

**Performance Audit
of the Allegheny County
Prothonotary's Office**

February 14, 2005

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December 3, 2004

Honorable Michael E. Lamb
Prothonotary
First Floor-City County Building
414 Grant Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

SUBJECT: PERFORMANCE AUDIT
OF THE ALLEGHENY COUNTY
PROTHONOTARY'S OFFICE

Dear Prothonotary Lamb:

We completed a performance audit of the Allegheny County Prothonotary's Office. Our objective was to provide an independent assessment as to whether or not the Prothonotary's Office is efficiently and economically executing its functions.

The results of our audit revealed that the Prothonotary's Office was proactive in making its functions efficient through automation of its significant operations. Use of technology could be further expanded by increasing electronic document filings, digitally imaging all recorded documents and automating certain workflows. Additionally, Notary services should be centralized in conjunction with the Clerk of Courts and the Recorder of Deeds.

Prothonotary Lamb
December 3, 2004

We would like to commend the management and staff of the Prothonotary's Office for their receptivity of our audit and the constructive and professional manner in which they participated in it. In addition, we would like to thank them for their courtesy and cooperation which allowed for the timely completion of our work.

Very truly yours,

Michael Wassil
Assistant Deputy, Auditing

MARK PATRICK FLAHERTY
Controller

cc: President and Members of the Allegheny County Council
Honorable Dan Onorato, Allegheny County Executive
Mr. James Flynn, Jr., Allegheny County Manager
Mr. Joseph Catanese, Council's Chief of Staff, Allegheny County
Ms. Amy Griser, Director of Budget and Finance
Mr. Eric Feder, Deputy Prothonotary, Allegheny County

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background:

The Prothonotary is the chief clerk of the Court of Common Pleas. This office has administrative control and responsibility for keeping and maintaining all official documents and records, as well as the official Seal of the Civil and Family Divisions of the Court. The Civil Division includes the General Docket, Arbitration Docket and Statutory Appeals sections. The Family Division includes the Divorce, Non-Support and Juvenile sections.

The Prothonotary accepts documents for filing, issues writs, initiates execution proceedings, takes bonds in civil cases, and processes appeals from the minor judiciary, Board of Viewers and administrative agencies to Common Pleas Court and from Common Pleas to the appellate courts. In addition, the Prothonotary has miscellaneous record keeping duties such as the recording of notary public signatures, mechanics' liens, municipal claims, and tax liens. Processing of certain of these documents is completed through the use of the Banner Courts system. The scanned documents are stored electronically on a system provided by CGI Information Systems Management Consultants, Inc. and can be assessed through a web interface.

Prothonotary service fees and operational procedures are established by the State Legislature and guided by the Pennsylvania Rules of Civil Court Procedure. All County revenues generated by the Prothonotary's Office are remitted daily to the Allegheny County Treasurer's Office for deposit into the general fund or special revenue fund. The Prothonotary's Office is also responsible for assessing, collecting and remitting a surcharge for the Deputy Sheriff's Education and Training account which is remitted monthly to the Treasurer's Office. The Prothonotary's Office remits the balance of the fees collected to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Allegheny County and the City of Pittsburgh for court costs, commissions, interest earned and other fees.

The projected 2004 operating costs for the Prothonotary's Office totaled \$2,820,447. This amount includes \$2,741,063 for personnel and fringe benefits and \$79,384 for services and other miscellaneous expenses. The Prothonotary's Office collected approximately \$4,376,709 for 2004 from recording and filing fees. The operating costs for the Prothonotary's Office totaled \$2,963,928 for

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2003. This amount includes \$2,820,981 for personnel and fringe benefits and \$142,947 for services and other miscellaneous expenses. The Prothonotary's Office collected \$4,328,997 for 2003 from recording and filing fees. The Office had 75 employees throughout 2003. Prothonotary's Office had 72 employees throughout 2004

Results in Brief:

