

**ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF THE GREENE COUNTY
PUBLIC DEFENDER FOR THE YEAR 2014**

The 2013 year was my first full year as Public Defender of Greene County. Several changes occurred during that year. The Office of the Greene County Public Defender benefitted from the increased staffing that was created by the grant monies from the New York State Office of Indigent Legal Services. Unfortunately, one of the changes was the loss at the end of the 2013 year of two staff members. One staff member was an investigator who had worked diligently for many years. The other notable loss was the retirement of an attorney who had been on staff for approximately 26 years. This attorney handled one-half of all felony cases which are the more intricate cases in the office.

As reported in the Annual Report for the year ending 2013, this Office, for the first time in its history, received a Court Order for the payment of counsel fees for our work representing an alleged incapacitated person under Article 81 of the Mental Hygiene Law. Since the issuance of that Court Order, the Office has obtained many more Court Orders for counsel fees due to the Office continually being appointed to represent alleged incapacitated persons who are not considered indigent by the New York state standards. As a result of these Orders, the Office has increased its revenues by means other than through governmental funding. This was, to my knowledge, the first time this Office ever recouped expenses from outside sources. I expect that in the future there will be even more monetary reimbursement from sources other than through governmental funding.

During 2013, this Office received further funding from the New York State Office of Indigent Legal Services. We were awarded a grant which permitted the Public Defender's Office to replace equipment that was outdated and not functioning. It also permitted the Office to obtain two laptop computers. This is significant in that the addition of the laptop computers is the first step toward the eventual goal of remote access to public defender files while in Courts throughout the County. The new desktop computers installed in my first year as Public Defender coupled with the new laptop computers are paving the way for more efficient productivity and improved record keeping.

With the new computers in place, and with further funding from the New York State Office of Indigent Legal Services, the Greene County Public Defender's Office began its transition to the Public Defense Case Management System. This system is a uniform database accessible by all the computers in the office and by all people who work in the Public Defender's Office. This database will provide immediate access to

case files without the need to locate a hard copy of the file (located in the physical office). This is valuable in that it would allow for any attorney to be able to immediately represent a current client (even if the client is not usually handled by that attorney but by another attorney in the office) with enough knowledge about the case just by accessing the computer file. The eventual goal is remote access by all of our attorneys to Public Defender cases.

One example of how this remote access would be helpful is in situations that occur routinely throughout the year in which an attorney from the Public Defender's Office is already in Court and a client is picked up on a warrant. Rather than have the Court adjourn so that the file can be retrieved by the Public Defender's Office, the Public Defense Case Management System, coupled with the laptop computers, and remote access would avoid the above time consuming work of the Public Defender's Office and would avoid the delay and inconvenience to the Courts since the public defender file would be locatable almost immediately.

The Public Defense Case Management System will also streamline work and increase efficiency. In installing this system, reports and simple form letters can be generated with ease and speed thus absorbing some of the effort that an additional secretary would expend.

Assigned Counsel costs are always a burden on this Office. It is difficult to control this expense in that the number of conflicts of interest that cause the outside assignment is something that cannot be controlled as it relates to legal and ethical issues of law. This Office did explore the possibility of sharing defense services with Columbia County as a way to help control assigned counsel costs. The idea was to establish a referral of conflict cases between Greene and Columbia Counties so as to avoid the appointment of outside counsel at the rate of \$75 per hour. The attorneys in the respective Public Defender Offices would have an increased caseload, but this would avoid the payment of \$75 per hour to outside counsel (a much more expensive way of providing defense to clients). Unfortunately, the Columbia County Public Defender's Office was not interested in the sharing of these services.

Toward the end of the year, this Office did write for a competitive grant of additional monies to alleviate the costs associated with the representation of the indigent. This competitive grant sought additional money to improve representation by providing for an additional attorney and to increase the current hours of some attorneys already in the office.

With all of the changes taking place, it is the hope and expectation of this Office to continue to provide quality and effective representation of its clients while looking forward to improving efficiency and controlling costs.