

Pa. database: 1.4 million  
warrants unserved

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New state computer system finds more than 100 outstanding for homicide

**AP** Associated Press

updated 4/8/2007 6:50:05 PM ET

**HARRISBURG, Pa.** — Pennsylvania's new statewide computer system makes it possible for the first time to put a number on how many warrants remain unserved across the state — 1.4 million, including more than 100 for homicide, The Associated Press has found.

Pennsylvania is now the largest state to complete such a comprehensive court computer network, although several other large states — including California, New York and Ohio — are planning or implementing such systems, according to the National Center for State Courts in Williamsburg, Va.

The database is designed, in part, to help authorities reach across county lines to capture fugitives who have moved to avoid detection. It will also allow government officials and the public to compare how courts are performing from county to county.

“Because of this automation, it’s becoming harder to run from the law,” said Steve Schell, spokesman for the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts.

Figures on the number of unserved warrants were generated by the state courts administration at the request of The Associated Press. The data, based on an April 1 snapshot, show the overwhelming number of outstanding warrants — 1.2 million — were for less serious offenses, including traffic violations.

However, in addition to the homicide cases there were thousands of outstanding warrants for such violent crimes as aggravated assault, sexual offenses and robbery. More common charges in the warrant database include drug offenses, drunken driving and theft.

The Armstrong County clerk of courts, Brenda George, said she has learned not to overreact when someone paying a fine at her counter triggers the computer system’s yellow “WO” alert, indicating a warrant is pending. She quietly summons a deputy.

“We’ve had some circumstances where we’ve said ‘Hold on, you have a warrant, we need to get the sheriff,’ and they’ve run down the hall,” she said.

### **Instant online access to cases**

The system, which went fully online in September, also gives the public instant Internet access to case docket information, with more detailed information — including access to the warrants — available to law enforcement and court officials.

“Better information equals better justice,” said James E. McMillan, principal court technology consultant for the National Center for State Courts. “Because when you have more complete and more accurate information, you don’t make as many mistakes.”

The system also improves scheduling, makes it simpler to move cases from one level to the next, and gives judges more information about a person's background for setting bail.

Among other states, Indiana will be testing a new computer system in some counties in the next two years that will provide a statewide warrants database, said Mary L. DePrez, a technology officer with the Indiana Supreme Court.

Pennsylvania spent \$105 million on its Common Pleas Case Management System, which required buying and installing more than 800 computers and training thousands of workers during the past three years.

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