

COMPLIANCE AUDIT

District Court 45-1-03
Lackawanna County, Pennsylvania
For the Period
January 1, 2017 to December 31, 2020

August 2021



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 45-1-03, Lackawanna County, Pennsylvania (District Court), for the period January 1, 2017 to December 31, 2020, 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.

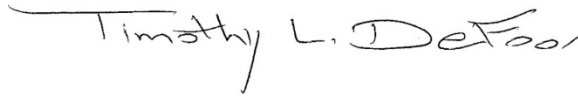
Based on our audit procedures, we conclude that, for the period January 1, 2017 to December 31, 2020, the District Court, in all significant respects, complied with state laws and regulations applicable to the collection of moneys on behalf of the Commonwealth, including whether they have been correctly assessed, reported, and promptly remitted, except as noted in the finding listed below and discussed later in this report:

- Inadequate Arrest Warrant Return 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 45-1-03, Lackawanna 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

July 22, 2021

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DISTRICT COURT 45-1-03
LACKAWANNA COUNTY
BACKGROUND
FOR THE PERIOD
JANUARY 1, 2017 TO DECEMBER 31, 2020

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>\$ 733,797</u>
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This balance reflects the summary of monthly transmittal reports as settled by the Department of Revenue.

Joanne Corbett served at District Court 45-1-03 for the period January 1, 2017 to December 31, 2020.

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 45-1-03
LACKAWANNA COUNTY
SUMMARY OF RECEIPTS AND DISBURSEMENTS
FOR THE PERIOD
JANUARY 1, 2017 TO DECEMBER 31, 2020

Receipts:

Department of Transportation		
Title 75 Fines	\$	132,122
Motor Carrier Road Tax Fines		13
Overweight Fines		303
Commercial Driver Fines		500
Littering Law Fines		468
Child Restraint Fines		3,773
Department of Revenue Court Costs		138,992
Crime Victims' Compensation Bureau Costs		14,053
Crime Commission Costs/Victim Witness Services Costs		10,144
Domestic Violence Costs		3,910
Emergency Medical Service Fines		33,994
CAT/MCARE Fund Surcharges		105,694
Judicial Computer System Fees		49,978
Access to Justice Fees		26,605
Criminal Justice Enhancement Account Fees		6,158
Judicial Computer Project Surcharges		79,948
Constable Service Surcharges		8,263
Miscellaneous State Fines and Costs		<u>118,879</u>
 Total receipts		 733,797
 Disbursements to Commonwealth		 <u>(733,797)</u>
 Balance due Commonwealth (District Court) per settled reports		 -
 Audit adjustments		 <u>-</u>
 Adjusted balance due Commonwealth (District Court) for the period January 1, 2017 to December 31, 2020	 \$	 <u><u>-</u></u>

DISTRICT COURT 45-1-03
LACKAWANNA COUNTY
FINDING AND RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR THE PERIOD
JANUARY 1, 2017 TO DECEMBER 31, 2020

Finding - Inadequate Arrest Warrant Return 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 ensure that warrants were returned/recalled when required. We tested 35 instances in which a warrant was required to be returned or recalled. Our testing disclosed that 18 were not returned or recalled, and 13 were not returned timely. The time of issuance to the time of return ranged from 244 days to 1,436 days.

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

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.

The district court stated that they have difficulty having warrants returned/recalled timely due to the high volume of warrants issued and staff not being able to keep track of outstanding warrants using the tickler system. 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 district 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 45-1-03
LACKAWANNA COUNTY
FINDING AND RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR THE PERIOD
JANUARY 1, 2017 TO DECEMBER 31, 2020

Finding - Inadequate Arrest Warrant Return Procedures (Continued)

Management's Response

The Magisterial District Judge responded as follows:

In the course of the daily operations of this busy inner city court, I am confident the staff strives to efficiently follow all of the guidelines and policies outlined in their AOPC handbooks. As the supervising Judge, I regularly review all reports required by the court. The warrants are numerous and their recall is an area that can be overlooked in the pressing demands of an average day. The staff was made aware of this issue and instructed on proper procedures. As of the date of this response all outstanding warrants have been addressed and proper procedure moving forward will be in place.

Auditor's Conclusion

We appreciate the officeholder's efforts to correct these issues. During our next audit, we will determine if the office complied with our recommendation.

DISTRICT COURT 45-1-03
LACKAWANNA COUNTY
REPORT DISTRIBUTION
FOR THE PERIOD
JANUARY 1, 2017 TO DECEMBER 31, 2020

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 Joanne Corbett
Magisterial District Judge

The Honorable Jerry Notarianni
Chairperson of the Board of Commissioners

The Honorable Gary DiBileo
Controller

Mr. Frank P. Castellano
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.