



Electronic Criminal Complaint System and Offense Tracking Number Generator

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Cross Boundary Collaboration and Partnerships

4/17/2019 – 12/08/2021

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Pennsylvania has long benefited from investments in booking and court technologies. With all 67 counties leveraging a unified court case management system and all 380 booking sites using standardized fingerprint and photograph equipment, Pennsylvania is uniquely positioned to capture and process offender and arrest information in a uniform and consistent manner.

However, a single, long-standing inconsistency had resulted in over 63,000 criminal records with missing and incomplete information: the issuance of multiple Offense Tracking Numbers (OTNs) to a suspect for the same offense. These mismatched records impact everything from the accuracy of firearms background checks to the veracity of pre-sentence investigations to the completeness of records shared with the Federal Bureau of Investigations.

In Pennsylvania, an OTN is issued for each offense charged to a suspect. OTNs can be issued by law enforcement when the suspect is fingerprinted at a booking station or police station or by court staff at the offender's initial court appearance. Although the steps to process an offender are the same across Pennsylvania, the order in which these steps take place can vary by county and by case. In practice, this model relied significantly on manual intervention and communication by law enforcement and court staff to make each other aware that an OTN already existed for the offense for which the suspect was being processed.

To improve the quality and completeness of criminal records, the Pennsylvania State Police (PSP), Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC), Pennsylvania Justice Network (JNET), and Pennsylvania Chiefs of Police Association (PCPA) collaborated to develop a single point of origin for all OTNs (OTN Generator), update AOPC and booking station fingerprinting equipment systems to account for the new OTN solution, and develop a new Criminal Complaint E-Filing System for departments that cannot file electronically through their police record management systems (RMS).

Since this project was implemented in 2022, the number of mismatched criminal records for adults was reduced by over 7,000 and now stands at little over 56,000 records. This is an 11% reduction in mismatched records. Additionally, the number of juvenile records with multiple or mismatched OTNs was reduced from 350 to zero. While juvenile records alone can be considered a huge success, it is anticipated that the mismatched adult records, which are slower to process through the court system, will continue to decline over time.

- **Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC):** Provides a statewide unified court system throughout all Pennsylvania counties.
- **Governor's Office of Administration, Pennsylvania Justice Network (JNET):** Serves as a universal messaging broker for all public safety and criminal justice agencies within the Commonwealth. built web-services that bridged access to the OTN generator.
- **Pennsylvania Chiefs of Police Association (PCPA):** Manages the deployment and maintenance of Livescan (electronic fingerprinting services) throughout Pennsylvania counties and municipalities.
- **Pennsylvania State Police (PSP):** Manages and maintains Pennsylvania's Computerized Criminal History (CCH) repository.

IDEA

Pennsylvania has long benefited from investments in booking and court technologies. With all 67 counties leveraging a unified court case management system and all 380 booking sites with standardized equipment to effectively identify suspects through fingerprints and photographs, Pennsylvania is uniquely positioned to capture and process offender and arrest information in a uniform and consistent manner.

By eliminating variables through standardization, Pennsylvania is positioned to be the model for an ideal and efficient criminal processing solution. However, a single, long-standing inconsistency had resulted in over 63,000 criminal records with missing and incomplete information: the issuance of duplicate Offense Tracking Numbers (OTN's).

In Pennsylvania, an OTN is issued for each set of offenses charged to a suspect. OTNs can be issued by law enforcement when the suspect is fingerprinted at a booking or police station or by court staff at the offender's initial court appearance. The OTN allows the court to track each criminal offense charged to an individual. As such, one offender may be associated with numerous criminal offenses over the period of their lifetime.

The Pennsylvania State Police (PSP) maintains the Computerized Criminal History (CCH) file, which contains the criminal history of all individuals arrested and processed in Pennsylvania. Using electronic fingerprint records from the booking stations, PSP assigns a unique state identification number (SID) to each individual arrested in the Commonwealth.

In Pennsylvania, issuing OTNs was problematic due to the different times and places in the criminal justice system that an OTN can be issued.

