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Southeastern Regional Office

Atlanta Municipal Court
Operations Assessment

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1. Introduction

At the initiation of the Atlanta Municipal Court, the National Center for State Courts' Southeastern Regional Office offered to provide technical assistance in the following areas:

1. Automation needs
2. Case processing and caseflow management
3. Facilities and space management

On December 10-12, 1985, Doug Walker, Senior Staff Associate, and Don Hardenbergh, Senior Staff Associate, visited the court. Meetings or interviews were held with the following persons:

Honorable Howard R. Johnson
Honorable Clinton E. Deveaux
Honorable Andrew A. Michle
Honorable Barbara A. Harris
Honorable Catherine E. Malicki
Mr. Jerry Coots, Clerk of Court
Mr. Callahan, Court Operations Supervisor
Ms. Marion Jakes, Warrant Officer
Ms. Eleanor Butte, Department of Public Safety
Mr. Richard Silvey, Office of Management Systems
Ms. Robin Singletary, Calendar Clerk

This report contains our findings and recommendations in the above areas.

2. Background and Organization

The Atlanta Municipal Court has jurisdiction over all violations of city ordinances, except traffic and parking violations, preliminary hearings of state misdemeanor and felony cases, and all code violations. There are five elected judges of the court and four pro hac judges. One of the judges serves as chief judge. The court is served by a clerk of court who has a total staff of 24.

Caseload Analysis

During 1984 there were a total of 33,650 persons booked through the jail, while the court disposed of 52,121 cases (charges). About 33 percent of the dispositions resulted in an adjudication with penalty; 28 percent were bound over to state court; and 39 percent were dismissed (see Table 1). Figure 1 graphically depicts the total number of cases filed and disposed from 1968-1984. Figure 2 shows the breakdown of dispositions during this same period of time.

Staffing and Organization

The court consists of a chief judge, four associate judges, four pro hac judges, and one senior judge. There is one law clerk who serves the court.

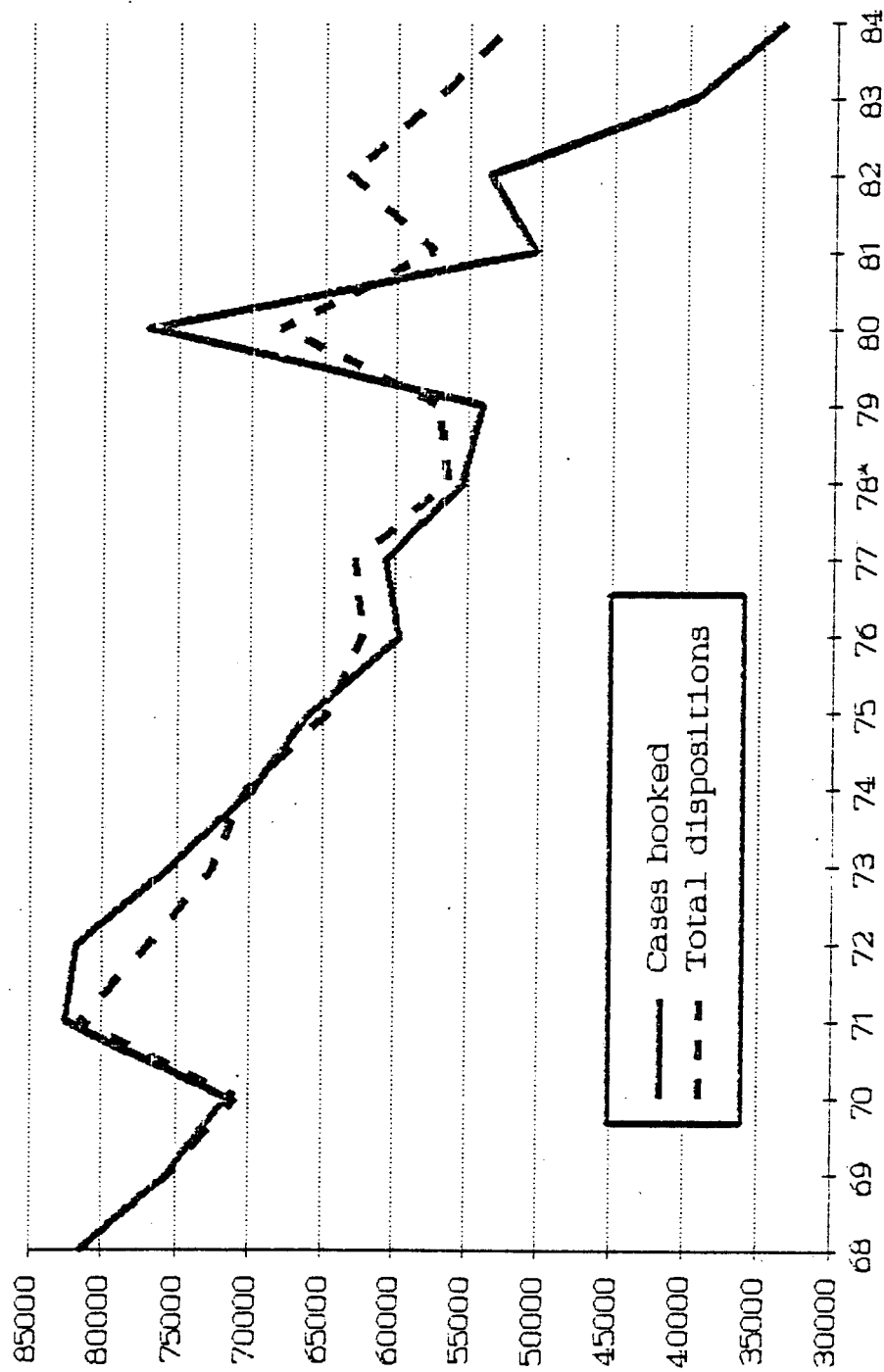
The clerk of court's office contains 25 persons, including the clerk. The clerk's office is divided into two divisions. The court operations division handles the calendaring and courtroom activities and has a staff of two calendar clerks, five court clerks, and nine bailiffs. The other division is under the direct supervision of the clerk of court and handles the administrative and accounting operations.