During our audit, we found that the Prothonotary's Office was receptive to our examination and participated in it in a constructive and professional manner. While performing our procedures, we noted that the Prothonotary's Office was proactive in automating its significant operations. The Prothonotary's Office may be able to further increase its effectiveness in executing its daily operations and functions. Specifically, we found:

- The Prothonotary's Office has pursued opportunities to promote electronic filings and has the capability to further increase the volume of such filings.
- An approximate two month backlog exists for tax lien documents that are submitted in hard copy form. However, processing of tax liens submitted in an electronic format is completed the same day submitted.
- The Prothonotary's Office stores all original documents as well as copies on microfilm and/or digital imaging and pre-2003 documents have not been scanned. The Prothonotary's Office spends approximately \$8,279 in rent annually to store records with the Courts paying the remaining \$16,809 for the warehouse. In addition, the Prothonotary's Office employs 4 staff members who are dedicated to the storage and retrieval of these documents.
- The process to certify notaries involves the recording and filing of documents at the Recorder of Deed's Office, the Prothonotary's Office and the Clerk of Court's Office.
- The information needed to prepare writs and billings for Protection from Abuse orders, which are

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

manually prepared, resides in the computer system of the Prothonotary's Office.

- Collection of outstanding Protection from Abuse order billings which totaled \$189,677 for 2004 and 2003 were not pursued for collection.
- Procedures to monitor documents assigned a bar code but not scanned can be improved to ensure submitted documents are not lost.
- The Prothonotary's Office does track input and output measures such as the number of documents processed per employee. However, management does not use this information to make adjustments to resource allocations, operational policies and practices, and organization structures. Additionally, the Prothonotary's Office did not have a strategic plan that sets forth goals and objectives for the office.

Recommendations:

We recommend the Prothonotary's Office:

- Continue to pursue ways to increase the number of electronic filings. This might be accomplished by increasing the number of targeted promotional campaigns to potential on-line filers, training sessions with key user groups such as the Allegheny County Bar Association, and other activities designed to promote awareness and acceptance of the on-line filing system.
- Review the tax lien process to make it more efficient by requiring that tax liens be submitted electronically on disk or preferably through the Prothonotary Office's website upon passage of enabling legislation.
- Upon passage of enabling legislation, obtain the approval of the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC) and the County Records Committee to store documents electronically or on microfilm, and eliminate the need to store all original paper documents.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Contact the County Records Committee and the AOPC to determine which records in storage (pre-2003) need to be retained permanently, scanned and original documents eliminated, or destroyed based on the retention schedules.
- Scan all pre-2003 documents and reevaluate staff levels upon completion of the scanning. This will increase productivity and efficiencies and make recorded documents more accessible to the public.
- Upon passage of enabling legislation, centralize the Notary certification process to improve efficiencies and the services provided to Notaries, in conjunction with the Clerk of Courts and the Recorder of Deeds.
- The Prothonotary should establish a collection process that includes tracking of all outstanding PFA order billings.
- Develop a plan to further automate the processing of statutory appeals and Protection from Abuse orders to enhance productivity and efficiency.
- The scanning process should be enhanced to include an operational control to identify and investigate any documents that have been assigned a bar code but have not been scanned.
- The Prothonotary's Office should implement a systematic process to manage for results which includes developing goals, objectives and operational plans to achieve the goals and objectives, monitoring and evaluating operating results, and adjusting resource allocations to achieve the goals and objectives.

I. Introduction

Purpose:

We completed a performance audit of the Allegheny County Prothonotary's Office. Our objective was to provide an independent assessment as to whether or not the Prothonotary's Office is efficiently and economically executing its functions.

Background:

The Prothonotary is the chief clerk of the Court of Common Pleas. This office has administrative control and responsibility for keeping and maintaining all official documents and records, as well as the official Seal of the Civil and Family Divisions of the Court. The Civil Division includes the General Docket, Arbitration Docket and Statutory Appeals sections. The Family Division includes the Divorce, Non-Support and Juvenile sections.

