

The Commission for Justice Initiatives in Pennsylvania ("CJI")

In May 2004, at the request and with the support of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, then Pennsylvania Bar Association President Michael H. Reed established the Commission for Justice Initiatives in Pennsylvania.

Guided by the basic tenet that the justice system needs to be responsive to the expectations and needs of the communities it serves, the Commission identifies, develops and recommends the implementation of programs and practices designed to improve the administration of justice in Pennsylvania, educate the public about justice and the judicial system and enhance the public's trust and confidence in Pennsylvania's justice system. To accomplish this task, the Commission's initial focus has been the study and evaluation of initiatives in courts of first resort –family, juvenile and the lower criminal courts - where most citizens have their first contact with the judicial system.

The Commission is a multi-disciplined body comprised of 23 distinguished individuals. Diversity in all respects is a priority. The group includes members of the Pennsylvania House, a member of the Pennsylvania Senate, the Attorney General, the Governor's General Counsel, a district attorney and a public defenders, trial and appellate court judges, private practice lawyers, representatives of the Pennsylvania County Commissioners, Pennsylvania Commission on Sentencing and Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, and an outstanding private citizen who by reason of her position in her community is knowledgeable about how the justice system impacts those communities. The Commission consults with its Advisory Council comprised of former Commission members, committees and sections of the Pennsylvania Bar Association and other experts in specific areas of interest.

Task-oriented committees, sub-committees and task forces carry out the work of the Commission. There are presently four committees, nine sub-committees, and four task forces:

- The **Organization/Planning Committee, chaired by PBA Past President Michael H. Reed**, fine tunes the Commission's infrastructure.
- The **Public Education/Community Outreach Committee, chaired by the Honorable Jack Panella**, not only recommends programs of educational outreach to communities and representatives of local and state government, but also seeks to receive information about the community's and local and state government's views as they relate to the judiciary and the justice system. It presently maintains three sub-committees: **The Website Sub-committee, Video Sub-committee** and the **Equal Access to Equal Justice Task Force**.

The website group has formulated a plan to help the Court deliver legal information and resources on a statewide basis utilizing the ubiquitous Internet. Their goal is to help the Court develop and maintain a website that will provide the public with accurate and helpful information about Pennsylvania's courts in general and the area of family law in particular.

The Video Sub-committee, working in conjunction with the AOPC, has completed and updated "Pennsylvania's Unified Judiciary," an educational video about the judicial system enjoying wide circulation across the Commonwealth.

The Equal Access to Equal Justice Task Force has just been convened. Its initial tasks are focused on compiling information about Pennsylvania's equal access priorities.

- **Task Force on Self-represented Litigation, chaired by the Honorable Penny Blackwell** is focused on identifying and recommending best practices to assist Pennsylvania's self-represented litigants in family law matters. Launched in 2005, its members include judges, representatives from the legal services community, the PBA Pro Bono Office, and the law librarian community. The task force's **Education Sub-committee** is tasked with developing a continuing legal education program for a future annual meeting of the Pennsylvania Conference of State Trial Judges, and its **Recommendation Sub-committee** delivered its report and recommendation for the implementation of a number of practices geared to making the judicial system easier to navigate to the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania

in 2007. Several of its recommendations are currently being considered by the Court's Domestic Rules Committee.

- The **Specialized Courts Committee, chaired by the Honorable Kate Ford Elliot**, was the group tasked with the Commission's first substantive investigation. Its recommendations for the creation of specialized judicial dockets for non-violent adult drug offenders were adopted by the Court in the fall of 2005. Its **Juvenile Drug Court Sub-committee** continues its work on the juvenile drug court template while also exploring other juvenile justice best practices in light of Pennsylvania's inclusion in the MacArthur Foundation Model for Change study.

The committee's **Mental Health Initiative Task Force**, convened in the spring of 2007, has been engaged in exploring ways to improve how the justice system deals with mentally ill offenders. Using the Sequential Intercept Model as a framework for its study, the group has created four sub-committees to examine processes at arrest, at the district magisterial court /municipal court level, at the trial court level and at sentencing. Most recently the group, in conjunction with the Department of Public Welfare and the Council of State Governments, completed a statewide strategic plan to guide Pennsylvania's response to people with mental illness involved in the criminal justice system.

- The **Changing the Culture of Custody Committee, chaired by the Honorable Thomas King Kistler**, was tasked by Justice Max Baer to develop a best practice model for replacing custody litigation when possible with a combination of mediation and support services geared to preserve due process, maintain open communication between the parents and keep children, when possible, out of the courtroom. The group delivered its final report and recommendation in the spring of 2007, and is presently working with the Court to implement a pilot study of the committee's Gold Standard Model for custody resolution.
- **Task Force on Jury Issues, co-chaired by Lynn Marks, Esq.** works in conjunction with the Court's Interbranch Commission on Racial, Gender and Ethnic Fairness to recommend ways to enhance the diversity of Pennsylvania's juror pool and to create uniform procedures to address juror excusals and postponement of jury service. It is fine-tuning its recommendation, having received initial feedback from the Court, the Fairness Commission and the CJI.

2010 - 2011 Commissioners

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