

NEWS RELEASE

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Supreme Court of Pennsylvania

National Summit Buttresses Partnerships to Aid Pennsylvania's Abused and Neglected Children

HARRISBURG, March 21, 2007 — Court leaders and representatives from Pennsylvania's family services agencies participated in a nationwide symposium this month to enhance the handling of cases involving abused and neglected children.

Teams from 42 states, the District of Columbia and two U.S. territories and commonwealths, participated in *A Summit on Children: It's Their Future – Ours Too!* in New York City on March 9 and 10. As part of the Summit, each state's team met individually to determine needed and available resources, what other agencies and officials should be involved to strengthen foster care and services to families and children, what programs and strategies developed in other states may be applicable in Pennsylvania, and how best to address new federal requirements for improving the safety and well-being of children, the permanence of placements, and the timeliness of child protection proceedings.

Pennsylvania's multidisciplinary team was made up of: Supreme Court Justice Max Baer; the Hon. Kevin M. Dougherty, administrative judge of the Family Division of the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas; York County Common Pleas Court Judge Michael E. Bortner; Lehigh County Common Pleas Court Judge J. Brian Johnson; Zygmunt A. Pines, Court Administrator of Pennsylvania; Andrea Hoffman Jelin, administrator for the Office of Children and Families in the Courts and James E. Anderson, executive director of Pennsylvania's Juvenile Court Judges Commission. Also attending were, Anne Marie Ambrose, director of the bureau of child welfare and juvenile justice services for the state Department of Public Welfare and William Browning, executive director of Children and Youth Services, Lackawanna County.

"This summit presented an unparalleled opportunity for our diverse Pennsylvania team to share ideas and solutions with others from across the country in providing services to some of the neediest citizens in our Commonwealth — namely, thousands of abused and neglected children," Justice Baer said. "Our hope is to take the considerable amount of information garnered in New York to enhance what we've already begun on a statewide basis here in Pennsylvania."

A precursor to the New York gathering was a National Judicial Leadership Summit on the Protection of Children in September 2005 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. This landmark Summit was sponsored by the National Center for State Courts (NCSC), the Conference of Chief Justices (CCJ), the Conference of State Court Administrators (COSCA), and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ).

(MORE)

It was 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 was provided by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, Fostering Results, and the State Justice Institute. The Minneapolis Summit resulted in the development of state action plans that are summarized in *Justice for Children – A National Call to Action*.

In October 2006, the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania created an Office of Children and Families in the Courts and effectuated the statewide “Roundtables For Children” initiative. This initiative is working with multidisciplinary teams in each county and, importantly, among Pennsylvania’s 67 counties, to facilitate collaboration and communication among members of the child welfare system within each county to ensure that abuse and neglect cases are conducted with efficiency and timeliness.

To maintain the momentum and address issues that have arisen since the initial summit, NCSC, the Unified Judicial System of New York, CCJ, COSCA, and NCJFCJ sponsored the meeting in New York. The Pew Charitable Trusts and the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption again provided funding support along with the New York Community Trust, the Center for Court Innovation, the Unified Judicial System of New York, and NCSC.

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