

Court Reporter, Interpreter and Digital Recording Administration

Overview

The office of Court Reporter, Interpreter and Digital Recording Administration comprises five service centers, each of which provides a myriad of services to the public, legal community and various divisions within the court system. There are 9 office staff employees within Court Reporter, Interpreter and Digital Recording Administration

The five service centers are: 1.) Court Reporting Services; 2.) Interpreter Services; 3.) Record Reproduction Center, 4.) The CRS system and 4.) Digital Recording Services. The Court Reporter, Interpreter and Digital Recording Administration employs a total staff of **130** employees. The Administration provides services to **122** courtrooms within the FJD and operates under a budget of \$9 million.

In addition to the services listed above, The Court Reporter, Interpreter and Digital Recording Administration has added additional functions to its daily routine which have been implemented to reduce costs and increase efficiency. Those functions involve protocols established for the following services: Document Management, Interpreter Training and Scheduling, Criminal Appeals, Civil Appeals, and Archiving and Destruction of Notes of Testimony. (See last three headings in this report.)

Court Reporting Services

Court reporters are highly trained and skilled professionals who, through the use of stenographic machines and computer-aided transcription, preserve the verbatim record of all proceedings in the First Judicial District (FJD), with the exception of those proceedings held in Philadelphia Traffic Court and those preserved through the use of Digital Audio Recording. Court reporting services are provided to the Common Pleas and Municipal Courts and their constituent divisions.

In the Court of Common Pleas, court reporters staff courtrooms housed in Family Court, Orphans' Court and the various Trial Divisions. These divisions handle a wide range of matters including Juvenile Delinquency and Dependency, Adoptions, Domestic Relations, Criminal, Civil and Probate cases. Grand jury matters, official ceremonies and various administrative events also fall in the purview of court reporters' duties where the preservation of a record is required. Reporters also record testimony in the Civil and Criminal Divisions of the Municipal Court, such as preliminary hearings.

Since 2009 all translated steno notes are archived for security purposes. This allows Administration to access and produce transcripts should a reporter not be available to do so. The concept of maintaining a central storage server upon which are placed all raw notes created by court reporters assures the reporter and the Deputy Court Administrator that the record taken in each courtroom daily is secure. The court reporters transfer their non-transcribed raw notes onto a flash drive. These files from the flash drive are then stored onto a central server which contains a folder for each court reporter. In the event of a lengthy sickness, death or termination of a court reporter, if for some reason the court reporter cannot produce the requested notes of testimony, technicians are able to access this raw note storage server, gain access to the reporter's notes and a transcript can then

be produced, eliminating the time-consuming and often frustrating job of tracking an unavailable court reporter's raw notes of testimony.

Court Reporter Statistics

As of the month of February 2012, The Court Reporter, Interpreter and Digital Recording Administration employs a total staff of **ninety-four (94)** full-time court reporters. The Court Reporters provide services to various FJD courtrooms, in each of the divisions outlined above, on a daily basis. Their numbers include Registered Merit Reporters (RMR) and Registered Professional Reporters (RPR) who have achieved excellence in stenographic writing proficiency. As well as Certified RealTime Reporters.

Included in that total are twenty-three (23) Court Reporter Trainees who possess varied levels of experience and have attained, or are working towards attaining, their full certification. The First Judicial District's Court Reporter Trainee Program is the first of its kind in the country. Students who have recently graduated from Court Reporting School, or freelance reporters who have not achieved their RPR certification status, and who fulfill a strict set of requirements, are afforded the opportunity to become full-time employees with the Court Reporter Division. Their training is on-the-job, and specifically tailored to the official courtroom setting, thereby eliminating the challenges which face court reporters who are transitioning from the freelance arena to the courtroom setting. Per diem court reporters include retired and/or freelance reporters who staff courtrooms as their own schedule permits. Due to budget constraints, per diem court reporters are utilized sparingly in the courtrooms.

