

Video Teleconferencing Program

HISTORY

In 1995, the New Jersey Department of Corrections, in conjunction with the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) and the Office of the Public Defender, established a pilot videoconferencing project that involved installation of videoconferencing equipment at Essex County Courthouse, Essex County Public Defender and three state correctional institutions: Northern State Prison, Southern State Correctional Facility and Bayside State Prison. The objectives of this project were to demonstrate the effectiveness and efficiency of videoconferencing for court related matters and to promote acceptance of this technology. The NJDOC Videoconferencing Program was unique in using technology to provide system-wide access to the NJDOC inmate population for criminal justice systems at all levels – State, County, Local and Federal – enabling them to conduct their business in a more efficient manner. To this end, the New Jersey Department of Corrections has worked closely with the United States Executive Office of Immigration Review, Federal District Courts, New Jersey State Parole Board, Office of the Public Defender, Office of the Prosecutor, Administrative Office of the Courts, Intensive Supervision Program and County Correctional Facilities.

PURPOSE

Over the ensuing years, the implementation strategy of the program evolved from its single function of reduced transportation costs, to a multi-faceted criminal justice enterprise model. Videoconferencing has initiated a paradigm shift in the way the State Criminal Justice System conducts its business- i.e., from on-site, in-person activities and associated costs to videoconferencing from distant sites at much reduced costs and enhanced public safety. The culture of conducting criminal and legal court proceedings has changed dramatically at each agency that has participated in this project. Criminal cases pending against state inmates are now processed more quickly and efficiently, parole hearings and interviews of inmate candidates for early release programs are likewise streamlined along with civil proceedings and illegal deportation reviews. As a result, there has been widespread acceptance of videoconferencing technology in New Jersey that has led to the proliferation of videoconferences for a myriad of criminal justice and correctional related matters.

IMPACT

Currently, approximately more than 500 videoconferencing contact sites have been identified throughout the New Jersey Criminal Justice system. These sites are located throughout New Jersey's State Correctional Facilities, County Jails, Federal Courts, Superior Courts, Family Courts, Municipal Courts, Public Defenders' Offices, Prosecutors' Offices, State Parole Board, Intensive Supervision Programs, Juvenile Justice Commission and varying law enforcement/criminal justice agencies. The realizations of the program's long-term goals are, as always, undisputed. There has been significant cost avoidance through increased efficiencies in agencies impacting on inmate's release and/or custody level status. Many tasks involving inmate participation can now be done more effectively and efficiently while enhancing public safety. The success and effectiveness of the NJDOC Video Teleconference Program can be measured through inter-agency cost effectiveness, public safety, community protection, increased videoconference volume, interagency videoconference use and increased procurement of videoconference equipment throughout New Jersey government agencies.

FUTURE

New Jersey is the most densely populated state in the nation, with over 8.41 million people in a 7,419 square mile land area. The state has twenty-one (21) counties that contain more than 3,200 cities, towns, boroughs and municipalities. It is expected that within the next few years, more than three-quarters of all county criminal justice services, particularly those urban/metro counties with high commitments and/or parole violations to the New Jersey Department of Corrections, will be on-line with this new technology. Increased usage of videoconferencing should result in greater staff efficiency, reduced travel costs and greater level of security to the public.