



Paul P. Panepinto
Administrative Judge

Letter From the Administrative Judge

Decisions made in the Family Court Division affect the very core of our society — the family. The Division’s dedicated judges and staff are motivated in their work by principles intended to foster the well-being and best interests of our children, and their families and communities. Access to the courts of the Family Division provides, in a very real sense, a foundation for the future.

In the Juvenile Branch, the “Balanced Approach Restorative Justice” promulgated through recent amendments to the Juvenile Act, elicited programmatic responses that broadened the focus of attention to reflect renewed concerns for victims and communities in addition to the offender. The Victim and Community Service Unit, partnering Probation and Police Officers, and initiation of neighborhood Truancy Courts serve to address the needs of the community, provide a high profile presence on the street, and coordinate several agencies working from community-based service centers: prime examples of access to justice.

The Domestic Relations Branch continues to respond to ever-increasing public service access needs through enhanced automated case processing, a new Customer Service Unit, increased support collections, and a Custody Master system to better address the sensitive issues pertaining to children of separating, divorcing, and unmarried parents. Harking in new era in Family Law, Domestic Relations judges and employees have also recognized the Court’s evolving role in dealing with the impact of Welfare Reform on children and families by helping unemployed Domestic Relations case member parents find job opportunities and training programs through the “Networking-for-Jobs” program.

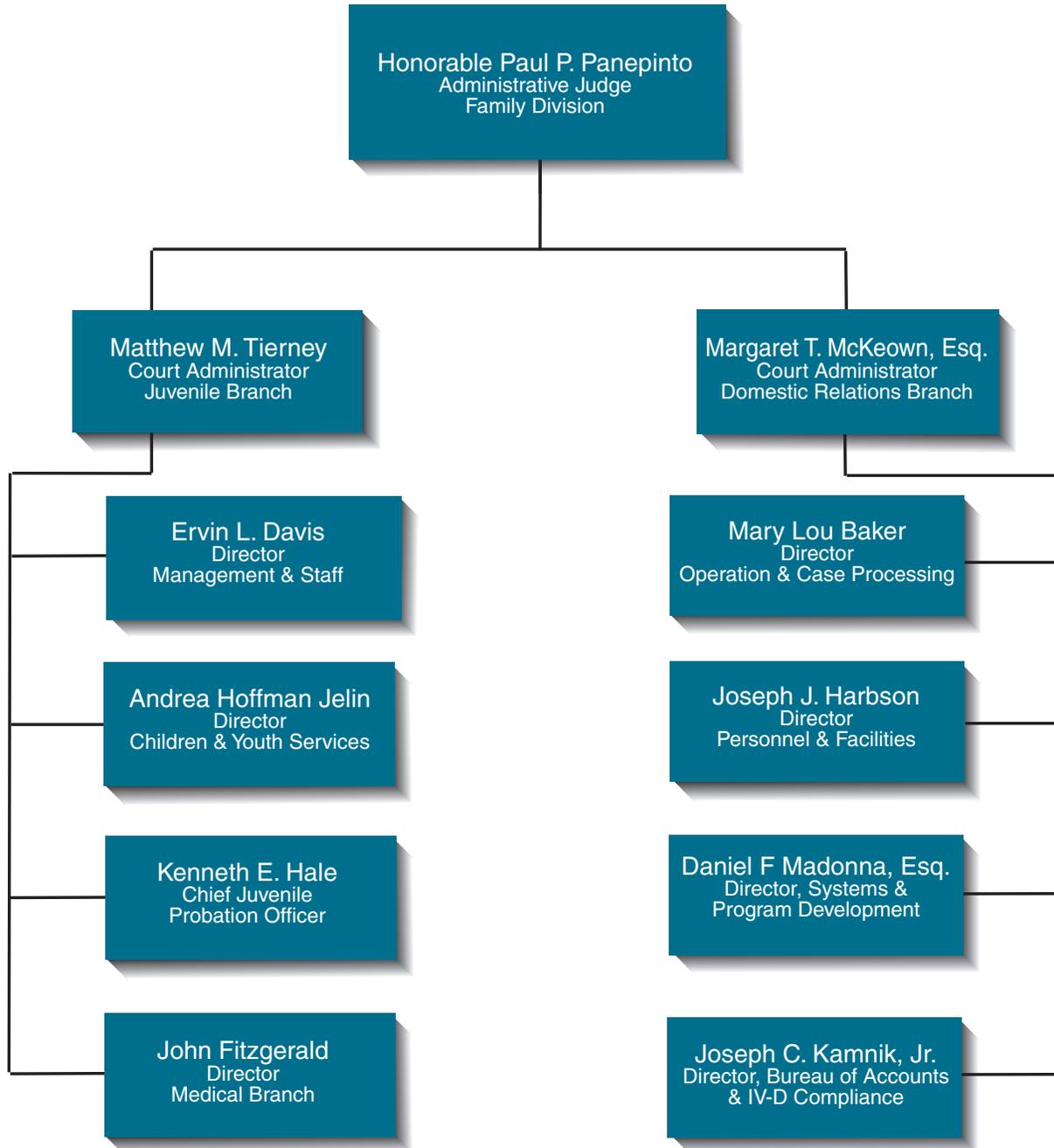
Through the commitment and tireless efforts of Family Division Judges and Staff, innovative programming, and community involvement, more people than ever before are participating in the judicial process in Philadelphia. By granting greater access they are truly laying a “Foundation for the Future.”