RealTime Reporters

RealTime transcription involves the simultaneous translation and display of court proceedings utilizing computer-aided transcription. Certified Real-time Reporters are Registered Merit Reporters or Registered Professional Reporters who possess the knowledge, who have successfully passed the Nation test and have the skill and ability to accurately and immediately translate spoken testimony into the written word. The court reporters' translated notes are simultaneously displayed on computer monitors during live proceedings within the courtroom. Real-time Reporters provide a valuable service to the hard-of-hearing and deaf individuals who otherwise would not be able to participate in the judicial process within the courtroom environment. In such instances, the deaf or hard-of-hearing individual utilizes computer monitors situated in the courtroom so that they can read an accurate written version of the live oral testimony as it occurs. RealTime reporters are requested in Civil Trial Division mass tort litigation, medical malpractice and defective product trials. Those real-time writers who are not certified continue to work towards their certification. Ten (10) court reporters on staff are Certified Real-time Reporters and twenty (20) are Real-time Capable Reporters (those who write real-time but are not yet certified.)

The Court Reporter Division of the First Judicial District of Pennsylvania employs court reporters who are considered to be the most proficient in their field. In 2011 official court reporters produced approximately **800,000 pages** of transcripts.

Digital Recording Services

The Court Reporter and Interpreter Division instituted the Digital Recording Program in 2003 in response to a general shortage of highly-qualified stenographic court reporters. As of February 2012, the Digital Recording Program employs **three (3)** administrative staff members, as well as a staff of **eighteen (18)** full-time and **five (5)** part-time Digital Recording Technicians (DRTs). The Digital Recording Technicians (DRTs) monitor the recording of court proceedings through the use of FTR Gold Recording software. Additionally, Digital Recording Technicians create detailed log notes that are utilized by the digital recording transcriptionists to ensure accurate transcription of audio files.

The Digital Recording Program staffs courtrooms within the Domestic Relations Division, Juvenile Division, Criminal Division and Civil Division, as well as those courtrooms hosting Violation of Probation/PCRA hearings.

All computers staffed by Digital Recording Technicians are connected to a central server. As the recordings and log notes are being produced, the audio files and log note files are automatically sent to a central server for storage and future retrieval. Prior to this advancement, each day's proceedings would be stored on a disk. The central server technology has greatly reduced costs as well as physical storage needs. The coordination of the digital recording courtroom assignment schedule, and the transfer of the audio and log notes from each day's proceedings into designated files contained on the server for ease of retrieval are completed daily.

The Administrative Staff of the Digital Recording Program, though not directly responsible for the maintenance of digital recording computers installed in other areas of the City, also voluntarily administers troubleshooting support services to the digital recording programs which have been implemented in other areas of the Philadelphia Court System, including the Civil Administration of the Municipal Courts and the Mental Health Hearing Program as well as offering support to the Berks County Court Administration in Reading, Pennsylvania.

FJD Court Reporters transcribe their own notes and produce their own transcripts. The Digital Recording Program outsources transcription to freelance and in-house DRT transcriptionists. Administration follows the progression of completion of a transcript from the processing of transcript order forms to the physical distribution or delivery to ordering parties. In the year 2011, approximately 2500 transcripts were produced by the Digital Recording Program.

Interpreter Services

The Interpreter Division of the First Judicial District remains in the forefront of the field by insuring, to the greatest extent possible, equal access to justice for those who are deaf or of Limited English Proficiency (LEP).

Toward that end, a database is maintained to record and track interpreter assignments, and to monitor costs. Accordingly, controls are in place to avoid unnecessary expenses and provide greater scheduling efficiency. Part of these controls are weekly calendars which are sent to the District Attorney, the Public Defender, the Chiefs of Municipal and Common Pleas courtroom operations, as well MC Civil and both

Family Courts. These calendars are provided to confirm hearings for the upcoming week for which an interpreter has been scheduled, and to cancel interpreters for any hearing that will not go forward. The advance notification process has saved thousands of dollars in cancellation fees to the Court.