1. The OTN is issued by law enforcement at a police station or a booking center when the offender is fingerprinted. This can happen at the time of arrest OR after their initial court appearance.
2. The OTN is issued by AOPC staff when the offender makes their initial court appearance at the Magisterial District Judge or Common Pleas Court.

Although the steps to process an offender are the same across Pennsylvania, the order in which these steps take place can vary by county and by case. In practice, this model relies significantly on manual intervention and communication by law enforcement to ensure that court staff are aware that a suspect appearing in court already had an OTN generated for an offense at a booking station. Conversely, court staff need to make law enforcement aware if an OTN was generated at the suspect's court appearance. Additionally, as a seven-digit alphanumeric code (e.g., A 123456 7), manual entry of OTNs was highly susceptible to typographical and transpositional errors.

The two distinct ways of issuing OTN's created a significant mismatch between the repositories maintained by the AOPC and PSP. Failing to match records correctly leads to issues in the maintenance of criminal history and court records.

In 2017, the PSP CCH contained over 63,000 records with duplicate OTNs. This jeopardizes the safety of police officers and law enforcement requesting a criminal records inquiry, as well as the overall integrity of background checks used for employment, weapons purchases, and clearances to work with children.

IMPLEMENTATION

In order to improve the quality and completeness of criminal records in Pennsylvania, PSP, AOPC, JNET, and the PCPA developed plans for a new Criminal Complaint E-Filing System with the specific intent to eliminate future duplicate OTNs and simultaneously enhance the availability of arrest and disposition records at the state and national level.

As mentioned above, while Pennsylvania benefits from both a unified court system and standardized booking equipment and processes, the ability for multiple OTN numbers to be issued for the same offense by a suspect was widely problematic.

To accomplish this goal, a three-prong approach was implemented:

1. Develop a single point of origin for all OTN's (OTN Generator).
2. Modify AOPC and fingerprinting equipment systems to account for the new OTN solution.
3. Develop an electronic criminal complaint interface on JNET for the departments that cannot file electronically through their police record management systems (RMS).

OTN Generator

To eliminate the possibility that multiple OTNs are issued for the same offense by the courts and law enforcement, there needed to be a single source of OTNs that could be reliably accessed regardless of the scenario or circumstances of the arrest.

To accomplish this, the AOPC developed the single source OTN generator and made it available to Pennsylvania criminal justice agencies via JNET. This service would be the single source of OTNs for the courts, booking stations, and police department RMS.

Modify AOPC and fingerprint equipment systems to account for the new OTN solution

In addition to the OTN generator and JNET services, the booking process was simplified and architecturally modified to shift the assignment of OTN numbers from the local fingerprinting machines to the PSP CCH.

Previously, a bank of OTN numbers would be assigned to a county booking center, which would in turn provide access to those numbers to each of the local booking centers within their county. Unfortunately, as previously discussed, there was no check in place to verify if an OTN had previously been issued for an offender. Someone could be booked and assigned an OTN by the fingerprint machine and then be taken to court where another OTN would be assigned. The reverse was also possible.

In the new solution, fingerprinting machines would no longer store a separate bank of OTNs. Instead, once the machine submitted the booking to PSP, the PSP CCH system would call the OTN generator on behalf of the machine, assign the OTN to the booking event, and then programmatically return the OTN back to the machine to close the loop on the record.

To ensure that a duplicate record is no longer issued through the Courts, the AOPC system now checks for the existence of an OTN; court staff are now presented with OTNs from the booking process for consideration before assigning a new number.

