Pennsylvania Bar Association's Constitutional Review Commission Schedules Public Hearings on the Judiciary

HARRISBURG (Dec. 10, 2010) - Public hearings to examine the state's judiciary process will be held in Harrisburg, Wilkes-Barre, Philadelphia, and Mercer County as part of a thorough review of the state's Constitution by a commission established by the Pennsylvania Bar Association.

"These hearings are valuable opportunities for citizens to provide information that will help shape the committee's recommendations to improve the structure and operation of government in the commonwealth," said Pennsylvania Bar Association President Gretchen A. Mundorff. "If the members of the commission's committees conclude that changes are needed based on public input and members' own findings, they will offer suggestions for enacting legislation, amending the state's Constitution or convening a Constitutional Convention."

"It's important that we hear all points of view during the hearing process," said James Gardner Colins, a former Commonwealth Court president judge and Philadelphia lawyer who is chairing the commission. "The constitutional scholars, practicing lawyers, sitting judges and public policy experts serving on our commission want to take a broad view and consider the multitude of ideas and opinions that could improve our commonwealth."

The PBA Constitutional Review Commission's Judiciary Committee is seeking citizens' input on the following issues:

- Judicial Conduct System, including (a) Reporting Judicial Officials, (b) Protecting Confidences and (c) Insuring Quick and Thorough Investigations
- Judicial selection and financing judicial campaigns
- Representation of the indigent, including juveniles
- Funding Pennsylvania's courts so as to guarantee an effective judiciary

Views on other issues under Article V of Pennsylvania's Constitution are also welcomed.

A written statement of testimony and an application to speak at a hearing must be submitted in advance by the due date for the location at which the individual or group wishes to speak. The PBA Constitutional Review Commission's Judiciary Committee must approve the application and schedule the time and duration of the witness's statement at the hearing. Public hearings will be held at the following locations, dates and times:

- March 16, 1 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.: Widener University School of Law, Harrisburg Campus, Harrisburg. Due date for submission of written statements, applications and exhibits is March 2.
- April 27, 1 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.: Wilkes University, Wilkes-Barre. Due date for submission of written statements, applications and exhibits is April 13.
- May 4, Time TBA: Pennsylvania Bar Institute Conference Center, Philadelphia. Due date for submission of written statements, applications and exhibits is April 19.
- June 3, 1 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.: Hermitage Municipal Building, Mercer County. Due date for submission of written statements, applications and exhibits is May 20.

For a more complete description of the forms and procedures to follow, consult the guidelines for written submissions and testimony on the webpage of the Judiciary Committee on the PBA Constitutional Review Commission website: www.pabar.org/crc. A statement of policies is also available by contacting: Lindsay Still, Pennsylvania Bar Association, 100 South Street, P.O. Box 186, Harrisburg, PA 17108, lindsay.still@pabar.org.
In addition to the Judiciary Committee, there are committees of the PBA commission examining local government, public education, the structure of the General Assembly, legislative reapportionment, and taxation and the uniformity clause. Some of those committees also are expected to schedule public hearings.

In early 2012, the commission will submit a report to the association's House of Delegates, which sets the association's policies, for review and possible action.

Interest in potential changes to the state's Constitution is not new to the association. The Pennsylvania Bar Association had a leadership role in the convening of the limited constitutional convention in 1967-1968.

Founded in 1895, the Pennsylvania Bar Association strives to promote justice, professional excellence and respect for the law; improve public understanding of the legal system; facilitate access to legal services; and serve the 29,000 lawyers who are members of the association.

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