The FJD has been acclaimed for a progressive and proactive stance towards insuring due process for persons with linguistic or auditory challenges. To further enhance service quality, training seminars have been conducted for interpreters so they can become more familiar with legal terminology specific to each court as well as instruction regarding professional and ethical standards.

In 2011, the Deputy Court Administrator provided training on weekends in the Spring, Summer and Fall. The seminars were a collaboration of the FJD, the Interbranch Commission on Racial, Gender & Ethnic Fairness in the Courts, Widener University School of Law.

In August of 2011, we provided individualized training for people hoping to become or pass the certification test in the Vietnamese language. Joseph Pham, a well-known trainer from Washington state was our main speaker and teach for the weekend.

In the Spring of 2011, we provided a seminar for Haitian-Creole interpreters. The US Ambassador spoke and encouraged the interpreters to assist those coming from Haiti. Judge Chen also spoke, as well as the trainer provided by Widener University.

Communication and interaction with the AOPC Office of Interpreter Programs is ongoing. We invite the director of the program to speak at our seminars and training.

We have presented at various conferences not only in Philadelphia, for the Family Court Division of the Philadelphia Bar Association, but also at the National Association of Judiciary Interpreters annual conference in Boston. Judge Chen and Janet Fasy have provided training at the Municipal Court judges' conference, the Pennsylvania Conference for Judges in Hershey, the Delaware Valley Translators Association.

We have provided training to in-house staff, court officers, and judges to assure their understanding of our protocols and what their obligations are within the courtrooms.

All of the presentations, seminars and training sessions are tools the FJD has used to assure we provide to the litigants and public outstanding interpreter services and to assure our court is at the forefront in this field. Our department received an award in 2011 from the Interbranch Commission on Racial, Gender & Ethnic Fairness in the Courts for our ongoing commitment to providing timely, accurate interpreting services, as well as our Translation Document Program, wherein we provided to the FJD, the AOPC, and all courts in Pennsylvania, forms translated into our five most-often requested interpreters services: Spanish, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Russian and Chinese.

The Honorable Ida K. Chen has assisted the Deputy Court Administrator and collaborated with our partners outside the Courts. In 2011, acting as editor, Judge Chen assisted the FJD in providing translated Protection from Abuse documents used in Family Court. All of those documents were given to the AOPC to post to their website and distribute throughout all counties in Pennsylvania.

The AOPC has set in place a certification roster. All interpreters working in any courtroom within the FJD must have passed certification criteria for confirmation and must appear on this roster.

The Interpreter Division has helped litigants meaningfully participate in the judicial process by providing interpreter services in over **55** languages. For the calendar year 2011, more than **\$500,000** was spent for on-site interpretation, as well as special assignments and text translations.

COURT REPORTING SYSTEM (CRS)

The Court Reporting System (CRS) provides electronic archival and retrieval services for transcripts produced by court reporters. ASCII disks that contain completed transcripts are brought to the Record Reproduction Center, date stamped by the staff, and given to the CRS Technicians. The CRS Technicians place the notes of testimony on the CRS system, which is a central transcript storage server. This server is accessible by judges, assistant district attorneys and public defenders who enjoy the ease of retrieving and printing completed transcripts from their own offices. They or their staff may also save copies to utilize for drafting opinions.

Presently being developed is a new program known as the TOS (Transcript Ordering System.) The Transcript Ordering System will allow ordering parties to pay for their transcripts through the use of credit card and/or debit card transactions. Upon payment, the TOS will automatically send a copy of a transcript to the ordering party. In addition, the TOS will connect and speak simultaneously with the CRS database, provide reports, and communicate directly to the reporter. The interaction of the database and the reporter, as well as the management staff, assures the request for transcript is received, the transcript produced timely.

As of December of 2011, the CRS database has archived over **7 million pages** of transcripts. Judges and their judicial staff, District Attorneys, Defenders are able to access the database and view a transcript at their own computers within seconds. The transcripts in the database are easily able to be read, searched, copied, pasted into a brief. Each transcript has a word index, which allows for fast search capability.

