

COMPLIANCE AUDIT

District Court 03-2-11
Northampton County, Pennsylvania
For the Period
January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2023

April 2025



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 03-2-11, Northampton County, Pennsylvania (District Court), for the period January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2023, 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 determined the reason(s) for any 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 of 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.

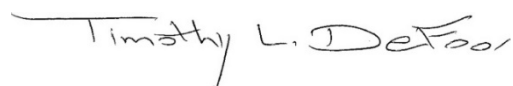
The district court is responsible for establishing and maintaining effective internal controls to provide reasonable assurance of compliance with state laws and regulations applicable to the collection of moneys on behalf of the Commonwealth, including whether they have been correctly assessed, reported, 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, 2023, 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 - Recurring.

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 *Proposed 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 Northampton County District Court 03-2-11 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
February 18, 2025

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DISTRICT COURT 03-2-11
NORTHAMPTON COUNTY
BACKGROUND
FOR THE PERIOD
JANUARY 1, 2019 TO DECEMBER 31, 2023

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 as follows:

District Court checks issued to:

Department of Revenue	<u>\$ 2,112,089</u>
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This balance reflects the summary of monthly transmittal reports as provided by the Department of Revenue.

Nicholas E. Engleson, Esquire, served at District Court 03-2-11 for the period January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2023.

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 03-2-11
NORTHAMPTON COUNTY
SUMMARY OF RECEIPTS AND DISBURSEMENTS
FOR THE PERIOD
JANUARY 1, 2019 TO DECEMBER 31, 2023

Receipts:

Department of Transportation		
Title 75 Fines	\$	401,032
Motor Carrier Road Tax Fines		1,813
Overweight Fines		87,806
Commercial Driver Fines		9,337
Littering Law Fines		1,019
Child Restraint Fines		2,169
Department of Revenue Court Costs		341,259
Crime Victims' Compensation Bureau Costs		33,920
Crime Commission Costs/Victim Witness Services Costs		35,104
Domestic Violence Costs		11,232
Department of Agriculture Fines		1,036
Emergency Medical Service Fines		117,272
CAT/MCARE Fund Surcharges		264,352
Judicial Computer System Fees		137,676
Access to Justice Fees		79,004
Criminal Justice Enhancement Account Fees		13,199
Judicial Computer Project Surcharges		221,467
Constable Service Surcharges		32,795
Miscellaneous State Fines and Costs		<u>320,597</u>
 Total receipts		 2,112,089
 Disbursements to Commonwealth		 <u>(2,112,089)</u>
 Balance due Commonwealth (District Court) per Department of Revenue data		 -
 Proposed Audit Adjustments		 <u>-</u>
 Adjusted balance due Commonwealth (District Court) for the period January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2023	 \$	 <u><u>-</u></u>

DISTRICT COURT 03-2-11
NORTHAMPTON COUNTY
FINDING AND RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR THE PERIOD
JANUARY 1, 2019 TO DECEMBER 31, 2023

Finding - Inadequate Arrest Warrant Procedures - Recurring

Our prior audit cited the district court for its inadequate procedures for arrest warrants and Requests For Suspension Of Operating Privileges (DL-38s) for the period January 1, 2015 to December 31, 2018. Our current audit found that the district court did not correct its inadequate warrant procedures.

Warrants and DL-38s 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 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.

We tested 35 instances in which a warrant was required to be issued under Pa.R.Crim.P. 430 (A) and (B). Our testing disclosed that one was not issued timely. The time from the date of required issuance to issuance was 264 days.

We also tested 25 instances in which a warrant may be issued under Pa.R.Crim.P. 430 (B). Our testing disclosed that two were not issued timely. The time from the date when the warrants should have been issued to issuance ranged from 80 days to 131 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 59 warrants required to be returned or recalled, 16 were not returned or recalled, and 23 were not returned timely. The time of issuance to the time of return ranged from 182 days to 1,740 days.

DISTRICT COURT 03-2-11
NORTHAMPTON COUNTY
FINDING AND RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR THE PERIOD
JANUARY 1, 2019 TO DECEMBER 31, 2023

Finding - Inadequate Arrest Warrant Procedures - Recurring (Continued)

Warrant Issuance Procedures: The Notice of Impending Warrant 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.