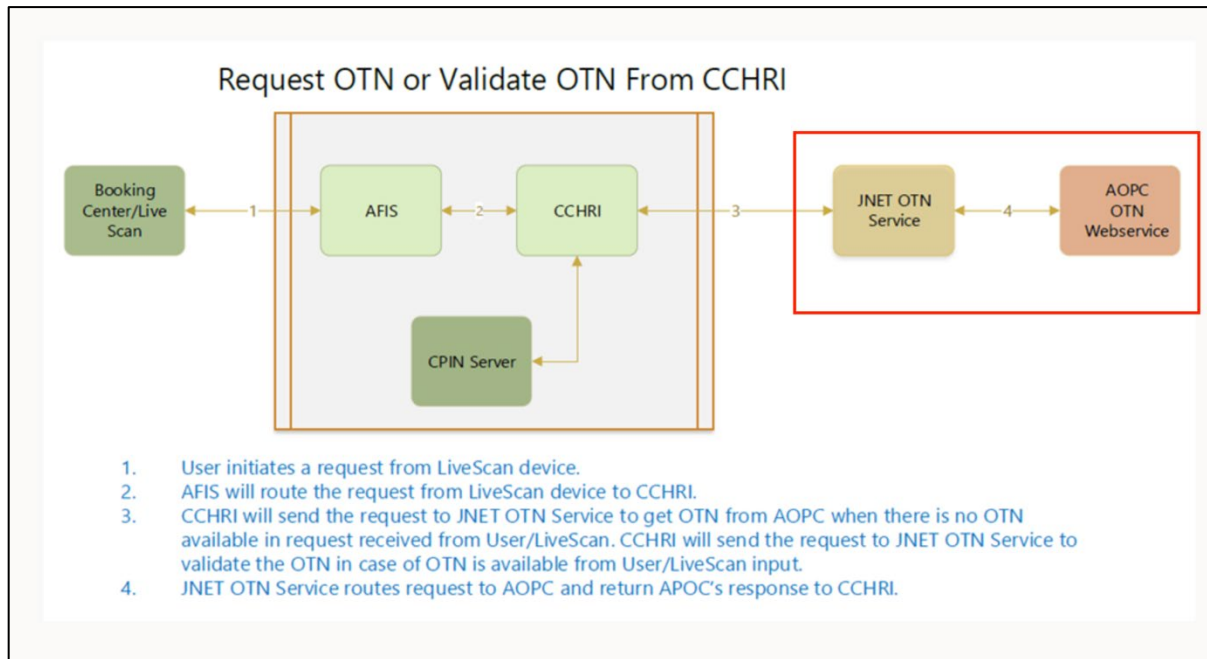


Figure 1 – OTN Services accessed through fingerprint machine (LiveScan)

Electronic Criminal Complaint

In a perfect world, an OTN is issued at the earliest stages of the criminal justice system and ideally follows the suspect through each step of the booking and adjudication processes. With the creation of a system for the electronic filing of criminal complaints, the OTN can be assigned to the offender at the very front of the system.

To keep Electronic Criminal Complaint solutions consistent with the changes to the AOPC and fingerprinting processes, this system also needed to utilize the OTN generator. As electronic filing to the courts was already facilitated through JNET, solutioning the criminal complaint services to use the OTN generator was a relatively straight-forward endeavor. The majority of Pennsylvania's 1,100+ police departments are fairly small or part-time and do not have the resources for a robust RMS with e-filing capabilities.

To address this gap, JNET developed an on-line Electronic Criminal Complaint Application that can be used by any department to submit criminal complaints to the AOPC. Rather than

purchase an RMS or pay a vendor to enable e-filing capabilities, departments may now use their JNET accounts to submit criminal complaints at no costs to the department.

