

# COMPLIANCE AUDIT

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District Court 11-1-04  
Luzerne County, Pennsylvania  
For the Period  
January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2021

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November 2022



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
Department of the Auditor General

Timothy L. DeFoor • Auditor General



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**TIMOTHY L. DEFOOR  
AUDITOR GENERAL**

The Honorable C. Daniel Hassell  
Secretary  
Pennsylvania Department of Revenue  
Harrisburg, PA 17128

We have conducted a compliance audit of the District Court 11-1-04, Luzerne County, Pennsylvania (District Court), for the period January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2021, pursuant to the requirements of Section 401(c) of *The Fiscal Code*, 72 P.S. § 401(c).

The objective of the audit was to determine whether all moneys collected on behalf of the Commonwealth have been correctly assessed, reported, and promptly remitted and to provide a report to the Department of Revenue to allow the Department of Revenue to state and settle the District Court's account. Our audit was limited to areas related to the objective identified above and was not conducted, nor was it required to be, in accordance with Government Auditing Standards issued by the Comptroller General of the United States.

The District Court is responsible for establishing and maintaining effective internal controls to provide reasonable assurance of compliance with state laws and regulations applicable to the collection of moneys on behalf of the Commonwealth, including whether they have been correctly assessed, reported, and promptly remitted. The District Court is also responsible for complying with those laws and regulations. It is our responsibility to perform procedures to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to the extent necessary to satisfy the audit objective. We believe that our audit provides a reasonable basis for our conclusions.

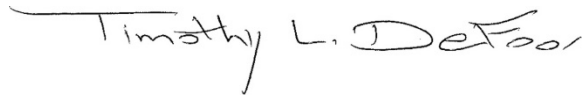
Based on our audit procedures, we conclude that, for the period January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2021, the District Court, in all significant respects, complied with state laws and regulations applicable to the collection of moneys on behalf of the Commonwealth, including whether they have been correctly assessed, reported, and promptly remitted, except as noted in the finding listed below and discussed later in this report:

- Inadequate Arrest Warrant Procedures.

This report includes a summary of the District Court's receipts and disbursements of funds collected on behalf of the Commonwealth (summary). We obtained data representing the District Court's receipts and disbursements from the Pennsylvania Department of Revenue, which obtains data from each of the Commonwealth's district courts and used the data to create the summary in the format required by the Department of Revenue. We also evaluated the accuracy of the data as part of our audit to conclude on the District Court's compliance with certain state laws and regulations as described in the previous paragraph. Any adjustments that we considered necessary based on our audit work are disclosed in the *Audit Adjustments* line of the summary; however, the scope of our audit does not include the issuance of an opinion on the accuracy of the amounts reported in the summary.

The purpose of this report is to determine whether all moneys collected on behalf of the Commonwealth have been correctly assessed, reported, and promptly remitted. This report is not suitable for any other purposes.

The contents of this report were discussed with the management of the District Court and, where appropriate, their response has been included in the report. We appreciate the courtesy extended by the District Court 11-1-04, Luzerne County, to us during the course of our audit. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the Bureau of County Audits at 717-787-1363.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Timothy L. DeFoor". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the left of the first letter.

Timothy L. DeFoor  
Auditor General  
September 29, 2022

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DISTRICT COURT 11-1-04  
LUZERNE COUNTY  
BACKGROUND  
FOR THE PERIOD  
JANUARY 1, 2018 TO DECEMBER 31, 2021

The Department of Auditor General is mandated by Article IV, Section 401(c) of *The Fiscal Code* (Act of April 9, 1929, P.L.343, No. 176), to audit the accounts of each district court to determine whether all moneys collected on behalf of the Commonwealth have been correctly assessed, reported, and promptly remitted.

District Court receipts are comprised of fines, costs, fees, and surcharges collected on behalf of the Commonwealth. These fines, costs, fees, and surcharges represent collections made on traffic, non-traffic, civil, and criminal cases filed with the District Court.

Total disbursements during the audit period are comprised as follows:

District Court checks issued to:

Department of Revenue	<u>\$ 2,061,576</u>
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This balance reflects the summary of monthly transmittal reports as settled by the Department of Revenue.

Alexandra C. Kokura Kravitz served at District Court 11-1-04 for the period January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2021.

The summary of receipts and disbursements on the following page provides a summary of receipts and disbursements by category. The categories and the amounts of fines, costs, fees, and surcharges assessed are based on Pennsylvania laws and regulations.