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OVERVIEW

The Family Division of the Court of Common Pleas, is the next to largest divisional court of the First Judicial District (FJD), relative to the number of judges and employees. During the 1996-1997 Biennium, the Family Division received and processed almost 147,000 total filings. In addition, in the interest of child and family subjects of delinquency and dependency petitions, to safeguard victims and communities, and to further ensure access, tens of thousands of review hearings are conducted each year to monitor existing cases.

Effective January 1, 1969, an amendment to the judiciary article of the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1874 provided for a Family Court Division of the Court of Common Pleas, creating a Family Court structure and procedures based in part upon those of the former County Court of Philadelphia. The Juvenile Branch has jurisdiction over Juvenile Delinquency, Dependency, and Adoptions cases, while the Domestic Relations Branch is responsible for proceedings pertaining to Divorce, Child and Spousal Support, Child Custody, and Protection from Abuse cases.

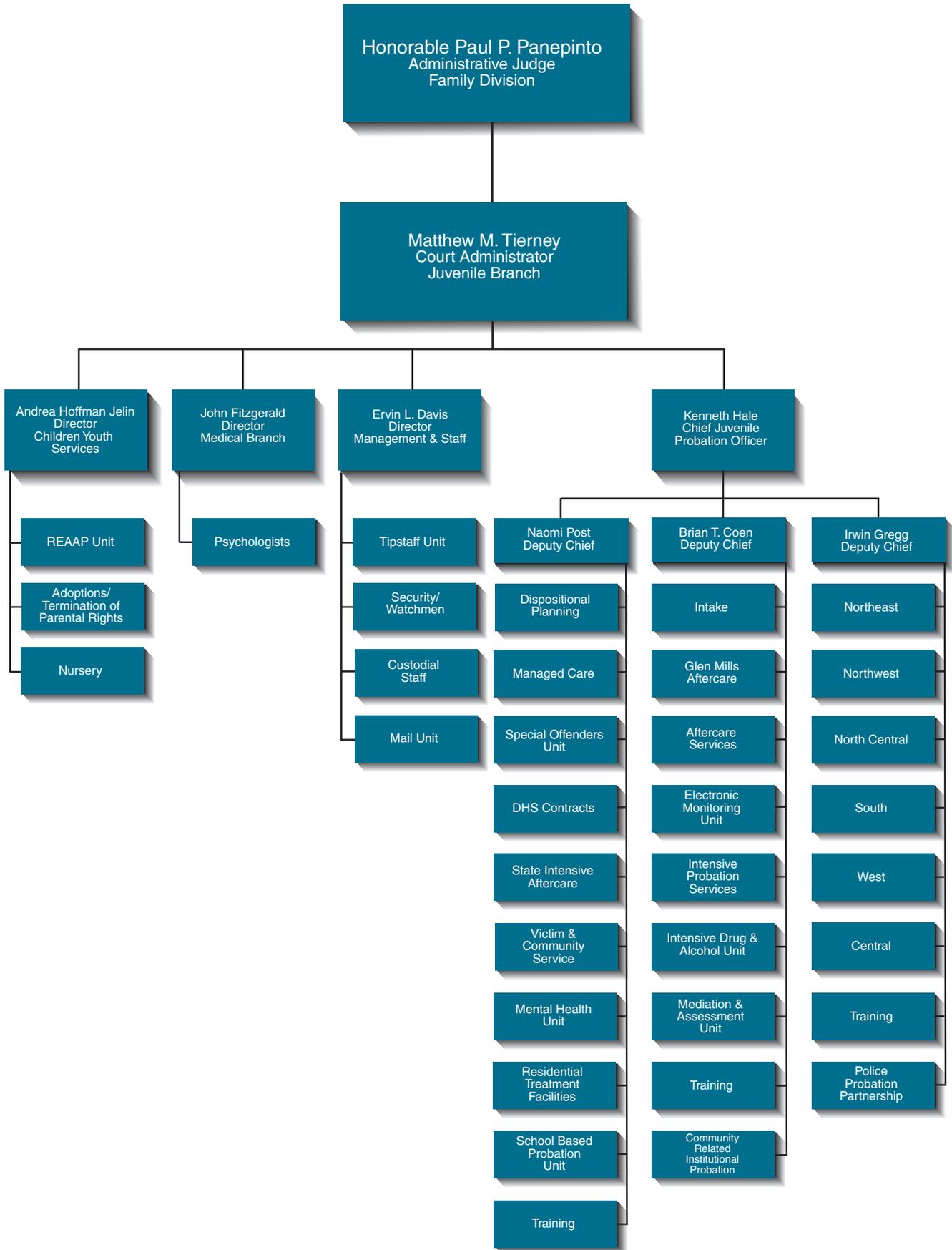
Administrative Judge Paul P. Panepinto oversees all facets of Family Division management and operations. The Domestic Relations and Juvenile Branches are each managed by a Court Administrator: Margaret T. McKeown, Esquire, in the Domestic Relations Branch; and Matthew M. Tierney for the Juvenile Branch. They report to Administrative Judge Panepinto, and also respond to the directives of FJD Court Administrator Joseph J. DiPrimio, Esquire. Aside from the Administrative Judge, 21 judges preside in the Family Division. Of these, 10 are assigned to the Juvenile Bench, and 11 preside in Domestic Relations cases.

