

Philadelphia Community-Based Prosecution Model

Website: http://www.phila.gov/districtattorney/about_CommunityProsecution.html

Program Start Date: October 2010

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Criminal Justice Partners: First Judicial District of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia court system), Philadelphia Police Department

Information: The Community-Based Prosecution Model was created as a way to tackle some of the major challenges presented by the thousands of criminal cases that come into the Philadelphia courts in each year. The Community-Based Prosecution Model of reorganization capitalizes on existing systems that categorize criminal matters coming into the court according to their charges, their complexity, and likely time to disposition. The aim is to wisely invest judicial resources-including time, space, finances and personnel- in order to schedule and dispose of the remarkable volume of criminal cases each year. Under the new plan, most criminal proceedings occur within Philadelphia's Criminal Justice Center (CJC). Preliminary hearings are no longer conducted in the neighborhood police districts. The Community-Based Prosecution Model breaks the city into six zones aligned with the police detective divisions. The bureaus are East Division, South Division, Northeast Division, Northwest Division, Southwest Division, and Central Division. Assistant District Attorneys are assigned geographically to bureaus that are responsible for a particular area or district of the city. Criminal cases are held on floors according to their division at the CJC. The criminal court reorganization reduces the number of cases continued or dismissed because of absent police witnesses when officers are scheduled to appear for different cases at different locations on the same day.

Evaluation/Research: Preliminary results very promising; fewer felony cases are being dismissed and felonies are being disposed of more quickly. Public safety benefits include stronger cases, more attention to victims, and more cooperation from witnesses. The reform has also improved working relationships with the police department and community organizations.