are the only special court in Pennsylvania which is a court of record and we serve the city through a combination of wide and convenient access to civil proceedings and substantial authority in matters of criminal law.

As a jurisdiction for civil cases, low filing fees and pro se filings provide tremendous opportunity for any citizens to be empowered. All landlord and tenant actions (unlimited jurisdictions) and civil actions in which the amount in controversy is 10,000 dollars or less fall within our responsibility. Municipal Court also handles numerous City filings including all Code Enforcement. All told, the civil disputes and complaints which comprise the overwhelming volume of encounters that average citizens have with litigation are the business of our court and our sense of duty has been heightened by a profound appreciation for this common experience with the law.

As for criminal proceedings, jurisdiction for preliminary arraignments and hearings, bail decisions and trials for offenses carrying sentences of up to five years have made us the necessary judicial forum for as many as 60,000 cases in a year and yet we have retained the confidence of the community in our capacity to dispense justice in a manner that secures the rights of everyone.

The combined civil and criminal cases we preside over each year approach totals unimagined when Municipal Court was formed in 1968. We have disciplined ourselves to face this enormous responsibility and have gathered a staff as competent and unselfishly dedicated as any serving a large jurisdiction in the country. We are thankful for their extraordinary effort, for their steadfast insistence on regarding their work as a vocation and for their determination to help us meet the challenges which lie ahead.

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Richard M. Simpson
Court Administrator

OVERVIEW

The Philadelphia Municipal Court was established through the 1968 amendment to the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania that also introduced the three Divisions of the Court of Common Pleas. Municipal Court is a court of limited jurisdiction with 25 judges.

Under the leadership of President Judge Alan K. Silberstein and Administrative Judge Robert S. Blasi, two Supervising Judges manage the major Municipal Court components: the Criminal and Civil Divisions. The non-judicial management team is headed by Court Administrator Richard Simpson. The Civil and Criminal Divisions are each run by a Deputy Court Administrator.

Municipal Court jurisdiction extends to criminal offenses (other than summary traffic offenses) punishable by a term of imprisonment not exceeding five years. Civil action jurisdiction is limited to claims not exceeding \$10,000.

The Philadelphia Municipal Court is the only special court of record in the Commonwealth. While there are no statutory provisions for jury trials, appeals may be taken for trials *de novo* in the Court of Common Pleas.

Municipal Court is a compact, well-organized, and high volume front line Court geared toward participation by average citizens. Interaction with the almost 200 Municipal Court employees reveals that they are committed to serving the public, and importantly, serving well.



Patricia R. McDermott
Deputy Court Administrator
Civil Division

OVERVIEW & ORGANIZATION

Each year, the Philadelphia Municipal Court Civil Division receives an average of 80,000 filings — Small Claims, Landlord/Tenant, Public Nuisance Complaints, and Code Enforcement actions. Managed by the President and Administrative Judges, the Civil Division lines of authority are further delineated to include the Honorable Barbara S. Gilbert as Supervising Judge. Managers of this division report directly to the Deputy Court Administrator, Patricia R. McDermott, who in turn serves under Court Administrator Richard M. Simpson and the Supervising and Administrative and President Judges. They are also affected by the decisions of the First Judicial District Court Administrator.

Eight major branches comprise the Civil Division organizational structure: 1) First Filing Unit; 2) Civil Listings; 3) Data Processing; 4) Writ Service; 5) Dispute Resolution Program; 6) Courtroom Operations (including Civil Trial Commissioners); 7) Court Recorders; 8) Judgment and Petitions.

The Civil Division is presently staffed with approximately 60 full time employees, more than 100 Writ Servers, 5 Arbitrators, and 25 Mediators. A sampling of the full time employee classifications would include Directors, Court Administrative Officers, Trial Commissioners, Court Recorders, Court Reporters, Cashiers, Court Officers, Court Order Processing Clerks, Legal Clerks, Clerk Typists, Clerical Assistants, and Messengers.

For each year of the Biennium, an average of 80,000 cases were filed and more than 76,000 cases were disposed in Municipal Court's Civil Division.

PURPOSE

Civil Division accessibility is highlighted by affordable and efficient operations. The mission of the Division is to guarantee that parties are afforded the opportunity to reasonably settle disputes. The aim is to safeguard fairness while offering options to expeditiously resolve cases before judges in courtrooms or through mediation or other alternative forums.