The summary was prepared in accordance with reporting requirements prescribed by the Pennsylvania Department of Revenue. Under this method, only the Commonwealth portion of cash receipts and disbursements are presented, revenues are recognized when received, and expenditures are recognized when paid.

DISTRICT COURT 11-1-04  
 LUZERNE COUNTY  
 SUMMARY OF RECEIPTS AND DISBURSEMENTS  
 FOR THE PERIOD  
 JANUARY 1, 2018 TO DECEMBER 31, 2021

Receipts:

Department of Transportation		
Title 75 Fines	\$	418,673
Motor Carrier Road Tax Fines		325
Overweight Fines		75
Commercial Driver Fines		3,050
Littering Law Fines		44,562
Child Restraint Fines		1,078
Department of Revenue Court Costs		266,935
Crime Victims' Compensation Bureau Costs		22,534
Crime Commission Costs/Victim Witness Services Costs		15,985
Domestic Violence Costs		5,894
Department of Agriculture Fines		382
Emergency Medical Service Fines		115,157
CAT/MCARE Fund Surcharges		292,084
Judicial Computer System Fees		113,835
Access to Justice Fees		62,530
Criminal Justice Enhancement Account Fees		8,959
Judicial Computer Project Surcharges		176,687
Constable Service Surcharges		13,283
Miscellaneous State Fines and Costs		<u>499,548</u>
 Total receipts		 2,061,576
 Disbursements to Commonwealth		 <u>(2,061,576)</u>
 Balance due Commonwealth (District Court) per settled reports		 -
 Audit adjustments		 <u>-</u>
 Adjusted balance due Commonwealth (District Court) for the period January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2021	 \$	 <u><u>-</u></u>

DISTRICT COURT 11-1-04  
LUZERNE COUNTY  
FINDING AND RECOMMENDATIONS  
FOR THE PERIOD  
JANUARY 1, 2018 TO DECEMBER 31, 2021

**Finding - Inadequate Arrest Warrant Procedures**

Warrants are used to enforce the collection of monies on traffic and non-traffic cases in which defendants failed to make payments when required. A Warrant of Arrest (AOPC 417) is used to authorize an official to arrest a defendant, to collect fines and costs from the defendant after a disposition, or to collect collateral for a trial. If the defendant does not respond within ten days to a citation or summons, a Warrant of Arrest may be issued.

During our testing of warrant procedures, we noted that warrant procedures established by the *Magisterial District Judge Automated Office Clerical Procedures Manual* (Manual) were not always followed. The Magisterial District Judge did not consistently issue warrants when required. We tested 33 instances in which a warrant was required to be issued. Our testing disclosed that eight were not issued timely and eight were not issued at all. The time of issuance ranged from 86 days to 283 days.

In addition, of 22 warrants required to be returned or recalled, four were not returned or recalled, and five were not returned timely. The time of issuance to the time of return ranged from 202 days to 775 days.

The Manual establishes the uniform written internal control policies and procedures for all district courts.

**Warrant Issuance Procedures:** The Manual states that on October 1, 1998, new warrant procedures took effect for summary cases. Amendments were made to Pa.R.Crim.P. 430, 431, 454, 455, 456, 460, 461, and 462. To comply with the new changes, the Notice of Impending Warrant (AOPC A418) was created with the purpose of informing the defendant that failure to pay the amount due or to appear for a Payment Determination Hearing will result in the issuance of an arrest warrant. The defendant is also informed that his/her response must be made within ten days of the date of the notice.

According to Pa.R.Crim.P. 430, a Notice of Impending Warrant may be issued in a post-disposition summary case for any of the following reasons:

- A guilty disposition is recorded and no payment is made or a time payment schedule is not created.
- A guilty disposition is recorded and a previously deposited collateral payment, when applied, does not pay the case balance in full.
- A guilty disposition is recorded and the defendant defaults on a time payment schedule.

DISTRICT COURT 11-1-04  
LUZERNE COUNTY  
FINDING AND RECOMMENDATIONS  
FOR THE PERIOD  
JANUARY 1, 2018 TO DECEMBER 31, 2021

**Finding - Inadequate Arrest Warrant Procedures (Continued)**

According to Pa.R.Crim.P. 430, a warrant SHALL be issued in a summary case for any of the following reasons (a Notice of Impending Warrant is not necessary for the following):

- The defendant has failed to respond to a citation or summons that was served either personally or by certified mail, return receipt requested.
- The citation or summons is returned undeliverable.
- The Magisterial District Judge has reasonable grounds to believe that the defendant will not obey a summons.

