

Spotlight on Juvenile Court File Management

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Back in late 2008 this column featured the Friend of the Court Accounting Office. At the outset of that article I mentioned my interest in periodically featuring offices within the court whose employees largely function behind the scenes but who perform necessary duties to ensure that the court is able to fulfill its responsibilities.

We are busy at Circuit Court and there is a never-ending supply of news to pass along, but I do want to recognize the significant contributions of some of our behind-the-scenes employees. This month's article will feature the employees who are responsible for managing juvenile court files.

All told, we have 13 full-time, two part-time, and three student employees who collectively ensure that files are properly managed and maintained from receipt of a new juvenile petition through disposition of the case and beyond. All of this activity falls under the watchful eye of Ms. Cindi Duggan, who for the last nine years has supervised the management of juvenile court files. Cindi began her employment with the court in 1978. She has worked in the juvenile file room, served as an order clerk where she was primarily responsible for processing orders arising from court hearings, and worked as a deputy register responsible for processing new juvenile petitions.

Even prior to attaining her present supervisory position, Cindi was our resident trainer in delinquency and neglect matters – the “go-to” person for training new deputy registers on the intricacies of juvenile court file processing. She received formal recognition for her contributions by virtue of her selection as Employee of the Year in 2005.

Under Cindi's oversight are four functions, each of which is integral to successful juvenile court file management. The first two functions involve the file room, and statistics and record keeping. Both units are headed by an office leader, Ms. Susan Morse. In addition to her oversight and supervisory responsibilities, Susan is responsible for the destruction of juvenile files – in accord with the rules governing the destruction of court files, of course. She also prepares the social files, processes them for proper filing, and processes all Orders for Reimbursement, wage assignments, consent orders and controlling paychecks.

Susan handles subpoenas delivered to the court, catalogs all transcripts retained by the court, receives HIV and DNA results, and receives and maintains all case exhibits.

She bears much responsibility and handles it with poise and professionalism.

The file rooms are staffed by one full-time and two part-time employees. One file room is located on the first floor of the east wing and contains about 2,500 active files. The second, containing about 5,000 closed files, is located in the basement of the east wing. Closed files are comprised of neglect matters where the minor has been returned to the home and delinquency matters where the juvenile has completed probation.

Staff in the file room unit conduct two daily mail runs and distribute mail to and from chambers and juvenile court employees. They also pull files for judges, deputy registers, referees, attorneys and caseworkers. Many requests for files are made by the public and these requests are also processed by file room staff.

The military, law enforcement agencies and probation departments routinely request information in juvenile files. All five branches of the military regularly frequent the courthouse to check juvenile records for new enlistees. Law enforcement agencies request information regarding criminal histories and probation departments frequently seek past juvenile records for persons currently in the adult criminal justice system.

The record keeping and statistics unit is comprised of two full-time employees, sometimes referred to as “order clerks,” and is located on the first floor of the east wing. The clerks are responsible for the distribution of some 15,000 orders annually resulting from formal hearings, show causes, consent hearings and other proceedings. They also distribute the docket every morning via e-mail to about 150 recipients throughout the courthouse.

The clerks handle about 7,500 juvenile court referee reports annually, ensuring that they are properly scanned and filed. They keep statistical records regarding the number of Public Act 150 and 220 wards sent to court-ordered placement – about 120 annually. Other records relating to the processing of delinquency petitions are maintained by the order clerks. One example relates to tracking the length of time for court orders to get generated, processed and served on the Department of Human Services.

The third is the typist function consisting of one full-time employee. This employee types all court orders for the six juvenile court referees with video-equipped hearing rooms.

Beginning this October the last two referee hearing rooms will be video equipped and our typist will prepare orders for those referees also. She also types orders for judges in a backup role when the judges' secretaries are away.

About 55 court orders are typed each day, resulting in an annual output of nearly 14,000 orders. Timeliness and accuracy are paramount when producing these orders and our employee handles these responsibilities with a professionalism that is appreciated by all with whom she works.

The deputy register function rounds out those dealing with juvenile court file management. Eight full-time employees process all new petitions that are received from the Department of Human Services and the Prosecutor's Office.

In 2009 a total of 1,475 new petitions were received. These are authorized petitions relating to delinquency and neglect proceedings. The unit also processed 374 supplemental petitions that are generally associated with underlying neglect proceedings. They may involve such matters as requests for termination of parental rights.

The unit also processed 701 intake consent cases that were opened last year. Consent provides the court with another dispositional option that will allow for the removal of a juvenile's record so long as he/she abides by the court's judgment.

Deputy registers also type and distribute notices of hearings, summons for hearings, disposition sheets for hearings, preliminary hearing orders, and Orders to Take into Custody. They process juvenile appeals and Order to Show Cause petitions.

The employees who handle juvenile court files fulfill their duties with care, precision and professionalism. They are reliable, accurate and perform with attention to detail. They may operate behind the scenes, but their contributions are indispensable. On behalf of the judges and employees of this court, we express our thanks to these employees who engender in us the realization that management of juvenile court files is in good hands.

Until next time...

Juvenile Court File Management Staff



Cindi Duggan, Bethany Jackson, Barb Aubin, Brenda Day, Danielle Chiapelli, Karen Johnson, Shanda Reardon, Alex Valdez, Bailey Castiglione, Jerri Decker, Jennifer Rembach, Lesley Allen, Nicole Walker and Susan Morse.

Not pictured: Deb Line, Cindy Romeos, Mike Hale and Kim Larkin.

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