

# Five New Counties Join Pennsylvania's Family Engagement Initiative

On Jan. 2, 2024, five new counties began an initiative to increase family involvement, reduce trauma and decrease the time children are separated from those who love and care about them.

Erie, Juniata, Luzerne, Potter and Warren Counties join 17 other counties participating in the Pennsylvania State Roundtable's Family Engagement Initiative (FEI).

"I am thrilled that Luzerne County is participating in Phase Five of the FEI," said Judge **Jennifer L. Rogers**. "The opportunity to implement enhanced methods to prevent placements, link children with lifelong connections and ensure that families and children receive quality advocacy in court all contribute to reducing the number of adverse childhood experiences in the life of a child."

*"We, as dependency court judges, now understand the lasting impact of adverse childhood experiences, and the work of the FEI enables us to change the trajectory of a child's life," Judge Rogers said.*

The selected counties participated in a rigorous education roll-out to prepare for the initiative, including a virtual FEI overview and in-person education sessions for all judges, juvenile court hearing officers, dependency attorneys and child welfare professionals.

Each county's FEI Implementation Team, led by the dependency judge and child welfare administrator, attended a two-day planning session in Harrisburg in December led by Supreme Court Justice **Kevin Dougherty**, Department of Human Services' (DHS) Office of Children, Youth, and Families Deputy Secretary Laval Miller Wilson, and the Office of Children and Families in the Courts (OCFC).



*"We have seen incredible outcomes from the FEI counties. Collectively, the FEI counties have higher percentages of children reaching timely permanency, higher use of kinship care and fewer children entering the court system when Crisis Rapid Response Family Meetings are used. I'm confident that these phase five counties have the leadership, dedication and commitment to continue these types of outcomes for children and families," Justice Dougherty said.*

The Family Engagement Initiative was developed by the Pennsylvania State Roundtable and is supported by the OCFC and the federal Court Improvement Program in partnership with the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania and DHS' Office of Children, Youth, and Families.