Table 1
Dispositions, Atlanta Municipal Courts

<u>Year</u>	<u>Cases Booked</u>	<u>Total Adjudicated with Penalty</u>	<u>Bound Over To State Courts</u>	<u>Total Dismissed</u>	<u>Total Dispositions</u>
1985	33,650	17,202	14,677	20,120	52,121
1984	39,758	20,667	15,451	20,582	57,392
1983	53,580	22,470	18,847	22,176	63,593
1982	50,567	19,810	12,758	18,068	57,424
1981	77,138	28,636	20,520	18,270	68,166
1980	54,056	28,081	15,588	13,339	57,008
1979	55,490	28,979	13,441	14,045	56,465
1978*	60,815	33,274	14,381	15,262	62,917
1977	59,780	30,227	17,189	14,911	62,327
1976	66,056	31,476	17,837	15,490	64,803
1975	69,935	37,839	18,779	13,686	70,304
1974	75,576	44,378	15,085	13,073	72,536
1973	81,951	48,100	14,593	14,282	76,975
1972	82,638	51,222	14,672	15,767	81,661
1971	71,728	47,023	12,277	11,688	70,988
1970	75,759	54,236	10,199	11,214	75,649
1969	81,727	60,787	9,437	11,466	81,690

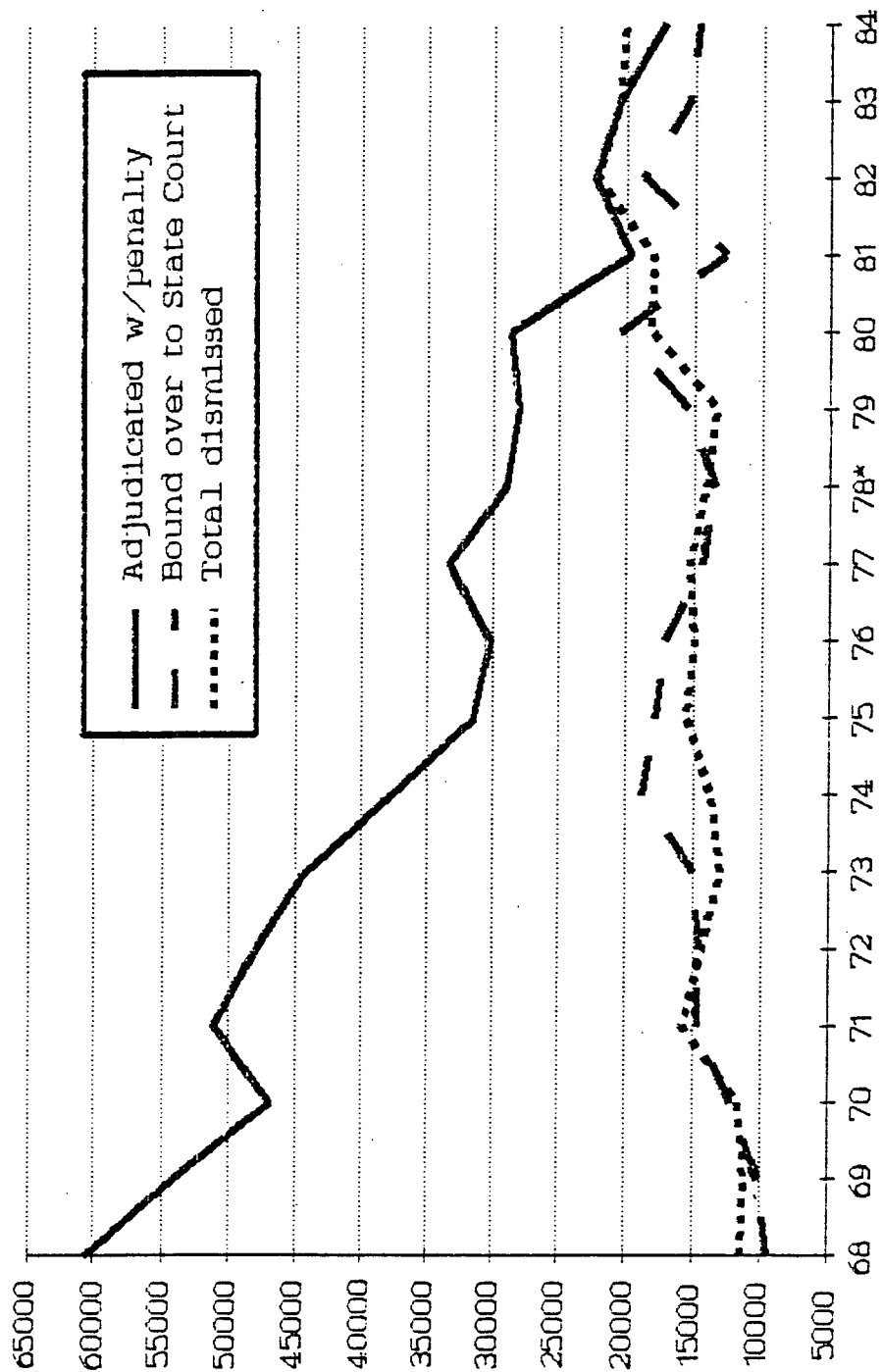
* Public drunkenness ordinance amended

Figure 1: Atlanta Municipal Court
Filings and Dispositions, 1968-1984



*Public drunkenness ordinance amended

Figure 2: Atlanta Municipal Court
Dispositions, 1968-1984



*Public drunkenness ordinance amended

There are three clerk stenos, two cashiers (court clerk II), a warrant officer, and a custodial worker (see organizational chart, Figure 3).

Personnel

