



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Pennsylvania Court and Child Welfare Agencies to Participate in National Landmark Meeting to Reform Foster Care System**

**HARRISBURG, Sept. 19, 2005** — Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice Max Baer and other state court and child welfare agency officials will participate in an unprecedented national effort to better protect abused and neglected children who are in the court system.

Pennsylvania's team is joining court leaders and representatives of child welfare agencies from every state, the District of Columbia, and three U.S. territories for *Changing Lives By Changing Systems: National Judicial Leadership Summit for the Protection of Children*, Sept. 20 to 23 in Bloomington, Minnesota.

The Pennsylvania delegation will include: Justice Baer, a former administrative judge for the family division of Allegheny Common Pleas Court and Pennsylvania's former Child Advocate and Adoption Advocate of the Year Award recipient; Allegheny County Juvenile Court Supervising Judge Kim Berkeley Clark; Philadelphia Juvenile Court Supervising Judge Kevin Dougherty; Court Administrator of Pennsylvania Zygmunt A. Pines; AOPC Director of Judicial District Administration Joseph J. Mittleman and Terry Clark, of the state Department of Public Welfare.

The Summit will serve as the springboard for a series of actions designed to reform the way abused and neglected children's cases proceed through the courts. One of the Summit's goals is to reduce delays in securing safe, permanent homes for children in foster care. Each state will develop an individual action plan to improve its child protection procedures and programs. Following the Summit, these action plans will be compiled into a National Call to Action for state courts and will launch a collaborative reform plan between the courts and child welfare agencies at state and local levels. More than 40 justices and judges from the states' highest courts are attending the four-day Summit.

"The complexity of cases seen in Juvenile Court requires efficient interaction among the court system and a number of state and local agencies," Justice Baer said. "This intergovernmental summit will provide us in Pennsylvania an opportunity to collaboratively examine the services and programs that are being provided with an eye toward mutual ways to enhance their implementation."

In May 2004, the Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care issued recommendations that call for improving court oversight of foster care cases to reduce delays in placing children safely and permanently in homes. These recommendations, endorsed by the Conference of Chief Justices (CCJ) and the Conference of State Court Administrators (COSCA), will serve as the Summit's central themes.

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The National Center for State Courts (NCSC), CCJ, COSCA, and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges are sponsoring the Summit. Minnesota Chief Justice Kathleen Blatz is co-chairing the event along with Vermont State Court Administrator Lee Suskin.

“This nation’s abused and neglected children deserve better results from the system designed to protect them,” Chief Justice Blatz said. “By bringing the leadership of courts and child and family services to the table, we have a unique opportunity to make meaningful improvements for kids in each and every state.”

The Summit is made possible by a \$400,000 grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts to the NCSC, which has conducted extensive research on family courts and child protection. Additional support for this project is being provided by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, Fostering Results, and the State Justice Institute.

The Pew Charitable Trusts serves the public interest by providing information, advancing policy solutions and supporting civic life. Based in Philadelphia, the Trusts will invest \$204 million in Fiscal Year 2006 to provide organizations and citizens with fact-based research and practical solutions for challenging issues. More information about the Trusts can be found at [www.pewtrusts.org](http://www.pewtrusts.org).

The National Center for State Courts, founded in 1971 by the now late U.S. Chief Justice Warren E. Burger, is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the administration of justice and provides leadership, research, technology, education, and training to the state courts. NCSC also is taking the lead on several key issues facing the justice system, such as improving citizens’ participation in the jury system. NCSC is headquartered in Williamsburg, Va., with offices in Arlington, Va., and Denver.

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