

NEWS RELEASE

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Supreme Court of Pennsylvania
**New Rules Adopted for Juvenile Court Cases
to Aid Dependent Children and Families**

HARRISBURG, August 21, 2006 — The Pennsylvania Supreme Court has adopted new statewide rules for juvenile courts that uniformly will apply procedures for the first time to all phases of dependency cases that enter the state court system.

The new rules govern a wide range of matters in juvenile dependency proceedings, including: counsel, records, motions and courtroom practices. Dependency cases involve allegations of abuse, abandonment or a general inability to care for a child. The rules were adopted today and become effective Feb. 1, 2007.

“Pennsylvania’s judiciary is committed to working hard to promote, restore and strengthen families that come into the state court system,” Chief Justice of Pennsylvania Ralph J. Cappy said. “The dependency procedural rules adopted by the court create a framework for the judiciary to deliver effective and uniform solutions in support of healthy families for Pennsylvania’s children.”

The comprehensive and new dependency rules represent the second significant organizational fine-tuning within the past two years by the Supreme Court to enhance the efficiency of juvenile court matters. A similar uniform set of procedural rules governing delinquency proceedings was adopted by the Supreme Court in April 2005. Delinquency proceedings involve juveniles charged with a crime.

The Supreme Court’s Juvenile Court Procedural Rules Committee, a 10-member advisory group of lawyers and jurists from across the state, was responsible for drafting the rules proposals. Both new sets of rules were presented to the Supreme Court after extensive public input periods that included a systematic survey of police, juvenile probation officers, district attorneys and public defenders in judicial districts covering each of Pennsylvania’s 67 counties.

Juvenile court is a part of Common Pleas Court that last year saw more than 60,000 cases statewide. Cases filed in juvenile court include juveniles who are without proper parental care and control, those neglected and abused, truants, and those charged with misdemeanors and felonies.

In addition to the recent rules changes, other initiatives are underway within the judicial branch to address the needs of Pennsylvania’s families. They include the launching of a pilot

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project in Allegheny County—one of five in the nation—to develop a program designed to prevent children from being abused or neglected, and to reduce the number in foster care. Allegheny County Family Court has received a \$100,000 federal grant to help pay for the program.

Another ongoing initiative is the AOPC's new Center for Children and Families in the Courts. Plans call for providing technical assistance to county courts in dealing with neglected and abused children—and in ensuring their placement in safe, permanent homes in as brief a time as possible.

(To view a copy of the order and new rules, visit the Juvenile Court Procedural Rules Committee page of the Pennsylvania Judiciary Web site at: www.courts.state.pa.us)

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