The court operates under the city's personnel system. Job descriptions exist for the clerk of court, court clerk I, court clerk II, court clerk III and calendar clerk. Employees, however, are not part of the classified civil service system. Although paid by the city and classified by the city personnel office, they are under the direct control of the court, which has the authority to hire and fire.

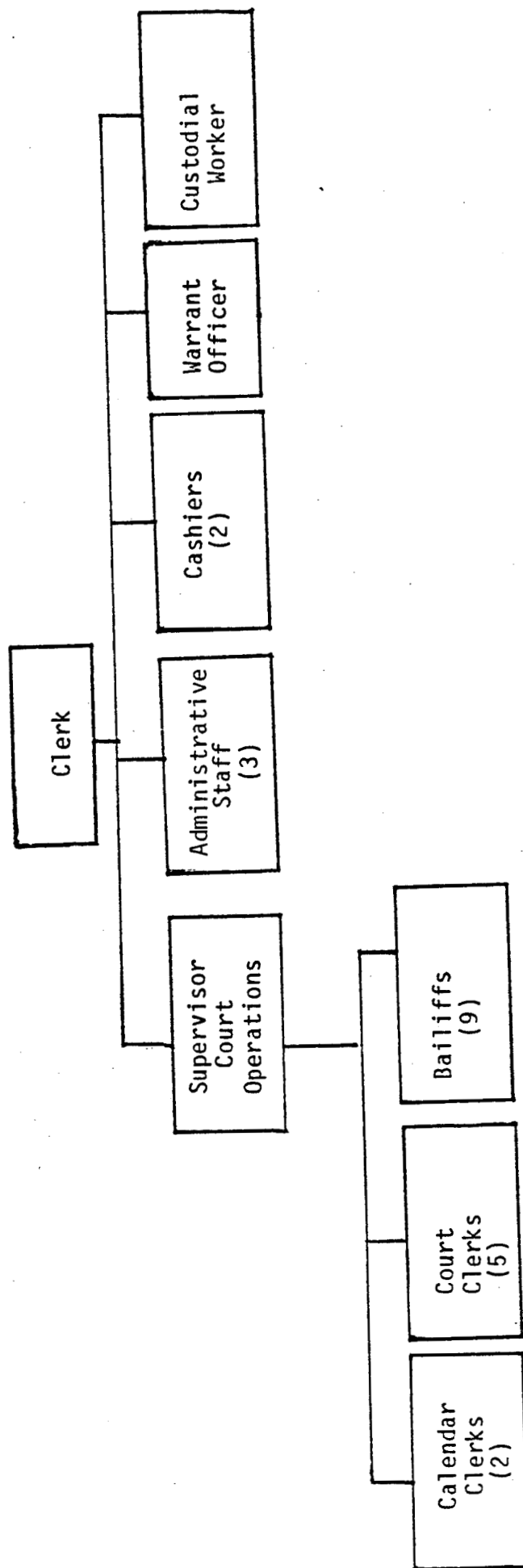
While training is minimal and consists of the on-the-job variety, written procedures exist for the cashier's operations and court clerk, while draft written procedures exist for processing warrants. This represents a major accomplishment of the clerk's office.

Staffing would appear adequate at the present time, considering the declining number of bookings and the current facility. The court and clerk appear to process cases quickly. Excluding the bailiffs, there are 16 employees involved with case processing, or 2,100 filings per employee. This compares favorably with several other courts of similar jurisdiction around the country. For example, a recent management evaluation of the Wichita Municipal Court estimated that there were about 4,300 dispositions per employee. The jurisdiction in the Wichita Municipal Court, however, includes traffic violations, many of which involve very little actual work to process.