Pa.R.Crim.P. Rule 430 states, in part:

- (A) Arrest warrants initiating proceedings. A warrant for the arrest of the defendant shall be issued when:
 - (1) the citation or summons is returned undelivered; or
 - (2) the issuing authority has reasonable grounds to believe that the defendant will not obey a summons.
- (B) Bench warrants
 - (1) A bench warrant shall be issued when:
 - (a) the defendant fails to respond to a citation or summons that was served upon the defendant personally or by certified mail return receipt requested; or
 - (b) the defendant has failed to appear for the execution of sentence as required in Rule 454(F)(3).
 - (2) A bench warrant may be issued when a defendant has entered a not guilty plea and fails to appear for the summary trial, if the issuing authority determines, pursuant to Rule 455(A), that the trial should not be conducted in the defendant's absence.
 - (3) A bench warrant may be issued when:
 - (a) the defendant has entered a guilty plea by mail and the money forwarded with the plea is less than the amount of the fine and costs specified in the citation or summons; or
 - (b) the defendant has been sentenced to pay restitution, a fine, or costs and has defaulted on the payment; or
 - (c) the issuing authority has, in the defendant's absence, tried and sentenced the defendant to pay restitution, and/or to pay a fine and costs and the collateral deposited by the defendant is less than the amount of the fine and costs imposed.
 - (4) No warrant shall issue under paragraph (B)(3) unless the defendant has been given notice in person or by first class mail that failure to pay the amount due or to appear for a hearing may result in the issuance of a bench warrant, and the defendant has not responded to this notice within 10 days. Notice by first class mail shall be considered complete upon mailing to the defendant's last known address.

DISTRICT COURT 03-2-11
NORTHAMPTON COUNTY
FINDING AND RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR THE PERIOD
JANUARY 1, 2019 TO DECEMBER 31, 2023

Finding - Inadequate Arrest Warrant Procedures – Recurring (Continued)

Warrant Return Procedures: 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 they were short staffed and behind due to COVID and hiring of new staff.

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) 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.

Recommendations

We recommend that the district court review the tickler reports for warrants daily and take appropriate action. 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.

Management’s Response

The Magisterial District Judge responded as follows:

We noted that this is one of the busiest courts in the county. We do struggle with staffing and with individual clerk caseloads, which are generally higher than the average caseloads of clerks in other courts. Of five staff members, three are still in training and are still limited in the types of cases they can handle. We lost a valuable employee recently to retirement.

In addition, the Court Administrator has assisted with our caseload by removing one of our former police departments from our jurisdiction, transferring it to a less busy office.

With the staff that we have, we are focusing our efforts on keeping up with our current caseload and working at cleaning up our backlog. While we have been successful, we understand that there is more to do.

DISTRICT COURT 03-2-11
NORTHAMPTON COUNTY
FINDING AND RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR THE PERIOD
JANUARY 1, 2019 TO DECEMBER 31, 2023

Finding - Inadequate Arrest Warrant Procedures – Recurring (Continued)

Auditor's Conclusion

We appreciate the officeholder's efforts to correct these issues. This is a recurring finding. It is imperative that the district court ensure that warrants are properly issued and returned. Failure to implement the recommended procedures could result in uncollected fines, unpunished offenders, and increase the potential for funds to be lost or misappropriated. During our next audit, we will determine if the district court complied with our recommendations.

DISTRICT COURT 03-2-11
NORTHAMPTON COUNTY
SUMMARY OF PRIOR AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR THE PERIOD
JANUARY 1, 2019 TO DECEMBER 31, 2023

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 recommended 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 complied with the recommendation as it relates to DL-38s. However, the district court did not comply with the recommendation as it relates to our warrants. Please see the current year finding for additional information.

DISTRICT COURT 03-2-11
NORTHAMPTON COUNTY
REPORT DISTRIBUTION
FOR THE PERIOD
JANUARY 1, 2019 TO DECEMBER 31, 2023

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

Nicholas E. Englesson, Esquire
Magisterial District Judge

The Honorable Lori Vargo-Heffner
President of County Council

The Honorable Tara Zrinski
Controller

Mr. J. Jermaine Greene, Sr.
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.