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## **IMPROVING COURT OPERATIONS WITH CENTRALIZED FILE TRACKING**

The Miami-Dade County Clerk's Office supports the largest Judicial Circuit in the State of Florida. This Court Executive Development Program (CEDP) research project studied the Clerk's Office Criminal Division's effectiveness and timeliness of felony file availability for court calendars. With an average of eleven hundred forty-nine (1,149) felony cases appearing on calendar each day before twenty-five (25) Circuit Judges, file availability is a great concern to the Clerk's Office. The Court's and the public's valuable time should not be wasted on continuing a case to another day due to file unavailability. During the past five years, the caseload has remained stable with an annual average of 49,000 felony cases filed. However, the Clerk's Office staffing has decreased due to budgetary constraints. The resulting Court Clerk vacancies continue to impact the Division's daily operations and its capability of adequately preparing for court. The number of closed felony files stored off-site continues to increase each year resulting in as many as two hundred fifty (250) files being retrieved each day for court.<sup>1</sup> All these factors lead to a need for

improvement in current procedures.

The goal of this Court Improvement Project was to evaluate the availability of files to the court each day and improve upon the Clerk's Office efficiency of preparing for the daily court calendars. Surveys were designed to generate responses from the Court and Clerk's Office staff as to their satisfaction with current procedures and file availability. The office staff was surveyed as to the time they spent retrieving files needed for court calendars with the goal of improving upon current procedures and the quality of post court file updates. It is expected that a centralized Felony file retrieval system will improve file availability, both in office and off-site, as well as Court efficiency.

The methodology of this project centered on the two week testing of a centralized "Master File Tracking Calendar". This calendar is a daily, computer generated listing of each court case appearing on the daily calendars for all of the twenty-one court divisions. During this two-week pilot project, several court operation tasks related to file retrieval were tracked.<sup>2</sup> These same tasks were tracked for a two-week period prior to the pilot project. A comparison study was then conducted based on the results of these two studies. The surveys, which were distributed to all twenty-one division Circuit Judges, proved to be especially helpful and did, in fact, add another goal to the project – timely retrieval of files stored off-site. Extensive research was conducted regarding general records management principles as they relate to

centralized filing and retrieval of records.

This research project was chosen to assess the feasibility of implementation by the summer of 2002. After the Judge's surveys were completed, and the two-week "pilot project" was conducted, it was decided that the "Master File Tracking Calendar" would continue to be used on a daily basis. File room staff replaced the volunteer staff, working along with this writer, and work schedules were changed to accommodate their participation in the project. As of this writing, the project continues to be a success. Overall file availability has improved. File availability from off-site storage has also improved. Time spent retrieving files for court decreased – thereby allowing more time to prepare for court and to complete follow-up work. Conversations with Clerk's Office staff indicate that the majority of the staff are pleased with the new procedures implemented for centralized Felony file retrieval. Procedural changes moved the responsibility for file retrieval from the court staff to the file room staff. Utilizing the Master File Tracking Calendar for retrieval of files reduced time and staffing requirements. All staff involved with this project, and the subsequent procedural changes, agree that it has improved file availability and court efficiency.

As stated above, the new procedures for a centralized master file-tracking calendar will be permanently implemented. It is recommended that further system programming to enhance the accuracy of the Master File Tracking Calendar be completed. It will be necessary to make procedural changes such as alterations in work hours for delivery clerks in an effort to improve upon the delivery of off-site records. These procedures and system changes will be discussed with the Miami-Dade County Clerk's Office Records Management

Staff. It is the Clerk's Office responsibility to maintain the court file. The American Bar Association (ABA) standards dictate that "any elapsed time other than reasonably required for pleadings, discovery, and court events is unacceptable and should be eliminated."<sup>3</sup> Therefore, it is recommended that an automated centralized file retrieval system be implemented and further efficiencies be added to help reduce the time needed for retrieval of records stored at the Record Center.

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This [research paper](#) is available in its entirety in portable document format. To access, you must first obtain and install the Adobe Acrobat Reader



To obtain a copy of this research paper, please contact:

Knowledge Information Services  
National Center for State Courts  
300 Newport Avenue  
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<sup>1</sup> The Miami-Dade County Clerk's Office Record Center is located eight miles west of the Court. Currently, case files that closed in the year 1999 (conviction dispositions) and the year 2000 (dismissal dispositions) are stored at the Record Center.

<sup>2</sup> Tracked tasks included; retrieval of files needed for daily calendar, locating "missing files", returning files to shelves after court and retrieving files from Record Center.

<sup>3</sup> ABA Standard 2.50 on Court Delay Reduction.