

COMPLIANCE AUDIT

District Court 03-2-04 Northampton County, Pennsylvania For the Period January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2022

October 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 03-2-04, Northampton 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.

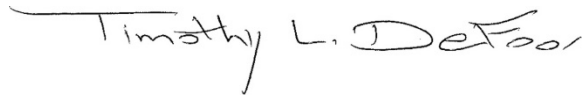
Based on our audit procedures, we conclude that, for the period January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2022, the District Court, in all significant respects, complied with state laws and regulations applicable to the collection of moneys on behalf of the Commonwealth, including whether they have been correctly assessed, reported, and promptly remitted, except as noted in the finding listed below and discussed later in this report.

- Inadequate Arrest Warrant Procedures.

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 03-2-04, Northampton 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
October 4, 2023

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DISTRICT COURT 03-2-04
NORTHAMPTON 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>\$ 1,193,116</u>
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This balance reflects the summary of monthly transmittal reports as settled by the Department of Revenue.

Alan R. Mege, Esq. served at District Court 03-2-04 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 03-2-04
NORTHAMPTON COUNTY
SUMMARY OF RECEIPTS AND DISBURSEMENTS
FOR THE PERIOD
JANUARY 1, 2019 TO DECEMBER 31, 2022

Receipts:

Department of Transportation		
Title 75 Fines	\$	246,311
Motor Carrier Road Tax Fines		1,965
Overweight Fines		3,825
Commercial Driver Fines		8,445
Littering Law Fines		125
Child Restraint Fines		975
Department of Revenue Court Costs		129,604
Crime Victims' Compensation Bureau Costs		8,460
Crime Commission Costs/Victim Witness Services Costs		6,064
Domestic Violence Costs		2,094
Emergency Medical Service Fines		88,203
CAT/MCARE Fund Surcharges		206,638
Judicial Computer System Fees		60,845
Access to Justice Fees		32,449
Criminal Justice Enhancement Account Fees		2,667
Judicial Computer Project Surcharges		86,819
Constable Service Surcharges		8,735
Miscellaneous State Fines and Costs		298,892
		<hr/>
Total receipts		1,193,116
Disbursements to Commonwealth		<hr/> <u>(1,193,116)</u>
Balance due Commonwealth (District Court) per settled reports		-
Audit adjustments		<hr/> -
Adjusted balance due Commonwealth (District Court) for the period January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2022	\$	<hr/> <u>-</u>

DISTRICT COURT 03-2-04
NORTHAMPTON 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 warrants in a timely manner. We tested 52 instances in which a warrant was required to be issued under Pa.R.Crim.P. 430(b)(1). Our testing disclosed that seven were not issued timely. The time of issuance ranged from 65 days to 520 days.

In addition, of 48 warrants required to be returned or recalled, 11 were not returned or recalled, and 15 were not returned timely. The time of issuance to the time of return ranged from 256 days to 627 days.

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

According to Pa.R.Crim.P. 430(b)(1), a warrant SHALL be issued in a summary case for any of the following reasons:

- 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.

DISTRICT COURT 03-2-04
NORTHAMPTON COUNTY
FINDING AND RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR THE PERIOD
JANUARY 1, 2019 TO DECEMBER 31, 2022

Finding - Inadequate Arrest Warrant Procedures (Continued)

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. The Magisterial District Judge indicated the condition was caused by inadequate staffing.

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.

Management's Response

The Magisterial District Judge responded as follows:

The District Court caseload during the time-frame examined required 3 full-time staff. However, from October 2021 through August 2022, the District Court only had 2 full-time staff. The deficiency was caused by under-staffing. As the District Court is now back to having 3 full-time staff, the deficiency is being rectified.

Auditor's Conclusion

We appreciate the officeholder's effort to correct these issues. During our next audit, we will determine if the district court complied with our recommendations.

DISTRICT COURT 03-2-04
NORTHAMPTON 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 H. Geoffrey Moulton, Jr.
Court Administrator of Pennsylvania
Supreme Court of Pennsylvania
Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts

The Honorable Alan R. Mege, Esq.
Magisterial District Judge

The Honorable Kerry L. Myers
President of County Council

The Honorable Richard Szulborski
Controller

Mr. J. Jermaine Greene Sr.
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.