The 836 employees of the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Branches have kept pace with increasing demands for access in their respective fields. Judges, managers, and employees of both branches employ case management techniques bringing cases to swift, fair resolutions. Domestic Relations Branch judges and employees take useful advantage of a three-tiered system of hearings before masters and judges to resolve often difficult, and always sensitive cases. Improvements continue to transform processes making them more user friendly and efficient through enhanced access, educational programs, state of the art scientific DNA testing, and streamlined case management systems. Also, the Domestic Relations Branch continues to receive accolades for record-setting performances in obtaining support money for children and ushering families off the welfare roles.

In the Juvenile Branch, increasing numbers of cases are disposed earlier — at the pre-trial level. Further, the judges, management, and staff of the Juvenile Branch have responded to strident legislative and public mandates for more aggressive approaches to juvenile crime. Together, they have fashioned innovative programs that provide for more stringent sanctions for juvenile offenders, while involving and paying heed to victim and neighborhood sensitivities to a greater degree than ever before.

Though the workforce is relatively large, the hundreds of staff are widely viewed as concerned and conscientious individuals, supported by forward looking leadership. They are fully aware that the successful execution of their duties helps to bolster the current and future strength of families and neighborhoods in Philadelphia.

Juvenile Branch Organization





Matthew M. Tierney
Court Administrator
Juvenile Branch

ORGANIZATION

From their location at 1801 Vine Street overlooking Logan Square, judges and employees of the Juvenile Court Branch of the Family Division administer juvenile delinquency and dependency cases, and criminal cases where adults have been charged with crimes against minors.

Led by Family Division Administrative Judge Paul P. Panepinto, Matthew M. Tierney is the Administrator of Juvenile Court overseeing the workings of the four main divisions of the court: 1) the Management and Staff Office; 2) Children and Youth Services; 3) the Medical Branch; and 4) the Juvenile Probation Department. The Juvenile Branch has roughly 375 employees, of whom 325 are assigned to the Probation Department under the leadership of Chief Probation Officer Kenneth E. Hale.