The move to a new facility, however, will be a good time for an in-depth review of staffing assignments. Such a study should cover:

1. Classification
2. Duties and responsibilities
3. Staffing needs

Figure 3
Organization of the Clerk's Office



3. Case Processing

Booking

The initial data entry into the computer is made from the citation by jail personnel. Each morning (about 5 a.m.) the citations are brought to the clerk's office for processing. The data on the computer is then verified and the case is assigned a judge and courtroom, and the judge and courtroom numbers are entered into the data file.

The citations are filed.

The police officers set the court date in all cases at the time the citation is issued. When the defendant is arrested and jailed, he/she is given the next available court date (if arrested on a Saturday, this would be Monday morning). When the defendant is not arrested, the appearance is set for at least 10 days in order to allow for a police ID check on prior arrests.

There is a problem with being able to conduct searches of prior criminal records, particularly in cases where the defendant was arrested, in time for the court hearing. (This problem is discussed more fully in the section on automation.) One solution would be to wait several days before setting trial to give time for the background check.

Cashiering

In non-mandatory appearance cases, the defendant may pay the fine prior to the appearance date. In these cases, he/she does not have to

appear, and the case is concluded.

Most defendants, however, appear in court to either contest the charge or plead guilty and the fine is paid afterwards at the cashier's counter.

While the fine payment is entered into the data base, this information is not used. The cashiering operation is essentially a manual operation.

A problem found by all limited jurisdiction courts is the collection of fines. To improve this situation, a number of courts throughout the country have begun accepting credit card payments. By making it easier to pay fines, courts can increase their revenues. In Virginia, district courts are authorized by statute to accept credit cards for payment of fines and costs for motor vehicle violations and misdemeanors. The Virginia Committee on District Courts has recently contracted with two banks to service credit card payments. A four percent service charge will be added to the monies owed the court to cover processing fees. The courts will use a credit authorization unit which attaches to normal phone lines to obtain credit authorization directly from the bank. In this way, the court is guaranteed payment by the credit card firm.

Warrants

Warrants for failure to appear (FTA) and failure to pay fines (FTP) are handled by the court. Citations are sent to the cashier where they are kept for payment. If the defendant fails to pay, a warrant is issued.

4. Automation

Introduction

Automation in the Atlanta Municipal Court is provided by the city's Office of Management Systems. Coordination of data processing services for the court is handled by the Management Information Systems Division of the Bureau of Police Services within the Department of Public Safety. In addition to the municipal court's operations, Management Information Systems is responsible for automation in six zones of the police department, the Bureau of Corrections, the Bureau of Taxicab Services, and the Commissioner of Public Safety. At the time of our site visit, the Office of Management Systems was beginning a process of upgrading its computer resources from two IBM 3031 mainframes to a single 3081 machine. At the same time, it is in the process of converting from the DOS/VSE operating system to MVS. It is anticipated that this conversion will be largely completed by summer of 1986.

There are three major automated systems supporting the criminal justice community in Atlanta. They are the Atlanta Police Information System (APIS), the Crime System, and the Managing Criminal Investigation Inquiry System (MCII). Municipal court automation is provided by a portion of APIS generally called the "Arrest/Tracking System." This system is used by the jail, the municipal court, the pretrial release program (under the municipal court), and the police department for investigations. APIS became operational in 1977 or 1978, and the municipal court began to use it full time around 1981.

The Crime System is independent from APIS and contains the police reports. The Management Criminal Investigation Inquiry System interfaces with the Crime System. Also interfacing with the crime system is a subsystem known as the Central Recordings Indexing System (CRIS). CRIS provides the ability to look up information in the Crime System by name of arrestee, victim, or driver; address; or complaint number. CRIS records are created automatically when the police report is entered into the Crime System. CRIS does not interface with the Arrest/Tracking System under APIS.

Current Use of Automation in the Municipal Court

The municipal court currently uses the automated system for three major purposes: calendaring, recording dispositions, and case inquiry. To support these functions, there are three terminals and one printer. The printer and one terminal are located in a small room containing a copier and are used predominantly by the calendar clerk. A second terminal is located in the office shared by the three secretaries/clerks and is used mostly for inquiry. The third terminal is located in the cashier's booth and is used both for entering dispositions and for inquiry purposes.

The initial entry of case information into the system takes place in the central booking and ID sections of the jail, whether or not a physical arrest was made. The court date (trial or appearance date) is entered into the system at this time. If a physical arrest was made, the case is set for the next available court date. Arrests made before 4 a.m. can be set for the same day. When no arrest has been made, cases are set by the officer for at least ten days ahead.

After entry into the system by the jail, tickets are sent to the court, usually by 5 a.m. The calendar clerk then sorts the tickets for entry into the computer. Tickets for "housing court" cases are separated from criminal tickets. The criminal cases are then grouped by officer and are then divided into two courtrooms. The calendar clerk attempts to balance the number of cases in each courtroom and also the number of serious cases assigned to each courtroom. All housing court tickets are assigned to courtroom 3. To assist in the calendaring activity, the APC2 screen (or map) can display all cases set for the current date, and a printout can be produced if desired.

