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### **Newark's Courts Go Online and Open Call Center**

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Last fall, at the request of Newark Mayor Sharpe James, members of New Jersey's judiciary stepped in to conduct a comprehensive review of the operations of the Newark Municipal Court and, at the mayor's urging, tapped former city business administrator, now Superior Court Judge Glenn Grant to oversee the review and implementation of improvements in the court system.

Today the Mayor and Acting Presiding Municipal Judge Grant took the state's top court administrator, Judge Richard J. Williams, administrative director of the Courts, on a tour of the Newark Municipal Court, proudly showing off its new call center and the court's new home page, while also demonstrating how motorists can now pay their tickets online from the comfort of their homes and offices.

Current and former Essex County Assignment Judges Joseph A. Falcone and Burrell Ives Humphries joined the three. They were accompanied by other members of the "working group," assembled by Judge Williams last year in response to the Mayor's request for the city and judiciary to work together in improving service delivery in the municipal court.

"Working as a team, we have been able to streamline our courts and offer new and innovative services to the thousands of Newarkers and others who come in contact with our court system," said the Mayor. "For the first time in our history, the City of Newark will have a Municipal Courts Call Center, which will be responsible for handling all telephone inquiries about the court. We also have partnered with other municipalities on [New Jersey Municipal Courts Direct \(NJMCDirect.Com\)](#), which starting today, enables motorists, who have been cited for traffic violations in New Jersey's largest city, to pay their tickets online.

"Also, for the first time, all municipal court judges have computer terminals and printers right in the courtroom, so that they can look up a driver's up-to-the-minute motor vehicle records, and can enter, file and print out Court Orders as part of the proceedings.

"The effort to improve the Municipal Court of Newark is a great success story, thanks to the dedication and focus of Mayor James, Judge Falcone, Judge Grant and the team headed by Judge Humphries," said Judge Williams.

"It is almost unprecedented to achieve in just a matter of months the level of improvement in customer service, in efficiency of operations, and in the use of technology that we are seeing here today. And with all that, they even managed to paint the walls and marry more than 100 couples on Valentine's Day! With such efforts continuing, the future of Newark's Municipal Court has never been brighter," Williams said.

James said the improvements and the quick manner in which they came about would not have happened without the dedication and input of the "working group" assembled by Judge Williams to analyze, study and suggest means of improving the timeliness and efficiency of court operations.

“We were fortunate that Judge Falcone sent Judge Grant to oversee this operation. As a former Newark business administrator and corporation counsel, Judge Grant has the rare blend of administrative and legal experience, not to mention great calm, vision and patience to address and correct problems that have plagued our courts for years,” the Mayor stated.

Of New Jersey’s 536 municipalities, Newark was one of the few prevented from joining the state NJMCDirect.Com Payment System because of its backlog of tickets, which were not entered into the computerized system used for electronic payment over the Internet.

“We are making the Newark Municipal Court more efficient, more effective and better organized,” said Judge Grant. “As a result, we are collecting fines and costs that are owed to the City, but had previously gone unprocessed.

Four new employees have been hired and two current workers reassigned to staff the new Call Center, which will be open five days a week from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. In a further effort to streamline operations, the courts have purchased a new telephone software system that will enable calls to be answered in the order they are received. The system can now place 48 callers in line to be answered by all the new operators, compared to only two several months ago.

Grant noted that the call center is all part of a new Customer Service Division in the courts, which includes a walk-in customer service unit and a clerk’s office dedicated to responding to all written communications from the public.

To provide even greater opportunities for the public to satisfy their obligations, Grant said the Court cashier’s window is open from 8:30 a.m. to 9 p.m., Monday through Friday and a 24-hour drop box is available in the lobby of the Courts Complex, 32 Green Street.

The court has assigned judges to preside over two extra evening sessions to deal with traffic offenses and one to handle criminal matters. “Generally citizens have a minimum of 14 days and a maximum of 28 days to pay their violations. However, human nature often being what it is, citizens often wait until the 28th day to pay or address their violation,” said Grant.

In order to accommodate the last minute payers, the judge said the city has established a “Ticket Thursday” for citizens to come to court once a month and address their payable items.

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