The Prothonotary accepts documents for filing, issues writs, initiates execution proceedings, takes bonds in civil cases, and processes appeals from the minor judiciary, Board of Viewers and administrative agencies to Common Pleas and from Common Pleas to the appellate courts. In addition, the Prothonotary has miscellaneous record keeping duties such as the recording of notary public signatures, mechanics' liens, municipal claims, and tax liens. Indexing and recording of certain of these documents is completed through use of the Banner Courts system. The scanned documents are stored electronically on a system provided by CGI Information Systems Management Consultants, Inc. and can be assessed through a web interface.

Prothonotary service fees and operational procedures are established by the State Legislature and guided by the Pennsylvania Rules of Civil Court Procedure. All County revenues generated by the Prothonotary's Office are remitted daily to the Allegheny County Treasurer's Office for deposit into the general fund or special revenue fund. The Prothonotary's Office is also responsible for assessing, collecting and remitting a surcharge for the Deputy Sheriff's Education and Training account which is remitted monthly to the Treasurer's Office. The Prothonotary's Office purchases short term (30-91 days) certificates of deposit with Court-ordered deposits. The Prothonotary's Office held \$7,239,975 in certificates of deposit for litigants for 2003. If the certificate of deposit is for an amount of \$1,000 or more, the interest earned is awarded as part of the court settlement. If the amount is less than

I. Introduction

\$1,000, the deposits are not required to be held in an interest bearing account. The Prothonotary's Office remits the balance of the fees collected to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Allegheny County and the City of Pittsburgh for court costs, commissions, interest earned and other fees.

The projected 2004 operating costs for the Prothonotary's Office totaled \$2,820,447. This amount includes \$2,741,063 for personnel and fringe benefits and \$79,384 for services and other expenses. The Prothonotary's Office collected approximately \$4,376,709 for 2004 from recording and filing fees. The operating costs for the Prothonotary's Office totaled \$2,963,928 for 2003. This amount includes \$2,820,981 for personnel and fringe benefits and \$142,947 for services and other miscellaneous expenses. The Prothonotary's Office collected \$4,328,997 for 2003 from recording and filing fees. The Prothonotary's Office had 72 employees throughout 2004 and 75 employees throughout 2003.

Allegheny County Prothonotary's Office
Schedule of Projected Revenues and Expenditures
January 1, 2004 through December 31, 2004

GENERAL FUND

	<u>Final Budget</u>	<u>Actual</u>	Favorable (Unfavorable) <u>Difference</u>
2004 Revenue			
Recording & Filing	\$ 4,490,000	\$ 4,334,773	\$ (155,227)
Copying & Printing	60,000	41,936	(18,064)
Interest	<u>50,000</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>(50,000)</u>
TOTAL	4,600,000	4,376,709	(223,291)
2004 Expenditures			
Personnel	2,070,361	2,070,361	-
Fringe Benefits	655,150	670,702	(15,552)
Services	66,598	56,605	9,993
Supplies	23,091	19,508	3,583
Repairs & Maintenance	3,000	2,889	111
Materials	<u>500</u>	<u>382</u>	<u>118</u>
TOTAL	2,818,700	2,820,447	(1,747)
Revenue Over Expenditures	\$ 1,781,300	\$ 1,556,262	\$ (225,038)

SPECIAL REVENUE FUND

	<u>Final Budget</u>	<u>Actual</u>	Favorable (Unfavorable) <u>Difference</u>
2004 Revenue			
Recording & Filing	\$ 950,000	\$ 760,254	\$ (189,746)
Interest	<u>-</u>	<u>8,206</u>	<u>8,206</u>
TOTAL	950,000	768,460	(181,540)
2004 Expenditures			
Personnel	262,500	240,576	21,924
Fringe Benefits	62,500	65,133	(2,633)
Services	405,951	407,721	(1,770)
Supplies	18,205	12,639	5,566
Repairs & Maintenance	36,500	36,668	(168)
Minor Equipment	162,621	139,983	22,638
Materials	<u>1,723</u>	<u>1,723</u>	<u>-</u>
TOTAL	950,000	904,443	45,557
Revenue Under Expenditures	\$ -	\$ (135,983)	\$ (135,983)

