

Warrants and Disposition Management Project

York County Criminal Justice: The Benefits to Probation of Electronic Dispositions and Electronic Warrants

July 2, 2013



SEARCH

Profile, History and Structure

York County, Pennsylvania, has a storied history; when the Second Continental Congress was forced to flee Philadelphia from the approaching British at the end of September 1777, the delegates relocated 100 miles west to the City of York where the Articles of Confederation, the nation's initial governing document and the first to use the term "United States of America," were adopted. The County sits on the Mason-Dixon Line bordering the State of Maryland. Located in the Susquehanna Valley, the county encompasses 910 square miles and in 2010 recorded a population of approximately 435,000, an increase of nearly 14% over the previous census. In fact, the County has grown in population nearly 40% over the last thirty years, and the U.S. Census Bureau has ranked its Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) as the fastest-growing metro area in the Northeast region. The southern portions of the County are within easy commuting distance of Baltimore, and the County Seat, the City of York, is approximately 95 miles from Washington D.C. While the growth was welcomed by the area, these population increases also increased the pressures on local government agencies, particularly the Criminal Justice System.

The administration of justice in the region is the responsibility of Pennsylvania's 19th Judicial District, which is composed of the York County Court of Common Pleas and 19 magisterial districts. As the trial court, the Court of Common Pleas hears all major criminal cases and has the responsibility for various civil functions, family matters and juvenile related issues. Lesser criminal matters, as well as traffic and minor civil matters such as small claims and landlord-tenant disputes, are the responsibility of the magisterial courts. Management of the Courts is the responsibility of the District Court Administrator, an appointee of the President Judge of the Court of Common Pleas.

The York County Adult Probation and Parole Department reports to the District Court Administrator. The York County Adult Probation and Parole Department consists of approximately 110 employees of whom 73 are Probation Officers who are charged with the supervision of offenders adjudicated in the Common Pleas and Magisterial Courts and not sentenced to full-time incarceration. In addition to preparing pre-sentence investigation reports, Probation Officers' tasks include preparing case plans and advising and counseling offenders in the community. The Probation Department's ability to monitor the behavior of adjudicated offenders and revoke or modify probation for those who fail to adhere to the conditions of release imposed by the courts is essential to protecting public safety in the community.

Like other elements in the Criminal Justice System, the impact of regional population growth has created a large increase in the number of individuals placed under the supervision of Adult Probation. In fact, between 2004 and 2012 the Department experienced a 63% increase in caseload to an all-time high of 10,795 cases, just shy of a 150:1 ratio of case load to officer¹. This growth in workload occurred at a

¹ According to the American Probation and Parole Association (APPA) website, an issue paper from 2006 recommended the following ratios: Adult Intensive Risk: 20:1, Adult Moderate-High Risk: 50:1; Adult Low Risk: 200:1. http://www.appa-net.org/eweb/docs/APPA/stances/ip_CSPP.pdf

time when stagnant public revenues resulting from recessionary conditions have forced the Department to seek strategies allowing its employees to do more with less. Intelligent use of applied technology has permitted Adult Probation staff to accomplish that goal.

Strategic Technology Solutions: Electronic Dispositions

Even though the County had completed construction of a new Judicial Center in downtown York in 2004, by 2005, the large increase in case load for the Courts required that the Office of The Clerk of Court store over 4 million paper documents off site. Transportation of these documents between off-site storage and incarceration facilities and courtrooms frequently led to hearing and booking delays. The sharing of file information among the County's justice agencies was problematic at best. Just as importantly, other county offices were dealing with the same types of issues.

The County's Information Services Department began a project to scan minutes of County Commission meetings in 2002 with the goal of making the content more readily available to the public. With the success of that project, the same system was incorporated into the County's Human Resources Department and the Office of the Clerk of Courts by 2006. The County chose a York-based vendor, DocuScan USA (<http://www.docuscanusa.com/index.htm>), to implement software systems from LaserFiche© Inc. (<http://www.laserfiche.com/en-us>), a document management solutions provider.

The involvement of the local vendor was crucial in streamlining file organization and customizing processes specific to individual departments' needs. The County learned from experience that strict attention had to be paid to the human factor as well as the new technology. Reluctance to adapt to the new methodologies was not inconsequential, especially on the part of the judiciary. The Information Services personnel worked very hard to accommodate the judges and their staff, providing hands-on training at their convenience, and in many cases providing one-on-one instruction in system operations and capabilities. The end result was a judiciary strongly supportive of the process.

By 2008, the County had extended the system to the Adult Probation Department. The Adult Probation Department recognized the value of the new system immediately and continued fine tuning the system. The increase of system capabilities greatly enhanced both the efficiency and productivity of the department, allowing it to handle its increasing caseload while improving the services the Department provides to its constituency.