PURPOSE

Juvenile Court Branch employees and judges provide administrative, adjudicative and dispositive services for the juveniles, families, schools, and the neighborhood communities of Philadelphia. Working through a global approach in collaboration with other juvenile welfare and justice agencies and institutions, the Court utilizes an array of administrative tools and programmatic responses tailored to improve the quality of life of the citizenry of the City and the individuals who comprise it. In this endeavor, an impressive number of initiatives are employed to further access to justice.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Most of the volume of the work of the Juvenile Court concerns two major case type categories: Delinquency cases and Dependency cases. During the biennium, almost 25,000 new delinquency and dependency petitions were filed. Delinquency petitions are filed against juveniles aged 10 to 17, charged with what would be considered misdemeanor or felony violations of criminal law had they been committed by an adult. Dependency petitions are filed on behalf of children who may be found to be suffering from abuse, neglect, or inadequate care. Dependent courts administer the legal steps to improve care of children in the home and, in the alternative, adoption — including requisite termination of parental rights. Dependent Courts also have jurisdiction over “status” offenders including truants, and juveniles accused of incorrigibility by their families. Activities of the Juvenile Court are governed in part, by Title 42, Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes §6301 et seq. (the Juvenile Act). In adult criminal cases involving child victims, Juvenile Court Judges preside over adult trials for misdemeanor charges and preliminary hearings for felony charges.

Delinquency: New delinquency petitions for juveniles arrested by Police are filed by the court’s Delinquent Intake Unit, based at the Youth Study Center (YSC) juvenile detention facility. Located at 20th Street and Benjamin Franklin Parkway, the YSC is open 24 hours a day. Once arrested juveniles are held in detention, trials must be scheduled for a date within the ensuing 10 day period. If *not* held in



Senior Judge Joseph C. Bruno

custody, a Pre-Trial Hearing is scheduled, followed by an Adjudicatory (trial) Hearing. Juveniles are adjudicated delinquent as a result of judicial findings affirming one or more of the allegations. In these cases, youths are placed on probation or committed to residential facilities, the latter usually followed by aftercare probation. Juvenile Probation Officers provide personal supervision and monitor the delivery of delinquent intervention services from agencies funded through the City Department of Human Services (DHS). Review Hearings are required on a regular basis for minors in residential placement to measure progress and determine suitability for discharge. Review Hearings are also held in response to motions alleging probation violations and other problems.

Dependency: Most dependency cases are initiated by DHS in response to allegations of child maltreatment. Some cases are referred by the School District because of truancy. Also, a parent may file an incorrigibility petition. If the Court adjudicates a child dependent (upon the Court), DHS may be ordered to accept custody of the involved child(ren) or to provide in-home supervision and services for the family.

Review Hearings are held regularly for children in foster care to monitor progress toward a court-ordered goal — generally reunification with the family — or conversely, adoption.

ACHIEVEMENTS

A policy was established in 1996 to dispose of more delinquent cases at the Pre-Trial Hearing stage. This improvement generated 1,511 Pre-Trial Hearing dispositions in 1996. The additional 849 dispositions represented a 128% increase over the 662 Pre-Trial dispositions in 1995. In 1997, 1,454 cases were completed at the Pre-Trial stage, maintaining previous gains in expedience and benefitting access to justice.

Also, 1996 saw the adoption of a one family/one judge policy. In Juvenile Court, a judge disposing of a case is also assigned any subsequent hearings. As a result, most Review Hearings in both Delinquent and Dependent Courts are assigned to the judge most familiar with the family — the one who adjudicated the original case. This practice provides continuity of decisions within each case and family, serves to instill public confidence, and supports access to the Courts.

Judge Nicholas
M. D'Alessandro

Judge Murray C. Goldman



Judge Richard J. Gordon, Jr.



Judge James Murray Lynn

Moreover, significant access to justice developments are presented below in a special section under the heading “Major Access to Justice Developments in 1996-1997.”

DEPARTMENTS

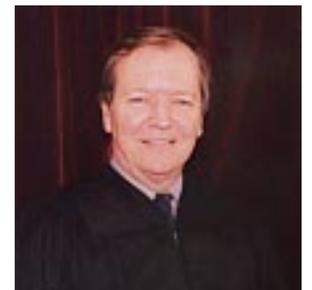
Probation Department: The Probation Department provides staff services to delinquent and dependent Court operations, and supervision services to delinquent and some dependent youths. The department operates the Delinquent Intake Unit, places juveniles in various intervention programs, and works to restore the victim and the community affected by crime. Court Liaison Officers in delinquent courtrooms and Court Representatives in dependent courtrooms provide essential information and immediately enter dispositional information into the Court mainframe computer. Probation officers supervise delinquents in the community and help to prepare institutionalized youths for their return to their families and communities.