Allegheny County Prothonotary's Office
Schedule of Revenues and Expenditures
January 1, 2003 through December 31, 2003

GENERAL FUND

	<u>Final Budget</u>	<u>Actual</u>	Favorable (Unfavorable) <u>Difference</u>
2003 Revenue			
Recording & Filing	\$ 5,260,000	\$ 4,267,932	\$ (992,068)
Copying & Printing	58,000	61,065	3,065
Interest	<u>65,000</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>(65,000)</u>
TOTAL	5,383,000	4,328,997	(1,054,003)
2003 Expenditures			
Personnel	2,169,500	2,169,495	5
Fringe Benefits	651,490	651,486	4
Services	95,882	95,875	7
Supplies	43,442	42,870	572
Repairs & Maintenance	2,200	2,118	82
Minor Equipment	5,528	1,988	3,540
Materials	<u>2,630</u>	<u>96</u>	<u>2,534</u>
TOTAL	2,970,672	2,963,928	6,744
Revenue Over Expenditures	\$ 2,412,328	\$ 1,365,069	\$ (1,047,259)

SPECIAL REVENUE FUND

	<u>Final Budget</u>	<u>Actual</u>	Favorable (Unfavorable) <u>Difference</u>
2003 Revenue			
Recording & Filing	\$ 716,400	\$ 741,120	\$ 24,720
Interest	<u>-</u>	<u>9,240</u>	<u>9,240</u>
TOTAL	716,400	750,360	33,960
2003 Expenditures			
Personnel	125,000	135,787	(10,787)
Fringe Benefits	30,000	26,903	3,097
Services	405,601	383,966	21,635
Supplies	13,282	16,456	(3,174)
Repairs & Maintenance	43,511	42,706	805
Minor Equipment	<u>99,006</u>	<u>138,618</u>	<u>(39,612)</u>
TOTAL	716,400	744,436	(28,036)
Revenue Over Expenditures	\$ -	\$ 5,924	\$ 5,924

II. Scope and Methodology

We completed a performance audit of the Allegheny County Prothonotary's Office. Our objective was to provide an independent assessment as to whether or not the Prothonotary's Office is effective in executing its functions, as dictated by statute, in the most efficient and economical manner. Specifically, we:

- Interviewed management and personnel to gain an understanding of their duties.
- Flowcharted significant office processes and analyzed workflow volumes and staffing to assess efficiency.
- Performed walk-through tests to assess the efficiencies.
- Inquired about IT platforms, applications, and the functions or services that are dependent upon the applications.
- Reviewed the volume of transactions for each service provided as well as the amount of fees collected and remitted.
- Performed analytical review procedures on transaction volumes, fees collected and expenditures to identify and investigate significant fluctuations.
- Reviewed key performance indicators used for measuring, reporting and monitoring operational performance.

We conducted this audit from October through November 2004. We provided a draft copy of this report to the Prothonotary for comment. The Prothonotary's comments may be found commencing on page 23.

III. Findings and Recommendations

Finding #1

**The Prothonotary's Office
Needs to Increase the
Volume of Electronic Filings**

The Prothonotary's Office began accepting electronic filings for most pleadings involving civil actions or divorce complaints in March 2001 and for the following documents:

Reports:

- Annual Audit
- Bond of Tax Collector
- Cemetery Report
- Oath of Office
- Tax Collector Report

Liens/Scire Facias:

- Commercial Broker Lien
- Commonwealth Tax Lien
- Condominium Lien
- Declaration of Covenant Lien
- Environmental Resources Lien
- Federal Judgment Lien
- Foreign State Tax Lien
- Mechanic's Lien
- Municipal Lien
- No Lien Agreement
- Pension Benefit Lien
- Planned Community Lien
- Scire Facias sure Municipal Lien
- Scire Facias sure Tax Lien
- Unemployment Compensation Lien

Foreign Judgment/Execution

- Foreign Execution
- Foreign Judgment
- Assurance of Voluntary Compliance

The Prothonotary's Office provided statistics which revealed that 19,982 documents or 3% out of 576,353 documents were filed electronically throughout 2003.