Strategic Solutions in Action

The York County Probation Department's use of electronic dispositions begins in the courtroom with a sentencing order (See Figure 1.), a copy of which is provided to the defendant with instructions to report to the Probation Department immediately before leaving the Judicial Center. At the end of the court session, all sentencing sheets are scanned into the LaserFiche system, making them immediately

available to the Adult Probation Department as well as other entities with authorized system access. Additionally, case notes are immediately fed into the electronic docketing system of the Administrative Office of the Pennsylvania Courts. When defendants arrive at the Adult Probation Office, the intake officer interviews them to establish criteria based on the offense and geographic regions to assign the offender to a particular supervisor. The intake documents are also scanned into the system. If the offender is new, a case management system entry is created; repeat offenders' information is added to their existing case jacket. After review, supervisors assign the offender to an individual probation officer.

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
VS

In the Court of Common Pleas of York County, Pennsylvania
Criminal Division
Docket No CP-67-_____
Charges: _____

Warrant Issued Warrant W/D **SENTENCE ORDER** been found Guilty
 pled Guilty

AND NOW, this _____ day of _____, 20____, the defendant having pled Nolo Contem Is sentenced to:

Count YCP/SCI _____ to _____ Probation _____ yr _____ mo _____ days Merges w/ Cnt _____ Is Conct/Consec to Cnt _____ Mandatory Non-Mandatory Section 17 Y N <input type="checkbox"/> Costs <input type="checkbox"/> Fines <input type="checkbox"/> Restitution	Count YCP/SCI _____ to _____ Probation _____ yr _____ mo _____ days Merges w/ Cnt _____ Is Conct/Consec to Cnt _____ Mandatory Non-Mandatory Section 17 Y N <input type="checkbox"/> Costs <input type="checkbox"/> Fines <input type="checkbox"/> Restitution
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All remaining counts are nolle prossed This Sentence shall be effective _____ Continued to _____
This Sentence shall be concurrent/consecutive to case(s): PADL Surrendered Court Notification of Prohibiting
 DL 16 Submitted Offense - Title 18 - Controlled Substance

Court Ordered Conditions/Recommendations: Report to YCP _____ am/pm
Successfully complete: Anger Management D/A Eval Outmate CRN Ordered
 Batterer's Intervention MH Eval Boot Camp CRN Completed
 In Patient Treatment Highway Safety RRRI RRRI Min _____ RRRI Ineligibility waived _____
 Out Patient Treatment Hrs Commy Service
Other: _____ Supervision transferred to: _____

The York County Prison is directed upon completion of his/her minimum sentence the defendant shall be released without a petition upon approval of a suitable parole plan by York County Probation. If defendant violates parole after serving a state sentence in YCP, he/she shall serve the balance of his sentence in a State Correctional Facility.
Unless otherwise indicated the defendant is eligible for any county re-entry programs.

Per stipulation, it is ordered that the defendant receive credit of _____ days time served. Absent stipulation, it is ordered that defendant receive credit as required by law for all time spent in custody as a result of these charges for which sentence is being imposed.

The Court also directs that the defendant shall pay the court costs/fines as assessed by the Clerk of Courts and be subject to such conditions governing probation, including a plan for the payment of costs, fines and restitution as established by the York County Probation Office, or the PA Board of Parole, as applicable.

Distributed to: District Attorney _____
Defense Counsel/Defendant _____
Court Reporter _____ Probation _____

BY THE COURT, _____
Judge _____

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Charges: _____

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Intermediate Punishment State IP Track II Vets

First _____ Months/Years
_____ Days/Months YCP
_____ days/months House Arrest / Electronic Monitoring
_____ day/mo Day Reporting _____ day/mo Int. Suprvisn

Costs Fines Restitution
Other: _____

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Distributed to: District Attorney _____
Defense Counsel/Defendant _____
Court Reporter _____ Probation _____

BY THE COURT, _____
Judge _____

Figure 1. In the Courtroom, a sentencing order like one of the two above will be completed by a clerk. By the end of the court session all such orders are scanned into the system and are immediately available to the Adult Probation Department staff.

Upon assignment, the Probation Officer monitors the offender's behavior, activities, and compliance with the Sentencing Order per normal procedures.

Real World Benefits

One of the key benefits of the new document management and offender tracking system is the immediacy with which the offender is supervised. Prior to system implementation, sentencing orders

were not received by the Adult Probation Department until the Clerk's Office completed and forwarded the case files. The lag time between the court's disposition and Probation's intake could be several weeks; this meant that an offender was without supervision until the Department received the order and scheduled an appointment with a Probation Officer.

Today, the expectation is that probationers report for intake the same day they are sentenced. So, for example, defendants who are ordered to wear electronic tracking devices as a condition of probation will leave the Justice Center with an activated device. York County's Adult Probation Department proudly points out that victim safety is greatly enhanced as a result of their new system and improved business processes and that recidivism and technical violations have declined. A direct financial benefit is that programs such as work-release and home confinement can be implemented immediately, and thus fewer individuals are held in jail.

From an administrative standpoint, performance metrics are easier to establish, which enhances accountability for employee performance. When circumstances require, revocation orders can be processed more quickly. Equally important, other entities in the justice system such as the Sheriff's Department and booking facilities also use the LaserFiche system, meaning that additional data, such as known identifiers, are immediately available to the Probation Officer.

