



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

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Attorneys Representing Abused and Neglected Children Receive New Training Tool

HARRISBURG—A new training video, believed to be the first of its kind in the country, will assist guardians ad litem—attorneys who represent the specific legal needs of abused and neglected children in dependency courts.

The video is another tool to help the Pennsylvania Supreme Court reach its goal of moving abused and neglected children to safe and permanent homes without delay.

“Guardians ad litem who represent children in dependency matters have very specific responsibilities,” Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice Max Baer said. “The training is designed to ensure that abused and neglected children, those often least capable of articulating their own interests before the court, are receiving high-quality legal representation. We are confident these efforts will significantly help in our overall goal to ensure that every child grows up in a safe, nurturing and permanent family.”

The specialized training for guardians ad litem meets requirements of the Federal Child Abuse Treatment and Prevention Act and will allow Pennsylvania’s Department of Public Welfare (DPW) to continue receiving approximately \$950,000 annually of critical federal dollars supporting the services to abused/neglected children and their families.

New guardians ad litem will be required to complete the pre-service video training if the county wants to receive future funding from the DPW’s Office of Children and Youth to help pay for guardian ad litem services in dependency cases. The training video was developed by the Supreme Court’s Office of Children and Families in the Courts (OCFC) in conjunction with DPW’s Office of Children, Youth and Families, and a Legal Representation Workgroup which included judges, attorneys, and children welfare professionals, co-chaired by Butler County Common Pleas Court Judge Kelley Streib and Montgomery County Court of Common Pleas Administrative Judge Wendy Demchick-Alloy.

The training video follows OCFC’s 2011 efforts to provide specific training to more than 600 attorneys who had been representing children and parents in dependency cases.

“The training covers relevant federal and state laws, court rules, and procedures regarding shelter, adjudication, disposition and permanency hearings and, non-legal topics such as trauma, the effects

of maltreatment and family dynamics,” said Justice Max Baer. “The training also focuses on family group decision making to protect and quickly place children in safe permanent homes.”

Since 2006, the Office of Children and Families in the Courts, along with the Department of Public Welfare and other partners, has safely reduced the number of dependent and delinquent children in temporary foster care homes by more than 7,000, or 33 percent. Placing these children into a permanent family setting greatly improves their chances to succeed and significantly reduces the cost of institutional care, saving an estimated \$117 million annually.

Guardian ad litem training materials can be obtained by contacting the Office of Children and Families in the Courts at 717-231-3300 ext. 4255 or elke.moyer@pacourts.us

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