To enter calendar information, the clerk must retrieve each case by entering the arrest number in the inquiry mode. The computer then responds with a display of information for that case only. The clerk must then enter a "U" to get into the update mode and then tab through several fields on the screen to get to the courtroom field. The courtroom number and the ID number for the judge are entered. The screen is then transmitted to the computer to update the file, and the clerk goes back into the inquiry mode to pull up the next case to be calendared.

After all tickets have been calendared, the calendar clerk uses another screen to display cases for which no paper tickets have been received by the court. To retrieve these cases, the court date and time are entered but not the courtroom number. The system will then retrieve and display only those cases with a blank courtroom field. These tickets, referred to as "add-ons," are then assigned to a particular courtroom. The courtroom to receive add-ons rotates on a weekly basis.

After all cases have been calendared, the clerk prints the separate calendars for each session in each courtroom for the day. Both a long and

a short form of the calendars are printed. After printing, the calendars are enhanced by hand to highlight the time and room number. Ten copies of each long calendar and 24 copies of each short calendar are then made and distributed.

Inadequacies of the Calendaring Procedures

Although the calendaring procedures described above seem to serve the court reasonably well, there are several drawbacks or inadequacies that were noted during our site visit. Because of the extremely short time lag between arrest and court appearance, the performance of the calendaring process is critical to the smooth operation of the court. The morning calendar must be produced for 8 a.m., 9:30 a.m., and 11 a.m. sessions. The afternoon calendar clerk begins the corresponding process around 10 a.m. each morning and must have the calendar prepared and posted well in advance of the 2 p.m. court session. Under the present system, afternoon calendaring activities are usually not completed before 1 p.m.

Because of this close schedule and because the current system forces some inefficient procedures to be followed, the performance of the computer system is very important. Reportedly, the system is prone to occasional failure during this time frame. When the computer system is down for some reason, the calendar clerk cannot risk waiting for it to return to service. The general practice of the afternoon calendaring clerk is to type the calendars by hand if the machine is not back in operation by 11 a.m.

The more chronic performance factor is the interactive response time. Because calendaring is on an individual case-by-case basis,

excessive response time drastically impacts the duration of a calendaring process. The day that we observed the calendaring process response time fell generally in the range of 1-5 seconds, with occasional 10- to 15-second responses. While under-5-second response time is quite acceptable for this kind of activity, the clerk reported that this was not the normal level of performance. She stated that she frequently was able to "walk down the hall and back" before the computer responded to a transmission. The Office of Management Systems anticipates that the upgrade to the more powerful computer system will help alleviate this problem.

There are several inefficiencies in the human/computer system juncture that complicate and lengthen the calendaring process. The APC1 screen brings up the current day's cases in arrest number order. Through this screen it is possible to update multiple cases on a single screen and transmit the entire screenful of information as one transaction to the computer system. Unfortunately, however, the calendar clerk groups the tickets by officer, in order to put all of the cases for one officer into the same courtroom. Ideally, if a screen could be developed to display these multiple cases in officer social security number order, the entry of courtroom and judge could be greatly simplified by using this screen.

Because of the file structure in the current data base, however, displaying cases in officer order may be prohibitively costly to implement. If so, then the court should develop procedures for sorting tickets in arrest number order (if they don't already come from the jail in that order) for entry on the APC1 screen. This would involve keeping track of the officers and courtrooms by placing the tickets on the

appropriate stack after each has been entered. The stacks, separated by officer, would then serve as a guide to the proper courtroom and judge for the next ticket to be entered in arrest number order.

Another inefficiency is caused by the way in which calendars must be called up and printed. Calendars must be printed individually for each session in each courtroom. The calendar clerk has to call up an individual screen, specify the time and courtroom desired, and then request that the display be printed. For example, the 2 p.m. session for courtroom 1 is displayed and printed out, then the process is repeated for the 3 p.m. session for courtroom 1 and so on, until each time slot for each courtroom has been covered. To solve this problem, an automated procedure should be developed to print all the calendars for the current day's morning or afternoon session. The calendar clerk would then have to enter only one command to invoke this procedure.

Another improvement could be made in the calendaring process for cases going to the housing court. Normally these cases are always heard in courtroom number 3. Furthermore, a single judge is permanently assigned to the housing court. Except for very unusual situations, then, the courtroom number and judge are always known in advance for these cases. The court should explore the idea of having the jail put in the courtroom and judge for housing court cases, along with the other initial case data. An even better solution would be to have the computer system plug in these entries by default when the charge was entered. Under either approach, the calendar clerk would need to make an entry in these cases only if a pro hac judge was on the bench or a different courtroom were temporarily assigned. Otherwise, the calendar would simply be printed out for the housing court.

Another enhancement could be added to the system to improve the calendaring process. For a given day the courtroom and judge are always paired, and yet each field must be entered separately. The system could be modified to allow the clerk to enter the courtroom and judge number pairs at the beginning of the calendaring session. Thereafter, for each case calendared, the clerk would need to enter only the courtroom, and the system could then plug in the judge number associated with that courtroom.