RESPONSIBILITIES

This section broadly summarizes Municipal Court civil case processing. More detailed information concerning specific operational components is presented below under the heading "Departments". Contact with the Municipal Court First Filing Unit is the first step in the generation of Municipal Court civil cases. Here, prospective litigants are assisted by staff interviewers who help to complete pleadings and provide clients with typed versions that indicate hearing date, time and location. Fees are charged for the initiation of cases and service of complaints to defendants. Next, claims are forwarded to the Civil Listings Unit for retention until the court date. Meanwhile, claim forms and copies are disseminated to involved operational departments allowing them to concurrently proceed with their respective functions — Writ Service employees serve notice, and Data Processing personnel record pertinent data in the automated com-



Judge Linda F. Anderson

puter systems. After the hearing date litigants can proceed to the Judgment and Petitions Unit to follow-up on Writs of Execution or Petitions to Open.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Examination of annual figures for the 1996-1997 biennium reveals a slight rise (2%) in Small Claims and Landlord/Tenant filings from about 38,000 in CY 1996, to 38,918 in CY 1997.

However, Code Enforcement data show a dramatic increase of 31%, or 21,300 filings from the 69,000 actions filed in CY 1996 to the 90,300 recorded in CY 1997. The numbers of Code

Enforcement dispositions mirrored filings — 69,400 in CY 1996 and 91,000 in CY 1997.

The Dispute Resolution Program fosters access through encouraging and facilitating agreements. This approach allows more parties to proceed toward resolution in a shorter time. Agreement rates are impressive: approximately 75%

for Small Claims Cases, 80% for Housing Cases, and 70% through Criminal Mediation.

For calendar years 1996 and 1997, the following averages were recorded: 1) total number of cases filed — 160,000; 2) cases adjudicated — 150,093; 3) cases disposed through Dispute Resolution — 2,250; and 4) active case inventory — 22,300. The number of appeals perfected on Municipal Court Civil Trials totaled 1,273.

In attending to public participation in the judicial process, the Civil Division assisted with ADA accommodations for over 1,500 clients during the biennium.

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DEPARTMENTS

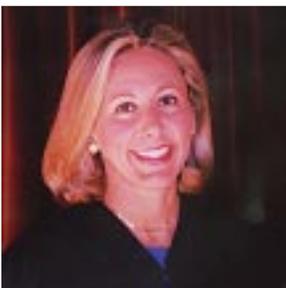
First Filing Unit: The First Filing Unit manages a variety of cases including Small Claims within the jurisdictional limit of \$10,000, Landlord/Tenant matters with unlimited jurisdiction, and City Tax Cases and Code Enforcement Complaints. Some procedures are designed to assist prospective plaintiffs without counsel. Interviewers prepare



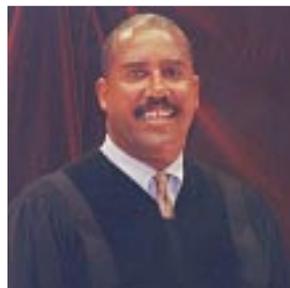
Judge Frank T. Brady



Judge Matthew F. Coppolino



Judge Georganne V. Daher



Judge James M. DeLeon



Judge Teresa Carr Deni



Judge Thomas F. Gehret

complaints and clerical employees type appropriate information into the court transcript. This personalized *pro se* service is thought to be unique to courts nationwide. Attorney filings are also administered by employees of this department, as are petitions to proceed “in forma pauperis” (petitions to proceed without assuming the burden of costs). In addition, First Filing cashiers receive fees generated by the high volume of cases filed in Municipal Court. Requests for ADA accommodations are also processed here.

Municipal Court employees aim to be readily accessible and helpful. The First Filing Unit employees contribute in the effort to achieve these goals by accepting mail-in filings and training Interviewers in Dispute Resolution skills to mediate Small Claims and Housing disputes.

Civil Listings: Civil Listings Department workers coordinate and schedule hearings in civil courtrooms of Municipal Court. This unit also controls City agency schedules and pleadings. A case management department vital to the maintenance and control of courtroom activities, Civil Listings monitors the docket to ensure that each courtroom is assigned an appropriate number of cases per day. For instance, complex protracted matters receive special

attention and time allocations for scheduling purposes. In this manner, the Department maintains a balanced calendar across available courtrooms and so makes optimal use of resources. Additionally, the Civil Listing unit processes correspondence with litigants and notifies parties of continuances and listings. Municipal Court judges, administrators and staff work cooperatively to continue to prevent backlogs. Case inventories are followed by tracking each case in the system.

