

NEWS RELEASE

CONTACT:

[Steve Schell](#), Communications Coordinator
(717) 231-3331

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WWW.PACOURTS.US



BROADCAST EDITORS NOTE: For audio actualities from Justice Baer, click [here](#).

PA Supreme Court Efforts to Help Abused and Neglected Children Expands Child and Parent Legal Representation Training Begins

HARRISBURG, March 21, 2011—The Supreme Court of Pennsylvania today expanded its efforts to improve the lives of abused and neglected children by launching a statewide training program specially designed for attorneys representing children and parents in dependency cases.

“A recent survey of Pennsylvania counties found that more than 90 percent of the attorneys representing children and parents in dependency cases do so on a part-time basis and few counties are requiring or offering those attorneys training fashioned to meet the needs of children and *parents*,” said Pennsylvania Supreme Court 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.

“We intend to fill the training void and ensure that our children, those often least capable of articulating their own interests before the court, and their parents, are receiving high-quality legal representation,” Justice Baer said.

The Court’s training will not only cover relevant federal and state laws, court rules, and shelter, adjudication, disposition and permanency hearings, it will cover an array of non-legal topics such as trauma, the effects of maltreatment, family dynamics, and how to speak with children and interact with parents.

The training curriculum is based on recommendations issued by a Legal Representation Workgroup consisting of judges, attorneys, and children and youth services representatives. The group’s chairperson, Butler County Common Pleas Court Judge Kelley Streib, said, “When children’s voices and their lives are placed in the hands of legal advocates, the dependency system must assure timely and thorough court hearings, and competent legal representation.

“We are confident the children and parent legal representation training will significantly help in our overall goal to ensure that every child grows up in a safe, nurturing and permanent family.”

-more-

Approximately 60 attorneys are attending the first legal representation training held in Pennsylvania's Judicial Center on March 21 and 22. The training program will be held at various locations throughout the state in 2011.

The training is part of the Supreme Court's Permanency Practice Initiative, 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 with the overriding goal to move abused and neglected child to safe, permanent homes without delay.

State Department of Welfare statistics show that the Court's efforts have resulted in a safe and consistent decline in the number of Pennsylvania children in foster care. In September 2006 there were approximately 20,450 children in Pennsylvania foster homes. By September 2010, that number had dropped below 15,000.

The OCFC 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.

#

Editors' Note: *Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice Baer and Judge Streib will be available for comment Monday afternoon, March 21 and Tuesday, March 22.*

Attached are photos of Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice Max Baer providing opening remarks at the Court's first legal training session for attorneys representing children and parents in dependency cases. The legal training is being held in the Pennsylvania Judicial Center in Harrisburg, March 21 and 22. Approximately 60 attorneys are attending.



