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Statewide Integrated E-Payment
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Many jurisdictions are accepting payments for various case types online, either through a vendor or through a custom developed website. The Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC) approached the development of a statewide e-payment site with the following unique goals:

> ➢ Provide a statewide e-payment system that would be fully integrated with several case management systems and that would display "live" case data to payers via the web;
> ➢ Provide a one-stop interface for payers so that they could pay fines and costs from the Magisterial District Judge Courts (MDJ) and the Common Pleas (CP) courts at the same time;
> ➢ Remove any risk of capturing credit or debit card information from AOPC and the courts;
> ➢ Provide a system whereby the money submitted through ePay is automatically distributed to over 600 different court bank accounts with little interaction from AOPC;
> ➢ Provide case management interfaces to the payment data so that end-users can simply accept payments rather than having to work from reports of payments received;
> ➢ Create a self-funding system whereby the courts do not incur additional expense for the operation of ePay;
> ➢ Provide a mechanism for courts to block an individual or case from being eligible for ePay, to help prevent fraud;
> ➢ Provide for future integration of the e-payment solution with an in-house developed e-filing solution to be used for magistrate, common pleas, and the appellate courts.

The AOPC ePay system has been in production since 4/5/2010 and has taken in 68,605 payments for fines and costs for a total of $11,007,736.99. Pennsylvania's largest counties, Philadelphia and Allegheny County are using ePay successfully at the common pleas level. There are over 328 MDJ sites and 67 Common Pleas Courts using the system with more MDJ courts added every week as a new case management system rolls out to these courts.

Users can access the ePay Online Case Payments site by navigating to the UJS Portal: http://ujsportal.pacourts.us. The UJS Portal is the home page for all of the electronic services available from Pennsylvania's Unified Judicial System. Once the page opens, payers can click on ePay in the Navigation Bar at the top of the page to access the ePay Online Case Payments site (See exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1

The process of making an online payment has the following basic steps:E

1. Search for cases or payment plans
2. Add cases or payment plans to a shopping cart
3. Specify the payment amounts and enter the payment information

When the ePay page opens, there are several options available to search for a case. To begin the search, the payer clicks on the link for the type of search they want to perform.

I want to make a payment on my court case and I have the...

Citation Number for the ticket

Payment Plan Number for the court case

Docket Number for the court case

Name of the person

Name of the organization/company

The fields available for entering information to search vary depending on the type of search chosen. For most search types, payers need to select the court type where the case was heard (for example, Court of Common Pleas) to view additional fields.

Exhibit 2

After entering the information for the search, the payer clicks SEARCH. The results of the search are returned in a grid on the screen. The search results are dynamically retrieved from the case management systems in near real time. When cases or payment plans are displayed in the grid, the payer selects the checkbox for each case or payment plan they want to make a payment on and clicks ADD TO CART.

Exhibit 3

After the payer clicks ADD TO CART, case information is passed to a third-party shopping cart. The cart displays the cases and payment plans selected in the grid. Payers enter the Amount to Pay for each case or payment plan. For payment plans, the Amount to Pay automatically defaults to the amount due. Payers can click ADD ANOTHER to return to search for more cases and payment plans or click CHECKOUT to proceed to making the payment.

Exhibit 4

Shopping Cart

Docket/Payment Plan Number	Description	Current Balance	Amount to Pay	
CP-02-CR-0010921-2010	Comm. v. Ayers, John P.	$0.00	$ 0.00	Remove
02-2010-P10759	Payment Plan 02-2010-P10759 Next payment amount due: $75.00 Next payment due date: 09/01/2010 CP-02-CR-0010923-2010 Comm. v. Ayers, John P.	$300.00	$ 75.00	Remove
		Subtotal:	$75.00	

Add Another   Checkout

When the payer selects CHECK OUT, a U.S. Bank E-Payment Service site opens and displays a summary of what has been selected for payment. Use of the U.S. Bank E-Payment Service prevents AOPC or the courts from needing to store or have access to credit or debit card information. Payers enter credit card or ATM/debit card information and billing address on the U.S. Bank site. U.S. Bank was selected in order to provide PCI compliance without the court needing to assume that responsibility.

Exhibit 5

Court Acceptance of Payments

The online system provides real time notification to the court that a payment has been made through messaging. An alert is displayed on the Case Profile and Receipting screens. This alert indicates that an e-Payment is being processed to assist court staff in determining whether further court actions need to be delayed, such as a warrant for non-payment. Payments generally complete the processing cycle within a day.

Exhibit 6
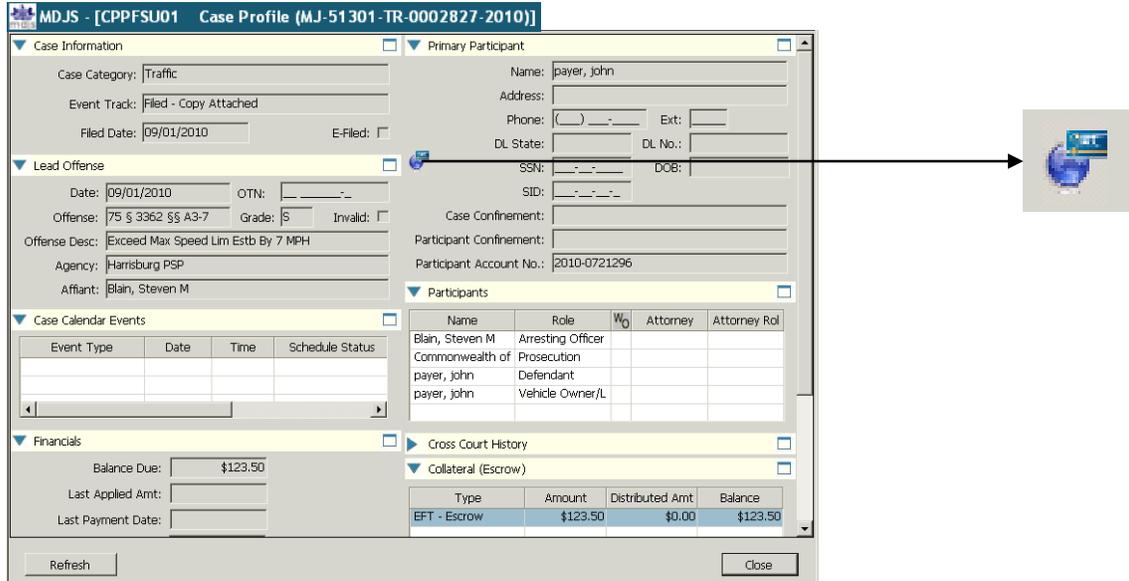
Each of the case management systems includes interfaces for managing and accepting e-Payments. A pending payment screen displays all the pending ePay payments.

