Case Management Process Improvement

September 20222

This video will discuss case management process improvements for CDL cases and methods to highlight and differentiate CDL cases within the traffic court division.

Courts and clerks rely on a robust case management system to manage the court's case load. These systems handle multiple types of cases such as traffic, criminal, civil and family, which have different processes, time standards, and other requirements. Commercial driving cases are often under traffic, but can also be criminal. In general, the flow of a case may include steps such as: case initiation, collection of case related filings, notifications, scheduling, and a record keeping of the critical points of the adjudication process, including the final disposition of the case.

Since commercial driving cases tend to be more complex with slightly different legal standards, it is an area that would benefit from process review. Having worked with many states conducting research on CDL case conviction reporting , there are still areas that can be improved to help commercial driving cases meet time and reporting standards. There are specific time standards for commercial driving cases that may differ from other traffic cases.

A desired capability that has been challenging for many case management systems is to identify CDL and CMV cases within the traffic division, and to identify and track Felony CDL/CMV cases that may also have reporting requirements. If the correct data is collected, most application systems will have the ability to flag and highlight cases that are related to commercial driving cases.

Courts are looking to use approaches that will improve the management and processing of cases. One approach is to use a process called differentiated case management. Differentiated case management looks at cases with similar characteristics and groups them together to an assigned track.

Some steps to do this successfully may include:

- Identifying common trends and characteristics. Make sure these characteristics are binary and that each stakeholder defines them the same. The outcome is to standardize trends, their characteristics, and the associated data elements.

- Next is to create a track in the Case Management System for commercial driving cases.

- Then the software can find and queue CDL cases into their specific track based on defined parameters using common characteristics.

For example, if the license contains a CDL endorsement, the law enforcement officer makes note of it on the traffic citation. Case management systems can then be programmed to look for this field and route the case to the appropriate track assignment for commercial driving cases.

Another characteristic might be that a driver was in a commercial vehicle but lacked the correct endorsement to operate a commercial motor vehicle. These are a few examples of common characteristics to look for to properly queue these cases in their own CDL track.

Once a commercial driving case formally enters the court system, there are some special requirements that would support having a differentiated approach to having these cases in a special assigned track. CDL holders have a higher standard of training and conduct in order to have these endorsements.

- For example, CDL drivers have a lower Blood Alcohol Level or BAC threshold for a DUI of .04.

- There is an automatic conviction if a BAC or drug test is refused.

- CDL drivers are unable to benefit from diversion or deferral programs to avoid convictions or points.

- Commercial drivers must maintain a medical card in good standing.

A differentiated approach to CDL cases is an opportunity to have the case management system evaluate and move the case forward in a more efficient and deliberate way, while helping to address unique requirements. The case management system may be tailored to help with awareness for CDL special requirements by programming warnings or process controls to reduce errors in CDL traffic cases.

For example, warnings might be given if a CDL driver is assigned to a deferral program, or the system might be programmed to automatically not allow such a selection.

The state driver's license agency must forward any out of state driver convictions through the federal reporting system, CDLIS, within 10 days. This time standard should motivate the court to be diligent in reporting the convictions to the SDLA timely.

Most states have electronic transfers between the court and the SDLA in place and submit information nightly. States that use electronic means to transfer their data tend to meet the time standards more consistently than those that use paper means.

It is recommended that the National Information Exchange Model, or NIEM, be used as a standard for electronic exchanges where feasible. This standard was developed to help state and federal agencies share information more easily.

NCSC has a NIEM compliant data exchange model that may be used as a guide when working on local data exchange development. It may be found on the NCSC commercial driving resource center site.

The data exchange between the courts and State Driver's License Agency is a critical piece towards ensuring a driver's license record is updated timely and that points, disqualifications, and suspensions of driving privileges are imposed within the required timeframe.

Some best practices for data exchange processes may include:

- Notification that the data was received after the transfer was initiated.
- A method to address cases that may require correction or follow up.
- Using performance measures such as: tracking the number of errors in order to identify trends, measuring the quality and completeness of the data being exchanged, tracking timelines, and measuring case clearance rates.

NCSC has information about these performance measures that may be found on our Commercial Driving Resource page.

Traffic is a high-volume docket comprising the largest percentage of the court's case load nationally. Courts are looking at ways for the public to interact with the court and deal with their cases in a more convenient and flexible way.

Adding tools that allow for remote interaction with the CDL cases would reduce disruption to a driver's time such as having methods for:

- on-line payment

- establishing payment plans

- remote discussion with the prosecutor and clerk about their case

- remote hearings

- convenient scheduling

- electronic reminders of events and notices of case activity.

Some other impacts of these enhancements that allow people to remotely address their case may include: reducing traffic and the need for parking, reducing disruptions in work schedules, and not needing to find childcare to appear in person.

Another way a case management system will help in the processing of cases is the ability to query and display information from external sources. For example, verification of the driver license endorsements is important to the case if there is a question about the status of the endorsement at the time of the citation. Information is best from its original and authorizing source, so it is important that government agencies share information when needed and appropriate. As investments towards improving technology and data exchanges are made, keep information sharing a part of that improvement process.

There are many opportunities to improve a case management system. We have covered just a few ideas about how to better leverage investments in technology as well as redesign the human part of the process where data is collected, and information is shared. Ultimately, having those critical conversations with stakeholders involved in the process will lead to the best design ideas to make the process work better and to provide better service to the public.

This series of videos presents guidance on multiple strategies to assist courts in improving the processing of commercial driving cases. A transcript of this video and a supplemental resource guide with additional information is available on the Commercial Driving Resource Center Website.