

# COMPLIANCE AUDIT

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District Court 32-1-33  
Delaware County, Pennsylvania  
For the Period  
January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2022

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December 2023



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 32-1-33, Delaware 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 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, 2019 to December 31, 2022, 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 - Recurring.

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 District Court's management. We appreciate the courtesy extended by the District Court 32-1-33, Delaware 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  
November 30, 2023

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DISTRICT COURT 32-1-33  
DELAWARE 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>902,325</u>
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This balance reflects the summary of monthly transmittal reports as settled by the Department of Revenue.

Harry J. Karapalides, Esq. served at District Court 32-1-33 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 32-1-33  
 DELAWARE COUNTY  
 SUMMARY OF RECEIPTS AND DISBURSEMENTS  
 FOR THE PERIOD  
 JANUARY 1, 2019 TO DECEMBER 31, 2022

Receipts:

Department of Transportation		
Title 75 Fines	\$	120,400
Littering Law Fines		50
Child Restraint Fines		1,565
Department of Revenue Court Costs		235,716
Crime Victims' Compensation Bureau Costs		9,993
Crime Commission Costs/Victim Witness Services Costs		7,119
Domestic Violence Costs		2,738
Emergency Medical Service Fines		44,576
CAT/MCARE Fund Surcharges		133,397
Judicial Computer System Fees		77,683
Access to Justice Fees		43,995
Criminal Justice Enhancement Account Fees		7,102
Judicial Computer Project Surcharges		126,302
Constable Service Surcharges		33,054
Miscellaneous State Fines and Costs		<u>60,666</u>
 Total receipts		 904,356
 Disbursements to Commonwealth		 <u>(902,325)</u>
 Balance due Commonwealth (District Court) per settled reports		 2,031
 Audit adjustments		 <u>-</u>
 Adjusted balance due Commonwealth (District Court) for the period January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2022	 \$	 <u><u>2,031</u></u>

DISTRICT COURT 32-1-33  
DELAWARE COUNTY  
FINDING AND RECOMMENDATIONS  
FOR THE PERIOD  
JANUARY 1, 2019 TO DECEMBER 31, 2022

**Finding - Inadequate Arrest Warrant Procedures - Recurring**

We cited the issue of inadequate arrest warrant procedures in the previous two audits, with the most recent for the period January 1, 2016 to December 31, 2018. Our current audit found that the district court did not correct this issue.

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 38 instances in which a warrant was required to be issued under Pa.R.Crim.P. 430(b)(1). Our testing disclosed that 18 were not issued timely and five were not issued at all. The time of issuance ranged from 62 days to 919 days.

We also tested seven instances in which a warrant may be issued under Pa.R.Crim.P. 430(b)(3). Our testing disclosed that one was not issued timely and two were not issued at all. The time of issuance was 87 days. These results do not include instances in which the Magisterial District Judge recently ordered a payment determination hearing, sentenced the defendant to jail time in lieu of payment, or sentenced the defendant to perform community service.

In addition, of 36 warrants required to be returned or recalled, 21 were not returned timely. The time of issuance to the time of return ranged from 209 days to 349 days.

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

DISTRICT COURT 32-1-33  
DELAWARE COUNTY  
FINDING AND RECOMMENDATIONS  
FOR THE PERIOD  
JANUARY 1, 2019 TO DECEMBER 31, 2022

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

**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(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.

According to Pa.R.Crim.P. 430 (b)(3), 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.

**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.



DISTRICT COURT 32-1-33  
DELAWARE COUNTY  
FINDING AND RECOMMENDATIONS  
FOR THE PERIOD  
JANUARY 1, 2019 TO DECEMBER 31, 2022

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

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. Therefore, it is considered best business practice to issue warrants that fall under Pa.R.Crim.P. 430(b)(3) when other actions are not taken by the Magisterial District Judge to compel compliance by the defendant, such as ordering a payment determination hearing, sentencing to jail time in lieu of payment, or sentencing to perform community service.

The court stated that they have been short staffed. 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 strongly 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.

**Management's Response**

The Magisterial District Judge responded as follows:

To address this issue, the Court Coordinator and general clerks have been asked to draft correspondence to the constables within 120 days of issuance of all summary warrants seeking to have those constables return unserved warrants for cancellation or reissue after judicial review. Summary warrants, in which a constable is unable to serve, will be returned to the office and recorded as unserved in the system within 120 days of issuance. The Court Coordinator and clerks handling traffic/non-traffic cases will be instructed to utilize the Warrant Management Reports in the MDJS to identify those summary warrants needed to be recalled. Finally, these warrant reports will be reviewed on a weekly basis to determine those that need action taken.

The Delaware County Administrative Office for Magisterial District Judges will also assist in monitoring these warrant requirements.

Please note that approximately 10 months of the Audit period includes the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. During these several months, over half of our countywide Magisterial District Court staff was furloughed. As such we have incurred backlogs in practically every aspect of court functions. We are currently working to resolve these backlogs and hope to resolve them soon. We also endeavor to preempt such deficiencies in the future by routinely monitoring reports and addressing any areas of concern.

DISTRICT COURT 32-1-33  
DELAWARE COUNTY  
FINDING AND RECOMMENDATIONS  
FOR THE PERIOD  
JANUARY 1, 2019 TO DECEMBER 31, 2022

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

Auditors Conclusion

This is a recurring finding. It is imperative that the district court take the necessary steps to ensure that the fines are collected, and offenders are punished, and reduce the risk that funds are lost or misappropriated. Please note that we did not include any exceptions in the finding for issuances or returns of warrants during the pandemic. During our next audit, we will determine if the district court complied with our recommendation.

DISTRICT COURT 32-1-33  
DELAWARE COUNTY  
SUMMARY OF PRIOR AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS  
FOR THE PERIOD  
JANUARY 1, 2019 TO DECEMBER 31, 2022

Summary Of Prior Audit Recommendations

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

- Review the tickler reports for warrants and DL-38s 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.

During our current audit, we noted that the district court did not comply with our recommendations. Please see the current year finding for additional information.

DISTRICT COURT 32-1-33  
DELAWARE 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 Tuominen**  
Court Administrator of Pennsylvania  
Supreme Court of Pennsylvania  
Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts

**The Honorable Harry J. Karapalides, Esq.**  
Magisterial District Judge

**The Honorable Dr. Monica Taylor**  
Chairperson of the Board of Commissioners

**The Honorable Joanne Phillips, Esq.**  
Controller

**Ms. Joan E. Van Horn**  
Magisterial 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).