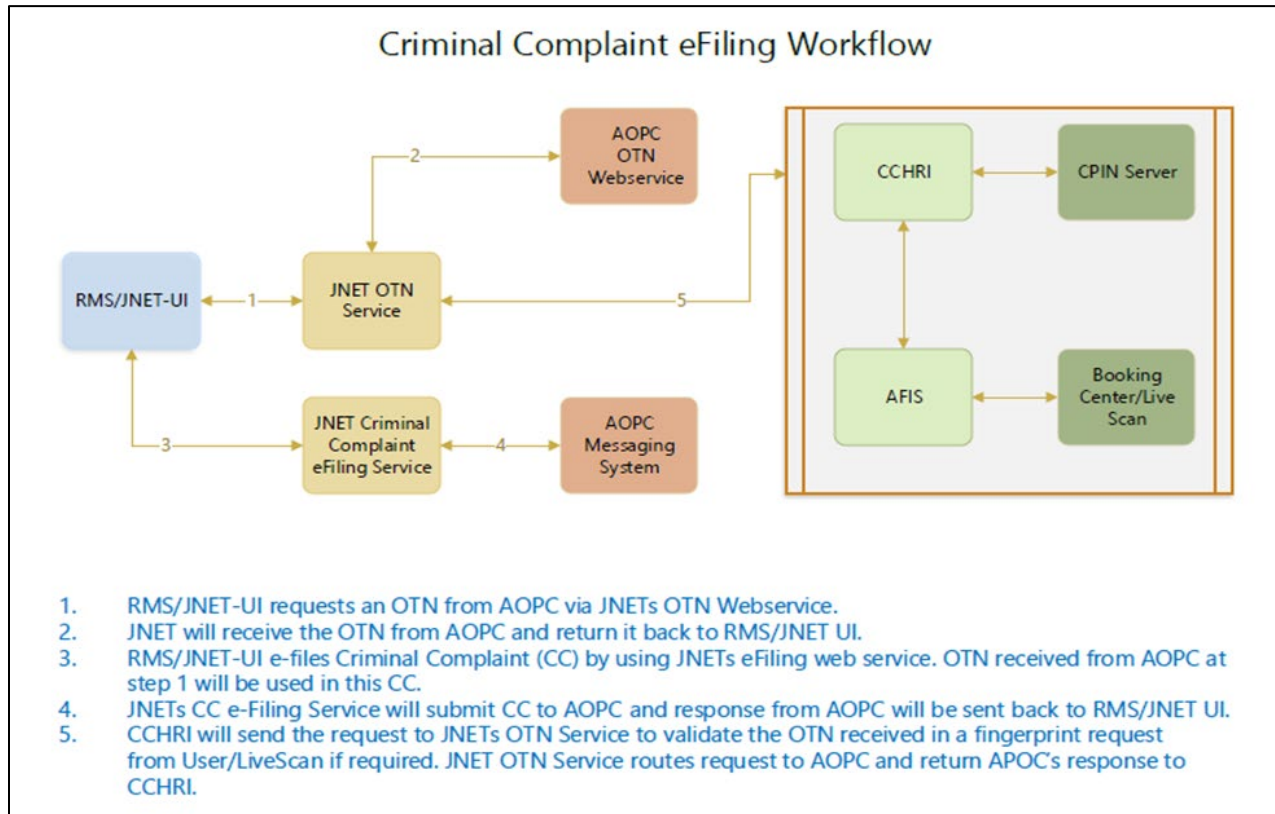


Figure 2 – Criminal Complaint Workflow

IMPACT

The Electronic Criminal Complaint and OTN Generator project was started on April 17, 2019. The System went live in October 2021.

In 2017, prior to the deployment of the project, PSP retained a file of 63,000 mis-matched criminal history records where two or more OTNs for an offense were issued to the same individual. The mismatches result in “no record found” disposition reported on Pennsylvania RAP Sheets. These mismatched records impact everything from the accuracy of firearms background checks to the veracity of pre-sentence investigations to the completeness of records shared with the Federal Bureau of Investigations.

In 2022, after this project was implemented, the PSP have reduced the number of mismatched criminal records by over 7,000. This is an 11% reduction in mismatched records.

Moreover, in the year prior to this project, 350 juvenile records contained multiple or mismatched OTNs. Last year, zero juvenile records were submitted to PSP that contained numerous or mismatched OTNs.

While juvenile records alone can be considered a huge success, it is anticipated that the mismatched adult records, which are slower to process through the Court system, will continue to decline over time.

Finally, to date 296 police departments are leveraging the OTN generator by submitting criminal complaints electronically either through their RMS or the JNET interface to the AOPC.