



SUPREME COURT OF PENNSYLVANIA

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Kevin M. Dougherty
JUSTICE

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December, 2024

As a sitting juvenile court judge, I handled many cases involving abused and neglected children. As Administrative Judge for the Philadelphia Family Court, I was responsible for thousands of these cases. As the Supreme Court Justice leading our dependency court improvement efforts, I've continued my commitment to this area of the law mainly because I know the immediate and generational impact that can be made.

Dependency Court Judges oversee the most important matters handled by our courts, involving the most vulnerable children and families in our Commonwealth. In this court, you will make a difference. Whether or not that difference is positive or negative depends on your commitment to this area of the law and your willingness to grow in knowledge, skill, and insight.

Unlike many other matters, you are the ultimate finder of fact in dependency proceedings. There is no jury, and because the ultimate goal of all dependency proceedings is "the best interest of a child," the concept of winners and losers should not exist.

In this courtroom, the judge is an active participant. Your ability to create a courtroom environment that facilitates the open sharing of information where all parties and their counsel focus on the ultimate goals of our dependency system is critical. Your willingness to implement best practices related to the reduction of trauma, the enhancement of resiliency, the promotion of kin and family connections, and the elevation of child and family voices will be key to ensuring children grow into healthy, productive citizens.

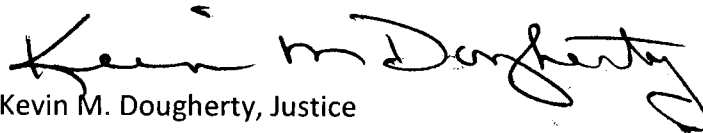
This Benchbook was written and updated by an experienced group of dependency court judges who represent all regions and sizes of counties across the Commonwealth. I was honored to be a member of the group that created the first edition released in 2010! Since then, the document has been updated three times to keep with changing laws and practices.

The Benchbook was designed to help new and experienced judges understand the intricacies of the many issues in dependency proceedings. Indeed, most Common Pleas judges have not grown up in the intense poverty, addiction, trauma, and abuse/neglect experienced by the children you will see. Dependency court judges need knowledge beyond their own

experiences to be most effective. This Benchbook provides much of that knowledge. If the issue is a dependency court issue, it is discussed in this Benchbook. And while the Benchbook is not binding authority, it is persuasive and has been mentioned in several Superior and Supreme Court opinions.

I would like to thank everyone who contributed to this fourth edition, including our relentless Chairperson, President Judge Craig Miller, and his entire committee. I also want to thank Sandy Moore and her staff from the Office of Children and Families in the Courts, who, as with all our initiatives, championed every phase of the project.

Finally, I especially thank everyone who read and used the original and revised Benchbooks and will now actively embrace this latest version. I encourage you to use this resource as you work to help children and families. In so doing, you will change the life trajectory of children and the generations that follow.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kevin M. Dougherty". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping "D" at the end.

Kevin M. Dougherty, Justice
Pennsylvania Supreme Court