System information is available to outside users via security protocols. Access to permitted information is available to the Defense Bar, Public Defender, Police and Sheriff on a case specific basis.

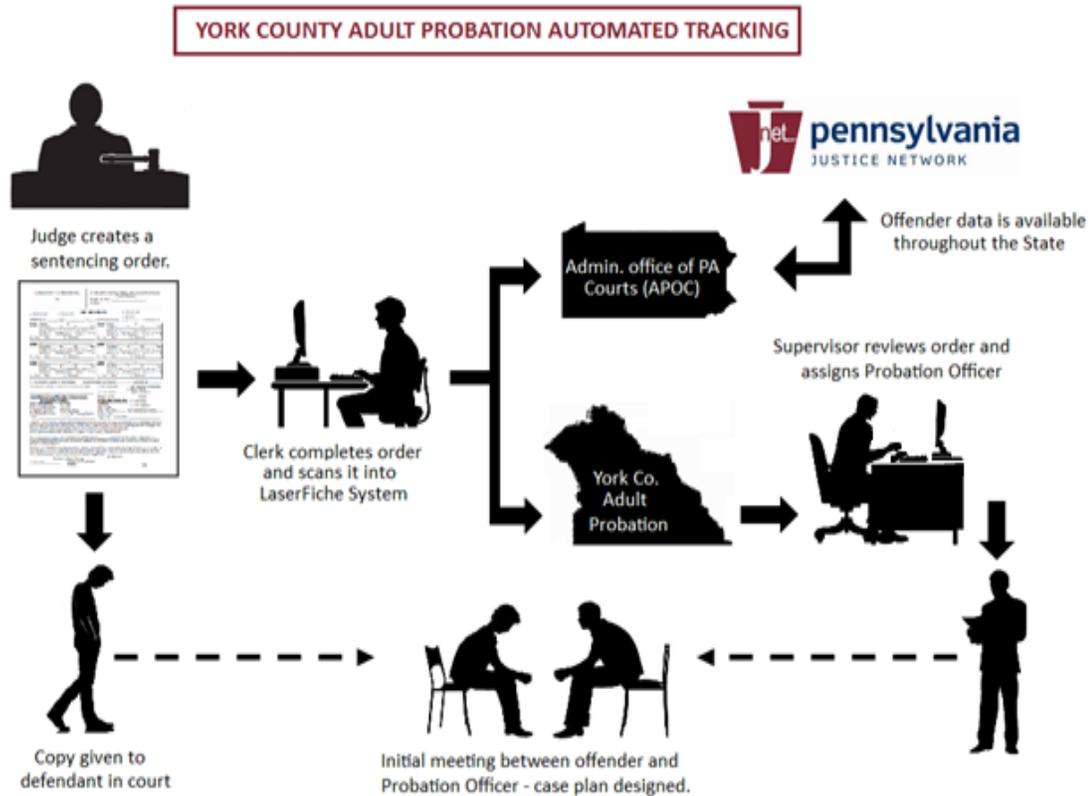
Strategic Technology Solutions: Electronic Warrants

York's Adult Probation Department makes excellent use of its subscription to the Pennsylvania Justice Network's (JNET) electronic notification of new arrest warrants. JNET is the Commonwealth's primary public safety and criminal justice information broker. JNET provides a common information sharing environment for authorized users to access public safety and criminal justice information throughout the state, permitting its contributors (justice agencies at the Local, County, State and Federal levels) a consistent information flow as an offender proceeds through the criminal justice system. Currently, the system permits an automated bi-lateral exchange of information between the State and contributing agencies. Thus, if a York County Probationer is wanted on an arrest warrant elsewhere in the Commonwealth, the Probation Officer of Record is automatically notified. The system's ability to include identifiers such as fingerprints and photographs means that multi-county offenders can no longer get "lost" in the system. Similarly, warrants created on the basis of a probation revocation are immediately entered into the system, greatly curtailing the likelihood of an offender being able to avoid his or her responsibilities.

Of particular value to York County probation officers is the fact that their system is mobile-enabled, meaning probation officers are assigned handheld mobile devices that receive automatic alerts concerning probationers on a 24/7 basis, which provides access to needed information as well as

automatic alerts on a 24/7 basis regardless of location. This enhancement is a crucial tool in the mission to improve public safety.

Figure 2. York County’s Electronic Dispositions support immediate supervision of adult offenders sentenced to probation, reducing recidivism and technical violations, and improving public safety.



Conclusion

York County Pennsylvania’s Adult Probation Department, in concert with other justice agencies served by the County’s Information Services Department, and Commonwealth partners such as JNET and the AOC Case Management System, have greatly increased the level of compliance by offenders under court-ordered monitoring. The strategic use of technology has provided a demonstrable increase in the level of public safety, reduced budgetary pressures, and increased staff performance and efficiency. York County serves as a model for other similarly situated population centers interested in reaping the benefits of electronic warrants and dispositions.

Contact Information:

For more information, please contact the York County District Court Administrator,
<http://yorkcountypa.gov/courts-criminal-justice/court-administration.html> , (717) 771-9234.



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