Disposition Processing

At case disposition time, the judge enters the pertinent information on the back of the court copy of the citation. This information includes the plea, the finding, the disposition, and the judge's signature. In certain cases, the judge may enter a note to order an evaluation at Grady Hospital. If the case has been reset, then the judge will enter the reset date on the face of the ticket. The courtroom clerk makes no entries on the ticket except to stamp the current date next to the disposition if the judge has not written it in.

If a fine has been imposed in the courtroom, the citation is given to a bailiff, who then takes the defendant to the cashier. The fine is rung up on the electronic cash register. Information entered into the cash register screen includes cashier number, judge number, citation number, days sentenced, amount of the fine, and the amount paid. The citation is inserted into a register printer, which allows the register to be rung, and the information described above is imprinted on the back of the citation. At the same time, a receipt and an audit tape are printed. The receipt is given to the defendant; the audit tape remains in the

register. The citation is then handed to the disposition/calendar clerk to be entered into the computer system.

The disposition clerk pulls up the case on the terminal, enters the disposition code, the amount of the fine, and the number of days sentenced. Depending on the case and disposition, the clerk may also enter a bond amount, a reset date, or may change one or more of the charges. Cases that have been reset are filed in the cashier's office by month and day. The evening before the reset date, the tickets are pulled for the calendar clerk to put on the next morning's calendar in addition to new tickets issued during the evening and late night.

For other dispositions, the cashier's office serves as the distribution point for the paperwork. For example, cases bound over to the state court go to the bond clerk if the defendant is not in jail, and the bond clerk forwards the paper work to the state court. For bound-over cases where the defendant is in jail, the ticket and bond paper are sent to the jail; only the bond paperwork goes to the bond clerk. Dismissed cases go to the jail and are flagged with a red number. Failures to appear are picked up by the warrant officer; collateral forfeitures are routed to the secretary's office to be filed; bond papers are picked up by bond companies; etc.

Inadequacies of the Disposition Procedures

Like the calendaring procedures, the disposition procedures seem to work reasonably well but have much room for improvement. One of the disadvantages noted was that the electronic cash register is not tied to the automated system in any way. Not only does this result in duplication of data entry effort, but there is nothing to correlate the

actual payment information with the fine information recorded in the system. Under the current procedures, the police department compares the fine amount on the actual citation with the audit tape for the cash register. In this way, most discrepancies between the imposed fine and the amount of the fine actually paid can be detected from the cashiering side. Since the computer record is independent of this process, however, the disposition information in the automated system could remain inaccurate.

Ideally, cashiering should be an integral part of the recording of the disposition information into the automated system. In other courts this has been accomplished through the use of electronic cash registers that are tied into the automated system. Entry of disposition and payment information results in the updating of the computer record. Alternatively, upon entry of all the disposition data into the automated system through a terminal, the system can immediately print a receipt and, if desired, validate the citation. A simple cash drawer is used to handle money. The municipal court should be looking toward this kind of integrated cashiering and case updating procedure.

The current automated system also is somewhat inefficient in the procedures required to enter disposition information. The clerk must use three separate screens or maps to enter the disposition information, depending upon the nature of the case and disposition. Screen APC7 is used to enter the disposition code, the fine, and the days. If a bond amount is involved, the clerk must go to screen APC3 to enter this information. APC3 must also be accessed for cases with reset dates. If a charge has been dropped or changed during the court proceedings, the APAT screen must be called up to enter this information.

Because the system is excessively slow to change screen formats, the clerk separates the papers into groups depending upon which screen will be needed before she begins to enter dispositions. This additional step reduces the number of screen swaps that must be made during data entry. The data processing staff should explore the possibility of simplifying the disposition data entry procedures. If possible, the system should provide a single screen through which all disposition information could be entered for most cases.

Case Inquiry

The third major usage of the automated system in the municipal court is for inquiry into case information. The terminal in the secretaries' office is used frequently by the three secretary/clerks to look up case information in response to telephone inquiries. They stated that most inquiries can be satisfied by accessing the terminal. The terminal in the cashier's section is also used frequently for case inquiry. Both the general public and criminal justice personnel frequently obtain information from the calendar clerk using the terminal in the cashier's area. Case information can be pulled up by the arrest number or by the defendant's name. Case information is available on the system for approximately two years. About every six months the oldest cases are dumped to microfilm and are purged from the computer files.

Inadequacies of Case Inquiry Support

While the automated system supports many of the information retrieval needs of the court, it is lacking in several ways. The major failing of the inquiry capabilities is the inability of the current system and

procedures to provide needed judicial information on a timely basis. Judges we talked with frequently cited the unavailability of case information and criminal history information, especially when needed in the courtroom. Judges frequently need access to criminal arrest records. One common use of these records is in determining the amount of bond to be set. In addition, certain charges have a mandatory jail sentence for a second offense. Before the sentence can be pronounced, the judge must determine whether the defendant has a prior conviction for the same offense.

