

COMPLIANCE AUDIT

District Court 12-2-05
Dauphin County, Pennsylvania
For the Period
January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2022

May 2024



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of the Auditor General

Timothy L. DeFoor • Auditor General



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**TIMOTHY L. DEFOOR
AUDITOR GENERAL**

The Honorable Pat Browne
Secretary
Pennsylvania Department of Revenue
Harrisburg, PA 17128

We have conducted a compliance audit of the District Court 12-2-05, Dauphin County, Pennsylvania (District Court), for the period January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2022, 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 the district court complied with state laws, regulations, and Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC) policies and administrative procedures related to the collection of moneys on behalf of the Commonwealth, including whether moneys collected on behalf of the Commonwealth have been correctly assessed, reported, and promptly remitted.

The procedures we performed are summarized below:

- Obtained data from the AOPC and the Pennsylvania Department of Revenue and determined whether:
 - Amounts provided by the AOPC match amounts received by the Department of Revenue.
 - The district court's distributions to the state agree with the data provided by the Department of Revenue.
- Compared collections by category of fines, fees, and surcharges for each year in the audit period to prior year collections and determine the reason(s) for large or unusual variances.
- Evaluated data related to cases without collections or adjustments to fines, fees, or surcharges and, if considered necessary, evaluated selected cases to determine whether such cases were handled appropriately.
- Obtained an understanding of internal controls related to the audit objective.
- Determined the adequacy of the design and operating effectiveness of internal controls we considered significant to the audit objective.
- Evaluated deposits of collections for accuracy and timeliness.
- Determined whether disbursements were accurate.
- Determined whether manual receipts were accurate and properly recorded.
- Determined whether voided receipts were necessary and proper.

- Reviewed selected cases to determine if the district court properly assessed, collected, and recorded all applicable fines, costs, fees, and surcharges.
- Determined whether the court complied with laws, regulations, and AOPC procedures related to the issuance and returns or warrants, collections related to warrants, and accounting for collections in the AOPC computer system.

Our audit was limited to the areas 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.

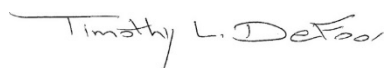
The district court is responsible for establishing and maintaining effective internal controls to provide reasonable assurance of compliance with state laws and regulations applicable to the collection of moneys on behalf of the Commonwealth, including whether they have been correctly assessed, reported, 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, 2019 to December 31, 2022, the district court, in all significant respects, complied with state laws, regulations, and AOPC policies and administrative procedures related to the collection of moneys on behalf of the Commonwealth, 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), which the Department of Revenue may use to state and settle the district court's account. 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. Other than any adjustments that we considered necessary based on our audit work as disclosed in the *Audit Adjustments* line of the summary, nothing came to our attention to indicate inaccuracies in the amounts included in the summary.

The contents of this report were discussed with the District Court's management. We appreciate the courtesy extended to us by the Dauphin County District Court 12-2-05 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.



Timothy L. DeFoor
Auditor General
May 2, 2024

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DISTRICT COURT 12-2-05
DAUPHIN COUNTY
BACKGROUND
FOR THE PERIOD
JANUARY 1, 2019 TO DECEMBER 31, 2022

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>\$ 690,951</u>
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This balance reflects the summary of monthly transmittal reports as settled by the Department of Revenue.

Paul T. Zozos served at District Court 12-2-05 for the period January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2022.

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 12-2-05
 DAUPHIN COUNTY
 SUMMARY OF RECEIPTS AND DISBURSEMENTS
 FOR THE PERIOD
 JANUARY 1, 2019 TO DECEMBER 31, 2022

Receipts:

Department of Transportation		
Title 75 Fines	\$	72,429
Motor Carrier Road Tax Fines		15,155
Commercial Driver Fines		90
Littering Law Fines		150
Child Restraint Fines		670
Department of Revenue Court Costs		177,206
Crime Victims' Compensation Bureau Costs		14,606
Crime Commission Costs/Victim Witness Services Costs		10,037
Domestic Violence Costs		3,643
Emergency Medical Service Fines		22,891
CAT/MCARE Fund Surcharges		68,327
Judicial Computer System Fees		59,923
Access to Justice Fees		34,799
Criminal Justice Enhancement Account Fees		7,054
Judicial Computer Project Surcharges		102,383
Constable Service Surcharges		22,732
Miscellaneous State Fines and Costs		<u>78,856</u>
 Total receipts		 690,951
 Disbursements to Commonwealth		 <u>(690,951)</u>
 Balance due Commonwealth (District Court) per settled reports		 -
 Audit adjustments		 <u>-</u>
 Adjusted balance due Commonwealth (District Court) for the period January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2022	 \$	 <u><u>-</u></u>

DISTRICT COURT 12-2-05
DAUPHIN COUNTY
FINDING AND RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR THE PERIOD
JANUARY 1, 2019 TO DECEMBER 31, 2022

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 and return warrants when required.

We tested 55 instances in which a warrant was required to be issued under Pa.R.Crim.P. 430(b)(1). Our testing disclosed that six were not issued timely. The time of issuance ranged from 73 days to 827 days.

In addition, of 79 warrants required to be returned or recalled, 17 were not returned or recalled and 35 were not returned timely. The time of issuance to the time of return ranged from 209 days to 1,388 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.

DISTRICT COURT 12-2-05
DAUPHIN COUNTY
FINDING AND RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR THE PERIOD
JANUARY 1, 2019 TO DECEMBER 31, 2022

Finding - Inadequate Arrest Warrant Procedures (Continued)

According to Pa.R.Crim.P. 430(b)(1), 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.

Court staff stated that the court has been short staffed for the amount of warrants they issue in this office. They also stated that the court fell behind recalling warrants when the Administrative Offices of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC) stopped using the “recall for reissue” computer system option on outstanding warrants. 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.

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.

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 12-2-05
DAUPHIN COUNTY
FINDING AND RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR THE PERIOD
JANUARY 1, 2019 TO DECEMBER 31, 2022

Finding - Inadequate Arrest Warrant Procedures (Continued)

Management's Response

The Magisterial District Judge responded as follows:

In regard to the finding of Inadequate Arrest Warrant Procedures, the correction was done the very next day. As of now, there are no pending warrants waiting to be recalled to reissue. We believe that the Administrative Offices of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC) should institute a tickle button on Magisterial District Judge (MDJ) AOPC system. Between every 15 to 30 days a tickle button should appear on all clerks' home screens where they can each go in to reissue warrants.

Auditor's Conclusion

We appreciate the court's effort to correct this issue and we acknowledge the court's concern regarding the computer system. As cited above, 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. During our next audit, we will determine if the district court complied with our recommendations.

DISTRICT COURT 12-2-05
DAUPHIN COUNTY
REPORT DISTRIBUTION
FOR THE PERIOD
JANUARY 1, 2019 TO DECEMBER 31, 2022

This report was initially distributed to:

The Honorable Pat Browne
Secretary
Pennsylvania Department of Revenue

The Honorable Andrea Touminen
Court Administrator of Pennsylvania
Supreme Court of Pennsylvania
Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts

The Honorable Paul T. Zozos
Magisterial District Judge

The Honorable George P. Hartwick, III
Chairperson of the Board of Commissioners

The Honorable Mary Bateman
Controller

Mr. Stephen Libhart
District Court Administrator

This report is a matter of public record and is available online at 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.