III. Findings and Recommendations

From January through November, 2004, 34,089, or 7% out of a total of 459,026 documents were filed electronically.

We estimate it takes an average of 7 minutes to process an internet filing versus an estimated average of 28 minutes to process these same documents through manual procedures.

We also noted that the Prothonotary's Office has other documents which are not permitted to be filed electronically because of the practice of furnishing an argument date to the party filing the document at the time of the filing. In addition, the following new case documents cannot be filed electronically by local rule.

- Health Department Judgments
- Housing Court Judgments
- Confession of Judgments
- ACBA Fee Dispute Judgments
- Judgment Rolls
- Orphan's Court Judgments
- PHEAA Judgments
- Pennsylvania Agency Judgments
- Workers' Compensation Judgments
- District Justice Transcripts
- Exemplification of records
- Amicable Ejectments
- Petition for Name Change

The technological advances of electronic filings have helped to decrease the number of customers who wait in line to file documents and the workload in the Prothonotary's office. However, the Prothonotary's Office has the capacity to increase the volume of these electronic filings which will in turn increase the efficiency and effectiveness of their office.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that the Prothonotary's Office continue to pursue ways to increase the number of electronic filings. This might be accomplished by increasing the number of targeted promotional campaigns to potential on-line filers, training sessions with key user groups such as the Allegheny County Bar Association, and other activities designed to promote awareness and acceptance of the on-

III. Findings and Recommendations

line filing system. This will decrease the Prothonotary Office's costs and support the effective utilization of resources. After increasing the volume of electronic filings, the staffing level of the Prothonotary's Office should be reassessed.

Management Response

We are continuing to pursue ways to increase electronic filings. We train attorneys, paralegals and legal secretaries, both in cooperation with the Allegheny County and other bar associations, and at individual law firms. We also promote our web site through informational cards, which are both distributed in our office and included in return mail. E-filings have shown a continual increase since the program was offered, and we expect this trend to continue.

III. Findings and Recommendations

Finding #2

The Prothonotary Should Require Tax Liens be Submitted Electronically

Tax Liens are filed either through paper copies of documents or are submitted on a disk. The tax liens submitted on a disk or electronically are usually processed the same day. However, there is currently a two month backlog of paper tax liens that need to be processed.

There are four employees whose specific duties include processing tax liens throughout the day until 2:00 p.m. when they stop and begin the processing of "Protection from Abuse" orders (PFAs). The processing of tax liens is an involved process which appears to be antiquated. The clerks manually count the number of liens, calculate the amount due from the filings and then enter all of the information into the computer. If the information is submitted on disk electronically, the clerks review the information and process it immediately.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that the Prothonotary review the tax lien process to make it more efficient by requiring that tax liens be submitted electronically on disk or preferably through the Prothonotary Office's website upon passage of enabling legislation.

Management Response

We agree that tax liens and satisfactions of tax liens should be submitted electronically. In fact, approximately 95% of all new liens are now filed electronically. We are supportive of any effort our County Executive would take to include on his legislative agenda the requirement to electronically file tax liens.

III. Findings and Recommendations

Finding #3

**The Prothonotary's Office
Should Review the
Effectiveness and Efficiency of
Storing County Records And Digitally Image
Pre-2003 Documents**

In the last fifty years, there has been a tremendous increase in the amount of records being created and maintained by county governments. Increasing judicial case loads and introduction of new methods of duplicating records are primarily responsible for this proliferation of documents. The Prothonotary's Office has reported an estimated 459,026 new cases filed as of October 31, 2004 and 576,353 new cases filed in 2003. As a result of this "record explosion", county governments have had to spend more money to create, store, and access information.