RECORD REPRODUCTION CENTER

The Record Reproduction Center provides a variety of crucial services to the Court Reporter Administration as well as all other divisions of the FJD court system. As it relates to Court Reporter Administration, the Center's primary function is to insure the efficient reproduction of all transcripts produced by court reporters and digital recording transcriber for court-appointed counsel and other private parties who do not have access to the CRS system (*See Court Reporting System (CRS) above*).

However, as we have been emailing transcripts to the above as much as possible, and have required attorneys to provide an email address in order to receive transcripts electronically, this department is actively pursuing paperless production of transcripts.

As the need for reproduction of transcripts has decreased over the years, and at this point we are emailing all transcripts to attorneys, the Record Reproduction Center functions, as they relate to court reporting services has been reduced. The employees of the Record Reproduction Center have been careful with the utilization of the expensive equipment also, thus allowing the continued use of outdated, old equipment. This has allowed us to save any purchasing costs, as expected this year and last for new equipment.

The Center also provides the following services to the FJD, as a whole:

- Provides printing services to the entire FJD. Printing is completed in the copy center for all the constituent divisions and departments of the Common Pleas, Municipal and Traffic Court systems.
- Archives and retrieves raw steno notes and other court-related materials from the Iron Mountain Storage facility.
- Assists judges, attorneys and private citizens regarding printing projects which are directly applicable to the functions of the court system, as a whole.
- Provides court-appointed attorneys with assistance in printing briefs, thus saving the FJD the cost of reimbursement at a higher cost.

In 2011, the total monthly average of pages copied equaled **55,000** to **58,000** pages as a result of almost **250** requests. Though the number of requests per month varies, these figures work out to a large number on a yearly basis. The Record Reproduction Center also affords court-appointed counsel the courtesy of copying their trial briefs. The average monthly total of briefs copied is approximately **50**, with the number of pages copied totaling close to **40,000** on a monthly basis as well.

CRIMINAL APPEALS

In 2011, the Court Reporter, Interpreter and Digital Recording Administration received approximately 1624 criminal appeals. The Criminal Appeals Database keeps track of all criminal appeals that arrive via fax and e-mail. Accuracy of information is verified and entered into an Access spreadsheet with all pertinent information. An email is then sent to the court reporter to notify him/her that an appeal has been ordered and said reporter has thirty (30) days to complete the notes. Reporters are required to notify the Criminal Appeals Database technician if there is a discrepancy in information and/or if there was an on the record hearing if the case was held. Once transcription of the notes is completed, reporters fill out a pink distribution sheet (used to delineate appeals from non-appeals). The transcript and the pink distribution sheet are forwarded to the CRS Database managers, who then upload the transcript to the CRS archival database. The distribution sheet indicating the transcripts was archived is returned to the Criminal Appeals Database Technician, who marks that case as completed on the Access spreadsheet. This process assures us of accurate and effective case flow management.

The introduction of the Criminal Appeals database came about after a discussion with the President Judge Dembe and Superior Court Judge Gantman. There had been some difficulties in the past with regard to attorneys not ordering transcripts either at all or at the last minute, and the appellate courts were waiting for a transcript that was never ordered. This database assures us, and now the appellate courts, when a case has not been ordered by a party, and therefore, should be dismissed, or the appellate court will

It was decided that the database would assure transcripts were produced for the appellate courts timely, if we put in place a procedure where we track the requests by attorneys.

CIVIL APPEALS

Civil Trial Division appeals comprise a smaller portion of the total cases appealed. Civil appeals may be juvenile, domestic relations or based on a CP judge's or jury's verdict. A database was set up to track the requests and detail all pertinent information regarding each case. Court reporters are responsible for completing notes of testimony ordered as a result of a civil appeal; however, transcription of a civil appeal cannot be undertaken until a completed transcript order form is received by a private party or private counsel.