A judge on the bench has no way of determining quickly whether the defendant has been convicted of an offense previously, even within the municipal court. Because there are no terminals in the courtroom, there is no way to quickly search the court records of even the last two years. Currently, obtaining these arrest records is accomplished by sending the bailiff or an officer (so that the bailiff will not have to leave the courtroom) to the record room to request the arrest record. Once the record has been obtained or printed or copied, the records room clerk hand carries the FBI record to the court, because of policies revolving around the privacy act. If there is no officer available, the judge must risk breaching the security of the courtroom by sending the bailiff to the records room. To avoid this, the judges sometimes simply rely on the defendant to disclose any previous arrests.

For "quasi-criminal" offenses (i.e., those violations tried in the housing court), there is no FBI record available. The only source of prior offense history is the municipal court files. The only practical access to these records if the prior arrest numbers are not known is the arrest/tracking subsystem. Cases that are over two years old are no

longer on the system and must be obtained from microfilm.

Another source of information to which the judges have indicated the need for immediate access is the police arrest report. This report is sometimes necessary to obtain the names and addresses of witnesses. In other cases, the judge needs access to the entire police report to substantiate a guilty plea. The police report is not available through the Arrest/Tracking subsystem, but it is available in the Crime System.

There are several recommendations that we can make to improve the inquiry capabilities of the system. First of all, we strongly recommend that terminals be placed in the courtrooms for use by the judge and in-court clerk. APIS provides an interface to GCIC and NCIC files. Terminals placed in the courtrooms should be authorized to access the criminal histories in these files. In this way, the automated system could produce the information needed by the judge relatively quickly. In many cases, viewing the arrest information on the terminal would be sufficient for the judges' needs, without a printout being necessary. In addition to GCIC and NCIC access, these terminals should be given inquiry capabilities into the Crime System. They should, of course, also have full access to the Arrest/Tracking subsystem. The courtroom clerks should be trained in the use of the terminals for inquiry into all three systems.

Secondly, the name inquiry capabilities of the Arrest/Tracking subsystem should be enhanced. The system should provide the ability to retrieve a case when the exact spelling is not known. A phonetic search and a partially qualified name search are the two most common techniques employed. The ability to use other criteria, such as the date of birth, race, or sex to narrow the search would be desirable.

The use of the microfilm records could be improved considerably. If possible, the Arrest/Tracking System could be enhanced to provide an on-line name index containing only the reel and frame numbers for cases that have been purged from the active computer files. This feature would greatly enhance the ability to search for prior offenses by name, regardless of the date of the offense. Microfilm readers could be placed in the courtrooms along with the terminals, to round out the tools needed for rapid access to complete criminal history information.

Future Considerations

The current municipal court automation produces very little operational output, nor does it provide the complete information that is needed for the operation of the court. The overall concept of the municipal court system should be expanded to include more information, more comprehensive interfacing with other information systems in the criminal justice community, more functional support for municipal court operations, and better approaches to implementation that would assure fast and reliable performance in a real-time environment. With the anticipated move to new facilities alleviating the space constraints, and the Office of Management Systems' computer system upgrade expected to be completed in the near future, we would suggest that the municipal court plan to conduct a requirements analysis to properly identify its needs within the framework of the criminal justice community. Such an analysis is the essential first step in the development of a comprehensive automated system that will meet the true needs of the court in the most effective way for the foreseeable future.

The system should be revamped to include more information, while requiring less clerical effort to enter and retrieve information from the system. Redundant entry of information across various subsystems should be eliminated as far as possible, and all needed information should be readily available to all authorized personnel in all agencies. For example, in the municipal court, police reports should be easily accessible. Furthermore, police schedules should be kept up to date in the system and be available within the courtroom to help in resetting cases in which an officer must be present in court. Warrants should be handled by the system with minimum data input required and should interface with an overall metro area warrant system.

The output capabilities of the system should include the ability to produce within the courtroom all standard documents that are now manually created by the courtroom clerk. With the current availability of high-speed, relatively silent printers at a very reasonable cost, producing various types of preformatted documents could be accomplished very rapidly with no disruption to courtroom proceedings. Such documents would include warrants and warrant cancellations, reset notices ("check sheets"), bind-over sheets, bond forfeitures, commitment papers, and Grady orders.

The system should include more docketing or register of actions capabilities. This enhancement would facilitate recording and retrieving a complete history of a particular case, including such things as changes in pleas, changes in charges, number of resettings and reasons, and filing of documents.

The enhanced capabilities for capturing, exchanging, and accessing of data should reduce the dependency on physical papers and the inherent

delays that it causes. By having complete information available to all parties who need it, the system would improve communication between the court and the jail in the location and transportation of prisoners, between the court and the prosecutor's office, and between the court and the police department.

The court should explore alternatives to the use of dumb terminals connected to the mainframe computer. While this approach may be suitable for many applications, certain operations within the court might be better supported by a distributed data processing approach. The possibility of using personal computers that would be connected with the mainframe should be explored. These machines could function much as the current dumb terminals for obtaining information from the mainframe, but would also have some stand-alone processing capabilities. For example, having obtained a particular case record from the mainframe data base, a personal computer could then format the information in various ways required for various documents and then print each of these documents. The same personal computer could be used very effectively as a word processor with immediate response and no drain on the mainframe.