Our review of the Prothonotary's Office revealed that it stores all original documents as well as copies on microfilm and/or digital imaging. The Prothonotary spends approximately \$8,279 annually for rent to store records at the Second Avenue warehouse. The Courts pay the remaining \$16,809 for this warehouse. Other storage facilities include the Northside warehouse, the Courthouse attic, and the Record Retentions Office at the County Office Building. In addition to the storage costs, the Prothonotary's Office employs 4 staff members who are dedicated to storage and retrieval of these documents.

The Prothonotary's Office is governed by the Records Retention Act of 1963. This act established a County Records Committee which administers the local records program. The Committee's primary responsibility is to develop record retention schedules and disposition procedures for certain county offices including the Prothonotary. The Supreme Court of Pennsylvania is responsible for promulgating records retention schedules and disposition procedures for the records of the entire unified judicial system. In turn, the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC) has delegated part of this responsibility to the County Records Committee.

III. Findings and Recommendations

The Prothonotary's Office still needs to scan all pre-2003 documents. Currently, the Prothonotary's Office was unable to provide an estimate of the number of files or documents that would need to be scanned or microfilmed as well as the number of years until these documents can be accessed on-line.

An effective records management system which eliminates multiple copies of documents can reduce the cost of creating, storing, and retrieving records and can increase productivity by saving staff time.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Upon passage of legislation, we recommend that the Prothonotary's Office obtain the approval of the AOPC and the County Records Committee to store documents electronically or on microfilm and eliminate the need to store all original paper documents. In addition, all records included under the definition of a county record should be disposed of in accordance with the County Records Act and disposition procedures approved by the County Records Committee.

The Prothonotary should also contact the County Records Committee and the AOPC to determine which records in storage need to be retained permanently, scanned and original documents eliminated, or destroyed based on the retention schedules.

Additionally, to increase productivity and efficiencies and make recorded documents more accessible to the public, we recommend that Prothonotary scan all pre-2003 documents and reevaluate staff levels upon completion of the scanning.

Management Response

We agree that, upon passage of legislation, storage methods in the Prothonotary's Office should change. The most efficient and cost-effective means of document storage for our office would be if scanned documents would be considered to be archival documents. At this time we do not see back-scanning as being cost-effective, but will continue to review and evaluate that issue.

III. Findings and Recommendations

Finding #4

The Notary Process Needs to be Centralized

“The Notary Public Law” empowers the Secretary of the Commonwealth to appoint and commission Notaries. The Notary process begins at the Recorder of Deeds Office where the Notary is sworn in and a fee is paid. The Notary’s paperwork is then taken to the Prothonotary’s Office where it is signed by the Prothonotary. The Notary also signs a signature card which is filed at the Prothonotary and pays a fee. The Notary must then take the signed paperwork to the Clerk of Courts Office where it is signed by the Clerk of Courts. The Notary once again signs a signature card which is filed at the Clerk of Courts and pays a fee. The Notary has to go to three different buildings until the paperwork is complete and they can receive their commissions. The signature cards are then filed at both the Prothonotary’s Office and the Clerk of Courts Office to be used to verify Notaries’ signatures on various court documents. Clerk of Courts management estimates that there are approximately 5,000 notary filings annually, or 20 filings per day.

This certification process needs to be streamlined so that all paperwork, seals and signatures can be completed at one office. Currently, this process is very cumbersome, time consuming and confusing to the customer.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Upon passage of legislation, we recommend that Prothonotary, in conjunction with the Clerk of Courts and Recorder of Deeds offices, centralize the Notary certification process to improve efficiencies and the services provided to Notaries.

Management Response

We agree that a centralized notary registration process is a good idea. Upon passage of legislation, we will enthusiastically work to implement a centralized registry.

III. Findings and Recommendations

Finding #5

**The Prothonotary's Office Should
Increase Efficiency through Improved
Workflow Automation and Enhance
Operational Controls**

A statutory appeal is the act of asking a higher court to reverse a lower court's decision or to reverse the decision of a local agency. These cases generally involve issues such as small claims, violations of municipal and housing ordinances, or zoning issues. When a statutory appeal is filed with the Prothonotary's Office, a writ is also prepared.