Medical Branch: Headed by John Fitzgerald, Medical Branch staff psychologists conduct mental health assessments of juveniles for the Court.

Staff psychologists examine, diagnose, and recommend treatment for clients referred by other branches of the Court or ordered by the judiciary. Professional findings support the judicial decision making process.

Children and Youth: Under the guidance of Andrea Hoffman Jelin, Children and Youth staff work with truants, incorrigibles, and their families. Their important work helps to preserve families and stabilize behavior. Individuals, their families, schools, and communities benefit as a result. In addition, preemptive intervention and diversion from further Court involvement address emerging problems limiting the potential for escalation into more serious conduct. Truancy issues have come to the forefront as a portent to antisocial behavior, and Juvenile Court judges, administration, and staff are vigilant in addressing this problem through innovative and cooperative programs seeking to stem truancy and related problems.

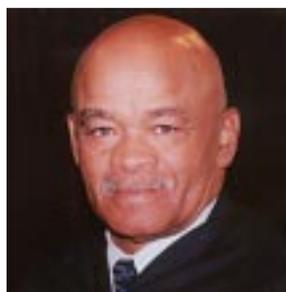
Management and Staff Office: With direction provided by Ervin Davis, this office provides assistance and guidance with budgetary and personnel concerns that underlie virtually all other facets of Juvenile Court operations.



Judge Thomas Dempsey



Judge Lillian Harris Ransom



Judge Abram Frank Reynolds



Judge Edward R. Summers

MAJOR ACCESS TO JUSTICE DEVELOPMENTS IN 1996-97

Juvenile Law Changes – Delinquency:

In 1996, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania adopted a new approach to juvenile delinquency, the *Balanced and Restorative Justice Model*, in the pursuit of three goals: 1) accountability of the offender to the victim and community; 2) public safety; and 3) development of competencies for juvenile offenders. This approach involves the community and the victim as clients with an interest and standing in the system, *along with* the offender. The strategy improves communication and widens public access to justice. Public confidence in the Court is also advanced. A Balanced and Restorative Justice Working Team of probation staff and others, including stakeholders from various agencies of the Philadelphia juvenile justice and victim service systems, is working to incorporate this philosophy into their policies and programs. Several new programs incorporating a balanced juvenile justice philosophy have been instituted by the juvenile probation department.

Other recent changes in Juvenile Law have affected the Court in a number of ways. Felony adjudicatory hearings have been opened to the public. School principals are provided with Juvenile Court delinquency history information when their students are adjudicated delinquent. Juvenile sex offenders must provide a blood specimen for future DNA identification purposes. Individuals reaching the age of 21 with unpaid juvenile restitution obligations are

subject to the imposition of civil judgments to facilitate payment of restitution even after juvenile Court jurisdiction ends. While youths arrested for violent felonies armed with a deadly weapon are initially excluded from Juvenile Court jurisdiction, they may be transferred to Juvenile Court from adult Criminal Court through Decertification Hearings, when in the public interest.

Victim and Community Services

Unit: With funding from a state grant program designed to help juvenile courts and agencies implement the Balanced and Restorative Justice Model, the Court created the Victim and Community Services Program in 1997. This probation program works to restore victims and their neighborhoods through the imposition of restitution and community service, and the continuing development of more victim and community sensitive Court programs and policies. Probation officers are working to create more community service projects with key City agencies and local community groups. A Victim Restoration Fund is being established with public and private donations to enable indigent juveniles to earn money and pay court-ordered restitution through public service. A Victim Advisory Board works with the Victim Programs Coordinator to produce more comprehensive programs for victims *and* offenders attending to victim needs and concerns.

Special Offenders Unit: To promote public safety and to tackle the often weighty rehabilitative needs of juvenile sex offenders and juveniles with serious mental illness, the Special Offenders Unit was created in 1997, also with

financial assistance from the state. Juveniles adjudicated delinquent for sexual assaults and molestation of children are treated in inpatient and outpatient programs supervised by probation officers trained to work with this population. Special supervision is also provided for offenders with major psychiatric disorders.