Another approach that might be considered is the use of a stand-alone minicomputer to serve the entire municipal court. The minicomputer would serve all the terminals and printers within the municipal court and would also be linked to the mainframe computer for interfacing with the rest of the criminal justice community. One advantage of this approach would be the fast and consistent response time that would result, the ability to operate when the mainframe was down or unavailable, and the ability to conduct efficient word processing from any terminal connected to the minicomputer. The major drawback to the approach of using a minicomputer

is the added complexity of interfacing with the other systems in the metro area.

All of these issues concerning the court's needs, the operation of the court system within the overall criminal justice community, and the technical approaches to system architecture would be addressed by a comprehensive requirements analysis. On the basis of the general design and plan that would result from the requirements analysis, the court and the city of Atlanta could proceed with confidence toward the goal of implementing an effective and successful system.

5. Facility Review

The court currently occupies the second floor of the Atlanta Police Department headquarters building. The current space is totally inadequate to function as a court. There are three courtrooms that are constantly in use. While the courtrooms are reasonably large, they are poorly lit and poorly ventilated. Corridors are narrow, congested, and poorly lit and ventilated. There is no public waiting area, no place for attorneys to meet with clients, and no separate waiting area for witnesses.

Judges' chambers are cramped and lack private corridors to the courtrooms.

Office space for the clerk's office also is deficient. There is no separate reception area, offices are cramped, there is no separate records storage area, and several offices open directly into one of the courtrooms.

The building lacks fire control systems (no fire extinguishers or sprinklers), and there is only one stairwell available for evacuation of the entire floor.

The city is committed to the construction of a new courthouse that is to be completed in three to four years, and the new facility will correct many of the deficiencies present in the current situation. The most pressing need is space, which should be adequate, according to the proposed floor plans for the new building. The following offices/activities will be accommodated:

clerk's receptionist
chief clerk
warrant officer
file clerk
records storage
calendar clerks
court operations
bailiffs
law clerk
judges' receptionist
judges
law library
photocopying
cashiers
holding cells
courtrooms
police/witness waiting
attorney/client meetings

While space appears adequate, there are no spaces designated for computer and data entry equipment, although it appears that the spaces adjacent to the copier machine in the clerk's office might accommodate a micro or mini-sized computer. The court needs to be assured that conduits will exist to accommodate computer cables between the three levels. The other requirement is space for a computer terminal to be used by the public/attorneys to look up cases. Terminals may be made available at the counter on the first floor and outside the courtrooms on the second floor.

The placement of the courtrooms on the second floor may be somewhat inefficient. The greatest volume of people visiting the court are those appearing for a court date, so that most persons entering the building will need to proceed to the second floor. The clerk's office, on the other hand, just off the first floor lobby will likely receive only light traffic. A more efficient plan would have placed the clerk on the second floor and the courtrooms on the first floor. This, however, would

necessitate movement of pretrial services to the second floor also, and further separate the judges' offices from the courtrooms. Considering the alternatives, the proposed agreement may be best.

The most critical features of the new courthouse will be its impact on the organization and staffing of the court. Space simply does not exist in the current facility to house many functions. These include a front counter, receptionist, records room, law clerks, and law library. Furthermore, the separation of the clerk's office and the judges on two floors will require two additional staff to serve as receptionists, one for each floor and reception area.

The existence of four courtrooms with two separate cashier locations will require at least two cashiers with adequate backup. It may require two cashiers in each location, depending upon the flow from the courtrooms. There should also be a cashier's station on the first floor at the reception area for defendants who wish to pay fines without appearing in court or who are making a deferred payment. This also may require two additional cashiers.

The addition of a law library will necessitate the delegation of the responsibility of maintaining it to someone, perhaps an additional law clerk or legal secretary. Additional secretarial support for the judges also may be required.

The layout may also require a different approach to case processing. Casefiles/records will have to be transported between the first and second floors. Similarly, separate cashier locations will require a revision of procedures. Supervision of employees serving in court will be more difficult, requiring the reorganization of the clerk's office and creation of additional intermediate supervisory positions.

6. Conclusion

The Atlanta Municipal Court in general is a well-run court suffering from inadequate facilities and insufficient automated support. We were impressed by the dedication and perseverance exhibited by both the judicial and the clerical staffs as they handled the rapid flow of cases through the court. We feel that, with adequate planning, many of the problems can be successfully addressed in the new and expanded facilities under development. The enhancements to and expansion of the automated system as recommended in this report would alleviate most of the problems caused by insufficient and unavailable information, would reduce clerical effort, would streamline procedures and paper flow, and would improve the timeliness of critical functions.

We strongly recommend that the court carefully examine its total needs and develop a long-range plan for meeting them. The anticipated move to the new building and the completion of the computer system upgrade for the Office of Management Systems provide an excellent pivotal point at which such a study could be conducted. The National Center would be very glad to assist in this effort at whatever level the court might desire. Our brief assessment has convinced us that the potential for a highly efficient and up-to-date municipal court operation exists and could be realized in the near future with the appropriate planning.