The process begins by the appellant or the appellant's counsel submitting a statutory appeal to the Prothonotary. The cashier reviews the appeal to ensure the form has been properly completed and charges a filing and recording fee. A case identification number is assigned to the document if it is a new case. The preliminary information from the statutory appeal is then entered into the Prothonotary's computer system by the cashier. The document is then validated by the receipt machine and a barcode is printed and affixed to the document. The document is then time clocked and sent to the Prothonotary's secondary department where the entire docket text is entered into the Prothonotary's computer system. The writ is manually prepared by typing the same information that has already been entered into the computer system. This is a duplication of effort that needs to be automated to become more efficient.

Another process that can further benefit from automation is the billing process for "Protection from Abuse" (PFA) orders. When a plaintiff files for and is granted a PFA, the defendant is billed by the Prothonotary for a \$109 filing and recording fee. This billing process is manual and can be automated through the use of information residing in the computer system. In addition, the defendant usually does not pay the fee and the Prothonotary does not track the outstanding balance. Collection of outstanding Protection from Abuse order billings which total \$189,677 for 2004 and 2003 were not pursued for collection.

III. Findings and Recommendations

In addition, we found that the Prothonotary affixes a bar code to all documents that need to be scanned. This bar code is read by the scanning machine to ensure that the number of pages reported on the bar code has been scanned. If the scanner does not have the reported number of pages, it will report an error. However, our review noted that the system does not have a facility to track or report on documents that have been bar coded but not scanned at all. Therefore, if an entire document is lost, there is no compensating control to notify the office of this error.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that the Prothonotary's Office develop a plan to further automate the aforementioned workflow processes to enhance productivity and efficiency. The Prothonotary should establish a collection process that includes tracking of all outstanding PFA order billings. The scanning process should be enhanced to include an operational control to identify and investigate any documents that have been assigned a bar code but have not been scanned. In addition, the Prothonotary should reevaluate staff levels upon automation of these processes.

Management Response

We agree that the creation of writs needs to be automated. We are currently working with the Sheriff's Office to re-engineer the process of creation and service of writs. Once this project is completed, writs will be computer-generated, and the sheriff's deputies will enter returns of service. The planned completion date of this project is July 2005. We agree that PFA collections should be improved. This is a problem that plagues prothonotaries throughout Pennsylvania. We need to tackle this problem in conjunction with the Family Court and the Sheriff's Office. We agree that we should implement a tracking system to ensure that bar-coded documents are scanned. We will implement that suggestion in 2005.

III. Findings and Recommendations

Finding #6

The Prothonotary's Office Should be Managing for Results

Performance measures can be utilized to assess costs and activities of government in relation to the results they are trying to achieve. Governments that periodically evaluate operational performance against desired outcomes are better able to manage for results through timely adjustments to resource allocations, operational policies and practices, and organization structures.

Specifically, performance measures are useful for:

- Setting goals and objectives
- Planning operations to accomplish the goals and objectives
- Allocating resources to operations
- Monitoring and evaluating results to determine if progress is being made toward achieving the goals and objectives, and
- Assessing the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of operation

Our review of the Prothonotary's Office revealed that management does track input and output measures such as number of dockets processed per employee. Management was able to provide daily reports of the operations of their employees. However, management does not use this information to make adjustments to resource allocations, operational policies and practices, and organization structures. Additionally, the Prothonotary's Office did not have a strategic plan that sets forth goals and objectives for the office.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that the Prothonotary's Office use existing performance measures to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of its services. The Prothonotary's Office should implement a systematic process to manage for results. This process should include:

- developing goals and objectives and operational plans to achieve the goals and objectives,

III. Findings and Recommendations

- monitoring and evaluating operating results to determine if progress is being made toward achieving the goals and objectives,
- adjusting resource allocations, operational policies and practices, and organization structures to achieve the goals and objectives, and identifying ways to improve the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of operations.

Management Response

We constantly review and improve upon our office procedures. While we have made many changes and continue to make many changes in our office procedures, we need to quantify our goals and objectives in written form.