Appeal notices are received from private citizens, attorneys and the Superior Court of Pennsylvania. The information is verified, the CRS is checked, and the court reporters are notified by email, with a paper copy of the appeal noticed placed in their mailbox. They are also provided with a pink distribution sheet for proper handling of the transcript once the notes are transcribed. All of the information is added to the database.

When civil notes have not been ordered for an appeal, the court reporter will contact the parties involved to ask if the transcript is needed for the appeal. If the attorney does not order the notes, a memo is placed in the file indicating that the appellant has not ordered the notes so that the appellate court is notified. This action, again, responds to the appellate court needing to understand why the transcript is not in the file. The Civil Appeals Database maintains an accurate updated description of completed and uncompleted transcripts.

ARCHIVING AND DESTRUCTION OF NOTES OF TESTIMONY

During a review of expenditures, in an effort to analyze fees paid by Court Administration, we realized costs associated with archiving documents within the court were astronomical. We recognized the need for a management review and undertook to discover how other departments within the FJD, and judicial chambers filed their documents. We unearthed decades of paying storage and retrieval fees to Iron Mountain for boxes paper stenographic notes, some dating back 40 years or more, and many judicial boxes for judges that no longer were in on the bench, in addition to alerting other departments that they still had boxes stored. In 2011, the Court Reporter Administration committed to identifying and destroying those boxes of stenographic paper notes, which have remained in storage past their time limit for archiving. We set about identifying documents that should be destroyed, and what Rules could be updated with regard to electronic storage possibilities. When researching, we realized the multitude of judicial boxes that were also beyond the archiving stage, and thus began an undertaking beyond the initial scope. This large project upon completion is projected to save the FJD over \$100,000 in 2012.

Our process has been over the last several years for each court reporter to box and store their stenographic paper notes, as required by the Supreme Court Record Retention Schedule. These boxes have been stored in Iron Mountain's facility. Iron Mountain

charges for the storage of each box. There are also fees attached to the continued storage, retrieval, and destruction of each box.

Thus, since 2009 we have archived stenographic notes electronically and have not stored paper notes in Iron Mountain. But we realized there were older boxes needing to be identified and possibly removed or destroyed. By identifying which boxes are no longer needed, or are so outdated that the material inside them has disintegrated over time and can never be transcribed in the future, it was decided to dispose of this material. By doing so, Court Administration has dramatically reduced its expenses regarding storage and retrieval, as well as expenses for judicial storage. As explained above, the future estimated savings to the FJD is approximately \$100,000 per year future.

FUTURE GOALS

At the present time, the staff of the Court Reporter, Interpreter and Digital Recording Administration is in the planning and development stage regarding the following goals for 2012:

To further reduce costs, and paper use, plans are being developed to eliminate the need to generate, and archive, various paper modalities, such as digital trial sheets and court reporter trial sheets. The use of a scanner to scan all reference material has been proposed and, if implemented, will eliminate unnecessary office clutter as well as the exorbitant costs of, again, storing such reference material in Iron Mountain.

Ordering of office supplies has become a centralized function, overseen by one individual, who keeps track of inventory, thus reducing the potential for duplicate orders.

The TOS database will be in place and a fee for each transaction will go to the FJD to supplement the cost of maintaining the database.

2012 will be a year of continual growth for the Digital Recording Division. During the first quarter of 2012, between three to eight courtrooms are planned to be added to the Digital Recording roster, increasing the number of courtrooms serviced by Digital Recording, on a full-time basis, to up to thirty-four (34).

Additional measures to reduce costs and increase efficiency have been proposed, and will be addressed throughout the calendar year 2012.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Court Reporter, Interpreter and Digital Recording Administration is committed to providing the FJD, the legal community, and the public-at-large, with service of the highest quality in the areas of court reporting, interpreter services, record reproduction and digital recording. We accept this charge and pledge to perform our duties with courtesy, efficiency and professionalism.