Data Processing: Data Processing Department employees post pertinent case information, including disposition, into the mainframe computer. Additionally, they perform checks to maintain quality control. Data are made available to personnel to aid in their efforts to help litigants. Some of this information is also used by title and credit agencies. On an ongoing basis, department employees and managers implement system upgrades and hone their technology skills to increase the efficiency of service delivery.

Writ Service: Writ servers work to expediently serve notice to litigants. Their efforts serve to aid litigants and promote case progress leading to more timely conclusions. The unit serves more than 100,000 writs annually. Notices of civil filings and Private



Senior Judge
Martin W. Bashoff



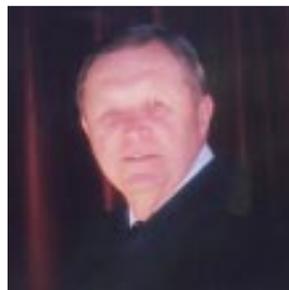
Judge Gwendolyn Conway



Judge Francis P. Cosgrove



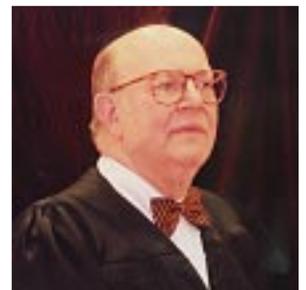
Supervising Judge
Barbara S. Gilbert



Judge William A. King, Jr.



Judge Lydia Y. Kirkland



Judge Morton Krase

Criminal Complaints are executed by employees of this department.

Dispute Resolution Program: The Dispute Resolution Program is an early intervention case management system providing alternatives to more lengthy and costly Court proceedings. The program has two broad functions: 1) mediation of Housing, Small Claims and Private Criminal Complaints; and 2) arbitration of Private Criminal Complaints. The operation sees over 2,000 cases per year. Mediation sessions are moderated by volunteers, law students and staff members. Arbitration cases though, are conducted by attorneys appointed by the Court. The results have been noteworthy: the over-all agreement rate is approximately 75%. The Dispute Resolution success rate has led the United States Office of Personnel Management to adopt the program as a training model for the federal government.

Courtroom Operations: Municipal Court Civil cases are heard at 34 S. 11th Street. Courtroom Operations employees direct the conduct of cases and provide step by step guidance for participants in courtroom proceedings. They confirm that all parties are present and maintain the integrity and safety of the courtroom participants. Litigants and other personnel with problems are assisted by Court Officers. Tipstaves in the Civil Division are responsible for the operation of metal detectors and recording daily statistical data.

Court Recorders: Civil suit testimony is preserved with an audio tape system managed by Court Recorders. Recorders are present during proceedings conducted before judges. Recorders

tape testimony elicited in courtrooms. Later, the tapes may be transcribed into typed format. Copies of tapes are retained for three years.

Trial Commissioners: For improved case management, Civil Trial Commissioners are vested with the authority to occupy the bench and dispose cases that might not warrant judicial determinations. Trial Commissioners glean out appropriate cases for their deliberation and eventual disposition through agreement. This arrangement enables judges to focus their attention on contested matters, relieving litigants of unnecessary and time-consuming delays.

Judgment and Petitions: Employees of the Judgment and Petitions unit handle civil division post-trial motions. They advise and assist *pro se* litigants and parties represented by counsel to guide them through the filing processes for post-trial petitions and motions. These filings involve the enforcement of money judgments and judgments for possession in housing matters. Duties have evolved and expanded in scope to address increasing numbers of a widening variety of petitions and motions. With the Court priding itself on developing easy access for all litigants, this unit plays an integral role in making the judicial process manageable and understandable.

Once cases have been decided, the department is also responsible to see that agreements are indeed executed properly by allowing for parties to file Affidavits for Breach. Writs of Revival and Appeals to Common Pleas Court are also kept by this unit. Through these and other functions, the Judgment and

Petitions office may be viewed as the office of final resort — ensuring, to the greatest extent possible, that justice is being served.