An ePay Processing Screen allows court staff to review payments and apply them to cases individually and in batch. For traffic citations that have a set fine, the user can also enter a Fast

Track disposition. Payers are reminded repeatedly online that full payment of a fixed fine traffic citation constitutes a guilty plea.

Exhibit 8

Fast Track Disposition

Additional Information about ePay

- Each transaction processed is assessed a $2.75 non-refundable convenience fee. A transaction may include multiple payments for cases in both magisterial district judge and common pleas courts and they may include courts from more than one county.
- Payment can only be accepted online for counties that have chosen to participate. The system can be configured to include/exclude counties.
- Cases where the defendant is a minor, holds another protected status, the case is sealed or pending expungement will not be available for online payment unless they are part of a payment plan that includes other cases that are not restricted. For a list of all restrictions, please visit the website.
- AOPC plans to integrate the ePay system with the collection of filing fees for eFiling.
- The ePay web interface uses ASP.net and a SQL based metadata database. It displays case information from a replicated Sybase ASE 15.0.3.0 case management database.

Court Context

The Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts Judicial Automation department has been responsible for development of case management systems for Magisterial District Judges, the Court of Common Pleas Criminal division, and the Pennsylvania Appellate Courts – Supreme, Superior and Commonwealth courts. This office has also been responsible for development of software for the Pennsylvania Board of Law Examiners (PABLE) and for internal administrative services and human resource tracking. These systems also include web interfaces for District

Attorney production of Informations, on-line bar applications, warrant tracking for arresting agencies and other secure users, on-line secure and public docket sheets for appellate and criminal cases, a scheduling interface for the Court of Common Pleas Criminal Division, among others.

Judicial Automation at the AOPC employs a full development staff. In over 20 years of developing software packages, beginning with the Magisterial District Judge (MDJ) System, AOPC has refined a repeatable process for software development, enhancement, and acquisition that involves an iterative lifecycle, joint application development (JAD) with user groups, screen prototyping, cross-disciplinary software development teams, and structured testing.

Tips for Implementation

Tip 1: Identify legal language to be used on the website. AOPC realized that legal information would need to be included on the ePay website to prevent issues with privacy, warrants, failed payments and other issues. The legal language provided by AOPC legal staff is contained on the Privacy Policy, Terms and Conditions, and ePay Homepage screens for review by other jurisdictions considering such a project.

Tip 2: Provide an on-line user guide and helpdesk access. A user guide is available on every ePay screen through the Help link. The Contact Us link directs users to the CP help desk.

Tip 3: Verify bank routing and account numbers with individual court offices and pre-note office bank accounts as implementation proceeds. Courts will need to verify the proper bank routing number to use. The number on a canceled check is not always the number that is to be used for electronic deposits. Courts also need to insure that their accounts are open for electronic deposits. The merchant bank account should be able to pre-note a specific account to insure that deposits can be made.

Tip 4: Identify and implement in pilot courts first. Creating an e-payment system that allows for implementing courts gradually will assist in fine tuning the electronic messaging and file transfer necessary to implement the solution. Each case management system has a table that stores information about which courts are live on ePay in order to enable or disable the web function. AOPC's rollout schedule has been coordinated with the introduction of a new MDJ case management system.

Tip 5: Be prepared for expansion. Once courts can quickly and easily accept on-line payments, they will not hesitate to ask for more. Current initiatives for AOPC include expanding ePay for Juvenile Delinquency and to take Bail Deposits. The Juvenile Delinquency search will permit only docket number and citation searches and will obscure the names of juveniles.

Tip 6: Assign staff to monitor payments and address charge backs. Staff must reconcile the merchant account and monitor that deposits are being made to the proper court accounts. Charge backs are situations where a payment is disputed by the cardholder**.** It is important to respond to these according to the rules of the bank.

Summary

AOPC sought to provide a fully integrated ePay solution that provides case and balance information to payers and allows court staff to accept payments through a simple process within

the case management systems. A convenience fee is charged for each transaction, creating a self-funding system. Payments to multiple courts and counties can be made within a single ePay transaction. Individual counties and courts that did not accept credit cards can now use an in court terminal to link credit card users to ePay for payment of fines and costs. Courts experience savings on credit card fees. The ePay infrastructure provides the ability for expansion to the acceptance of bail and for use in eFiling.

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Disclaimer: The advice and opinions represented in this bulletin are based on the experiences of the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC). Such recommendations may not be suitable for other jurisdictions, and are only offered in the spirit of sharing experience as information to others considering the installation of similar technologies and adoption of similar processes.