



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

## NEWS RELEASE

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### ***PA Supreme Court Holds Annual Children's Roundtable Meeting*** **Efforts Are Reducing the Number of Children in Foster Care**

**HARRISBURG, May 27, 2010**—United by the common goal of improving the lives of abused and neglected children, judges, children and youth service administrators, and state and local child welfare experts from throughout the Commonwealth today convened in Harrisburg to kick off the fourth Annual State Children's Roundtable.

The roundtable meeting began in 2007 as part of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court's efforts to implement best practices reducing delays in placing at-risk children safely and permanently in loving, caring homes

Justice Max Baer, a former administrative judge of family court in Allegheny County, who has been guiding these efforts on behalf of the Supreme Court, provided welcoming remarks at the two-day roundtable meeting stating, "Our collaborative efforts are paying off for the children and for the taxpayers as well."

He cited recent Department of Welfare statistics revealing that the number of Pennsylvania children in foster care is declining significantly, from approximately 20,450 in September 2006 to 15,920 at the end of 2009.

"These statistics not only mean we have 4,500 fewer children who were in foster care drift now in permanent homes, but we are saving \$225 million in the gross costs for administering foster care programs throughout Pennsylvania," Baer added. "Even subtracting the costs of subsidized adoptions, legal guardianship and additional community-based family support services from this figure, the taxpayers are saving tens and perhaps hundreds of millions of dollars, while children are being provided a real chance for success in life."

Justice Max Baer thanked roundtable members for their dedication and their countless hours of work in helping Pennsylvania's children, while emphasizing that much is yet to be done. "There are still too many children in the system, too many waiting for too long to be placed in permanent homes and too many 'aging out' of care with no connection to safe, loving adults. Collectively, we have to and will do even better for Pennsylvania's children."

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Day one highlights of the 2010 Children's Roundtable included:

- an update of the Permanency Practice Initiative (PPI) currently implemented in 27 Pennsylvania counties. PPI focuses on three practice areas: Family Finding, Family Group Decision-Making and Family Development. There has been particular success in Family Finding that provides professionals with the tools they need to efficiently and quickly find relatives and others committed to a foster child. Early results have shown that Family Finding strategies have produced a 217 percent increase in the number of "lasting resources" available to assist dependent children.
- a presentation of the status of the Pennsylvania Judicial Bench Book by Lackawanna President Judge and Committee Chairperson Chester Harhut, highlighting specific details of the publication design to assist judicial officers who preside over abuse and neglect proceedings.
- an Alternative Dispute Resolution panel including Venango County President Judge Oliver Lobaugh, Lackawanna County President Judge Harhut, Northumberland County Judge Charles Saylor and Dauphin County President Judge Todd Hoover.

Highlights of the second day (*Friday, May 28*) will include:

- a Fatherhood Workgroup Report, presented by Allegheny County Judge and Workgroup Chairperson Kim Berkeley Clark, that highlights recommendations to enhance father engagement in the child welfare system.
- a Legal Representation Workgroup Report, presented by Butler County Judge and Workgroup Chairperson Kelley Streib, that highlights recommendations to improve training of child and parent legal representatives in the child welfare system
- a Truancy Workgroup Report, presented by co-chairpersons Adams County President Judge John Kuhn and Allegheny County Children's Court Administrator Cindy Stoltz, Esq., highlighting recommendations to reduce the instances of truancy in the Commonwealth.

The Supreme Court's efforts are led by Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts' Office of Children and Families in the Courts (OCFC) in close partnership with the state Department of Public Welfare's Office of Children, Youth and Families. The OCFC, created in October 2006 by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, is funded with federal grants from the Court Improvement Project run by the Administration for Children and Families in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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**EDITORS' NOTE: Roundtable participants will be available for comment Friday, May 28 between 8:00 and 8:30 a.m., noon and 12:30 p.m., and after 2:30 p.m.**