LINKAGES WITH OTHER COURTS AND PROGRAMS

The Municipal Court Civil Division interfaces with the Prothonotary's Office when appeals are taken to Common Pleas Court. Municipal Court employees also work with District Courts of other counties for transfers of Judgments.

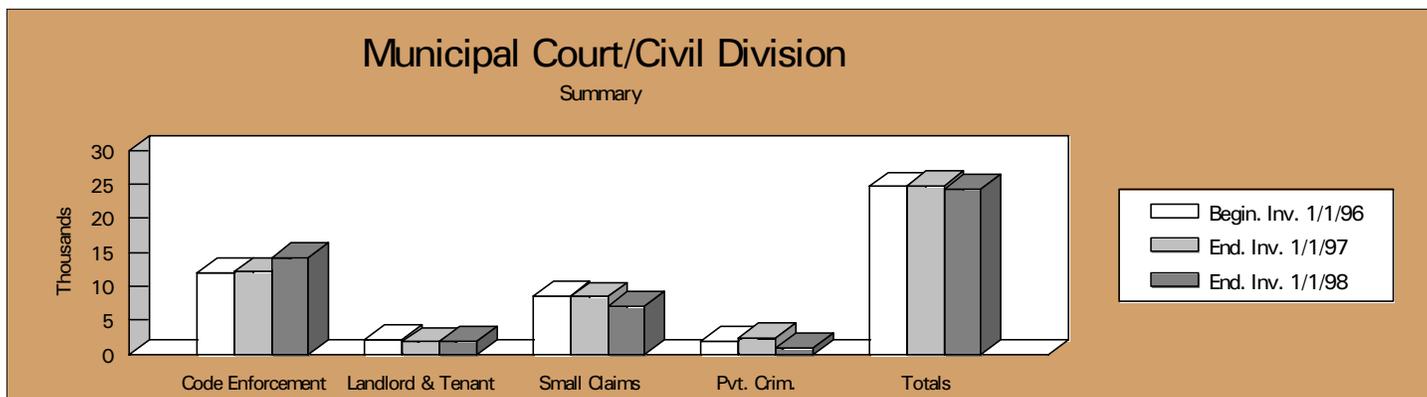
ACCESS TO JUSTICE INITIATIVES

Project Self: During the past two years Municipal Court has participated through the Big Sister Program of Philadelphia in "Project Self". This program places disabled high school students in Court jobs during summer

vacations. Students have the opportunity to gain valuable work experience while Court personnel learn about the needs and skills of the disabled community. The program has engendered greater understanding and generated mutually rewarding experiences for both students and Court personnel alike.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): Municipal Court ADA accommodations procedures also include the provision of telephonic hearings from a courtroom setting, and the supply of tape recorded testimony and proceedings. In addition, staff assist litigants by facilitating filing via the U.S. Mail.

Adjustment of Jurisdictional Limit: During calendar year 1996, the Municipal Court jurisdictional limit was increased to \$10,000. This move broadened access, and benefitted unrepresented and other litigants filing civil action in Small Claims Court.



Year to Date 1996

	<i>Avail. for Disposition 01/01/96</i>	<i>Received During Period</i>	<i>Total to be Disposed</i>	<i>Total Disposed</i>	<i>Avail. for Disposition 01/01/97</i>	<i>Increase (Decrease)</i>
Code Enforcement	11,958	69,776	81,734	69,614	12,120	162
Landlord & Tenant	2,138	24,461	26,599	24,741	1,858	(280)
Small Claims	8,510	55,639	64,149	55,738	8,411	(99)
Private Criminal	2,004	3,257	5,261	2,890	2,371	367
TOTALS	24,610	153,133	177,743	152,983	24,760	150

Year to Date 1997

	<i>Avail. for Disposition 01/01/97</i>	<i>Received During Period</i>	<i>Total to be Disposed</i>	<i>Total Disposed</i>	<i>Avail. for Disposition 01/01/98</i>	<i>Increase (Decrease)</i>
Code Enforcement	12,120	92,128	104,248	89,986	14,262	2,142
Landlord & Tenant	1,858	25,321	27,179	25,249	1,930	72
Small Claims	8,411	47,103	55,514	48,361	7,153	(1,258)
Private Criminal	2,371	2,313	4,684	3,775	909	(1,426)
TOTALS	24,760	166,865	191,625	167,371	24,254	(506)