Firearm Violators Program: In response to ongoing concern over juvenile shootings and related weapons and other offenses, an intervention program was created by the Court and DHS for juveniles adjudicated delinquent for possession of firearms. This day treatment program is intended to prevent youths found with a gun from further involvement in firearms incidents.

Police-Probation Partnership: In 1997, the Juvenile Aid Division of the Philadelphia Police Department and the Juvenile Probation Department began a joint program in which a probation officer makes field visits accompanied by a police officer in a police vehicle. This public safety-oriented program targets noncompliant, fugitive, and high-risk juveniles, who are visited day and night at homes and neighborhood hangouts where juveniles congregate — highlighting the Court's presence in the community.

School-Based Probation Unit: This program stations probation officers in schools to supervise students on probation. Over a dozen high schools and middle schools have resident probation officers. Through their daily presence, probation officers and school staff monitor attendance, grades, and behavioral problems on site. In November of 1997 the School Based Probation Unit was named as the Juvenile Court

Judges' Commission "Outstanding Court-Operated Program" in Pennsylvania for its operation at the Michael J. Gavaghan Memorial Village Prep School. This school, named for the late Juvenile Chief Probation Officer, works intensively with juveniles on probation, some of whom present severe truancy and learning problems.

Juvenile Law Changes – Dependency Combined Goal Change and

Termination of Parental Rights: In March of 1996 the Court instituted a new policy for foster children when the goal of the proceedings is to be changed from family reunification to adoption. Rather than scheduling separate events for goal change and termination of parental rights, these hearings are combined into one event. This change eliminated at least one step and attendant unnecessary delay, saving an average of 18 months in the adoption process. In 1996, 410 adoptions were finalized, and in 1997, 556 adoptions were completed — an increase of 36%, or 146 cases. In 1996, parental rights were terminated for 551 mothers and 547 fathers. In 1997, parental rights were terminated for 898 mothers and 886 fathers — increases of approximately 62%.

CASA Volunteers: In 1996, the Court authorized the introduction of Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) to assist judges, court-appointed attorneys, and others in determining the best courses of action for proceeding in difficult dependency cases. CASA volunteers undergo extensive pre-service training to qualify for certification as special advocates.

Court Improvement Program: In September of 1996, Juvenile Court received a federal grant to evaluate the

needs of juvenile Dependency Courts throughout Pennsylvania. The project involves: 1) a statewide survey of Court and child welfare practitioners; and 2) in selected counties, staff interviews of officials, observations of Court operations, and review of Court records. Findings are expected to provide extensive recommendations for improvement of the operations of Dependency Courts in the state.

Juvenile Court Training Center:

In 1997 the Court established a training center including a facility large enough to accommodate most staff training sessions, a law and resources library, and an audiovisual center.

JUVENILE COURT CASELOADS

This text and the accompanying statistical tables and graphs that follow show that the Juvenile Court Branch disposes of new cases at about the same rate at which they are received. In addition to adjudicative and dispositive court events, a substantial inventory of delinquent and dependent cases receive periodic formal review by judges and masters. Review hearings serve to ensure the welfare of the child subjects of the proceedings, and to monitor the

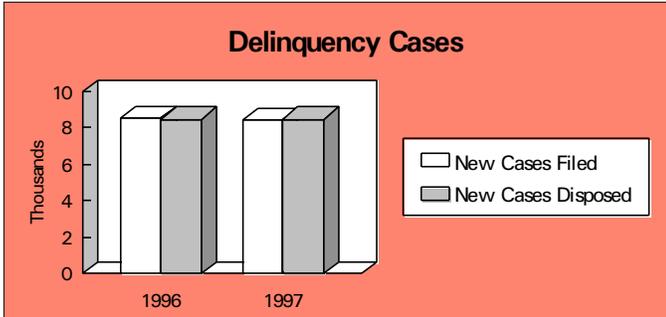
stability of their familial, neighborhood, and school environments.

In 1996 the delinquent courts disposed of 8,506 new cases and conducted 27,803 Review Hearings.

In 1996 the dependent courts disposed of 4,466 new cases and conducted 26,951 Review Hearings. The new cases included 931 cases that were disposed without a hearing — mostly incorrigibility cases that were provided social service interventions in lieu of filing a petition. In 1996 judges committed 1,483 children to the Department of Human Services for foster care and 323 children for in-home supervision.