**Warrant Return Procedures:** The Manual states that the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC) recommends that those in possession of arrest warrants should be notified to return warrants that have not been served. For summary traffic and non-traffic cases, outstanding warrants should be returned to the Magisterial District Judge's office within 120 days of issuance. Returned warrants can either be recorded in the Magisterial District Judge System (MDJS) as unserved, if the defendant is unable to be located; or they can be recalled for reissue, if the server has not exhausted all means of finding the defendant.

The failure to follow warrant procedures could result in uncollected fines and unpunished offenders. Additionally, the risk is increased for funds to be lost or misappropriated.

Adherence to the uniform internal control policies and procedures, as set forth in the Manual, would have ensured that there were adequate internal controls over warrants.

**Recommendations**

We recommend that the district court review the tickler reports for warrants daily and take appropriate action as required by the Manual. We further recommend that the court review warrant control reports and notify police or other officials to return warrants that are unserved for 120 days for summary traffic and non-traffic cases as recommended by the Manual.



DISTRICT COURT 11-1-04  
LUZERNE COUNTY  
FINDING AND RECOMMENDATIONS  
FOR THE PERIOD  
JANUARY 1, 2018 TO DECEMBER 31, 2021

**Finding - Inadequate Arrest Warrant Procedures (Continued)**

Management's Response

The Magisterial District Judge responded as follows:

District Court 11-1-04 has already implemented policies following AOPC standards in an effort to provide better internal controls over warrant procedures. District Court 11-1-04 will review tickler reports, daily outstanding warrant reports, and other warrant control reports to ensure warrants are processed timely and to help eliminate warrant backlog. District Court 11-1-04 will also notify police departments and constables to timely return all warrants, including unserved warrants.

It should be noted that during the audit period of January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2021, the office of District Court 11-1-04 was periodically closed by Orders of both the Pennsylvania Supreme Court and the Luzerne County Court of Common Pleas due to the Covid-19 global pandemic. During those times and other times of limited operations, District Court 11-1-04 was ordered not to issue warrants and DL-38 notices. This accounted for the majority of inadequate internal warrant procedures wherein warrants should have been issued in a timely manner. Please note further, the warrants referenced herein are not criminal arrest warrants, but rather warrants for summary matters. Summary warrants are issued to defendants for failure to respond or failure to make payments.

Auditor's Conclusion

We appreciate the officeholder's efforts to correct these issues. Please note that we excluded any exceptions identified for the period of March of 2020 to December 2020 from this finding due to the pandemic. During our next audit, we will determine if the district court complied with our recommendations.

DISTRICT COURT 11-1-04  
LUZERNE COUNTY  
SUMMARY OF PRIOR AUDIT RECOMMENDATION  
FOR THE PERIOD  
JANUARY 1, 2018 TO DECEMBER 31, 2021

Summary Of Prior Audit Recommendation

During our prior audit, we recommended that the district court:

- Establish and implement an adequate system of internal controls over computer downtime manual receipts.

During our current audit, we noted that the district court complied with our recommendation.

DISTRICT COURT 11-1-04  
LUZERNE COUNTY  
REPORT DISTRIBUTION  
FOR THE PERIOD  
JANUARY 1, 2018 TO DECEMBER 31, 2021

This report was initially distributed to:

**The Honorable C. Daniel Hassell**  
Secretary  
Pennsylvania Department of Revenue

**The Honorable H. Geoffrey Moulton, Jr.**  
Court Administrator of Pennsylvania  
Supreme Court of Pennsylvania  
Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts

**The Honorable Alexandra C. Kokura Kravitz**  
Magisterial District Judge

**The Honorable Kendra Radle**  
Chairperson of County Council

**The Honorable Walter Griffith, Jr.**  
Controller

**Mr. Paul Hindmarsh**  
District Court Administrator

This report is a matter of public record and is available online at [www.PaAuditor.gov](http://www.PaAuditor.gov). Media questions about the report can be directed to the Pennsylvania Department of the Auditor General, Office of Communications, 229 Finance Building, Harrisburg, PA 17120; via email to: [news@PaAuditor.gov](mailto:news@PaAuditor.gov).