In 1997 the delinquent courts disposed of 8,506 new cases and 26,019 Review Hearings. The number of 1997 new case dispositions was exactly the same as in 1996 — 8,506 — but slightly more juveniles were adjudicated delinquent.

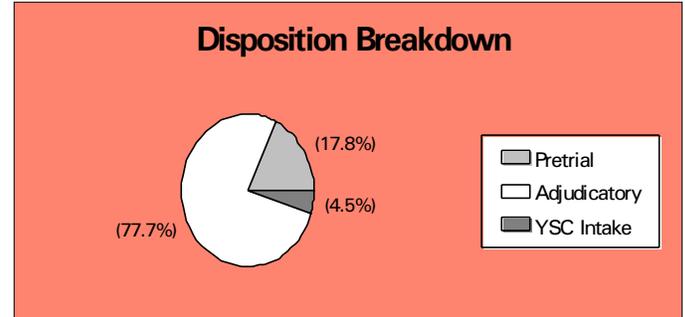
In 1997 the dependent courts disposed of 4,911 new cases — an increase of roughly 10% over 1996 — including 848 without hearings. New commitments to the Department of Human Services for foster care increased to 1,812 and for in-home supervision to 456. Review Hearings decreased to 22,651.



Delinquency Cases

1996 1997

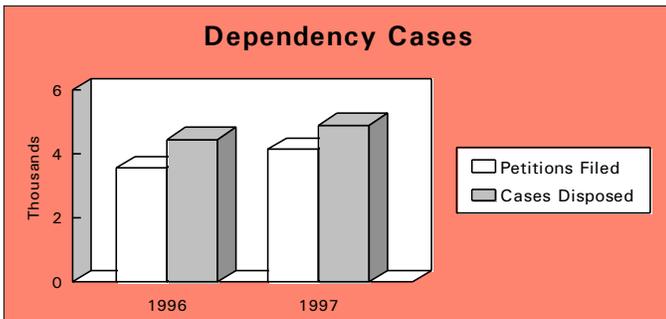
	1996	1997
New Cases Filed	8,539	8,466
New Cases Disposed	8,506	8,506



Disposition Breakdown

Pretrial Adjudicatory YSC Intake

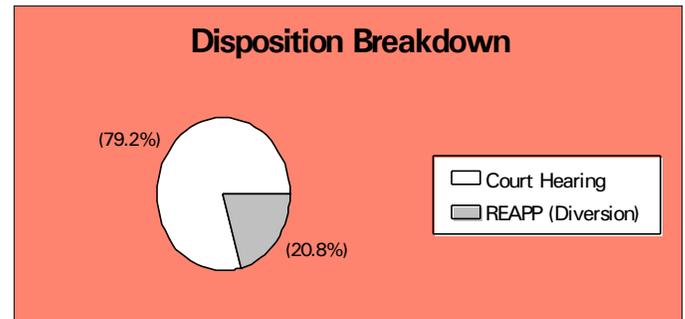
	Pretrial	Adjudicatory	YSC Intake
1996	1,511	6,609	386
1997	1,457	6,831	218



Dependency Cases

1996 1997

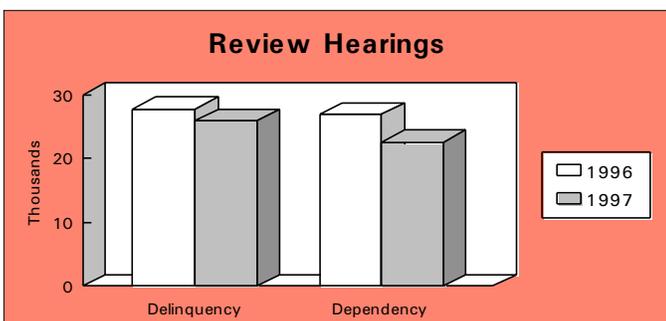
	1996	1997
New Cases Filed	3,568	4,164
New Cases Disposed	4,466	4,911



Disposition Breakdown

Court Hearing REAAP (Diversion)

	Court Hearing	REAAP (Diversion)
1996	3,535	931
1997	4,063	848



Review Hearings

Review Hearings
(Cases With Ongoing Court Activity)
Delinquency Dependency

	Delinquency	Dependency
1996	27,803	26,951
1997	26,019	22,651