



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

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Pennsylvania Conference of State Trial Judges Signals Support for Project LITIGATE

HARRISBURG – In a unanimous vote during their annual conference, the Pennsylvania Conference of State Trial Judges endorsed the work of a statewide taskforce of bar groups focused on developing the next generation of civil trial lawyers through Project LITIGATE. The Conference went further and adopted best practices by trial judges to advance the goals of Project LITIGATE.

Developed in response to a continued decline in the number of young lawyers with civil trial and litigation experience, Project LITIGATE – Lawyers Initiative to Improve next Generation Attorneys’ Trial Experience – aims to encourage law firms to take a pledge to provide training for young attorneys in case planning and preparation, taking of depositions and presenting oral arguments leading up to and through trying a case to a jury.

Justice Christine Donohue, on behalf of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, spearheaded the movement to create opportunities for less experienced lawyers to participate in jury trials. Justice Donohue is a strong supporter of Project LITIGATE after spending nearly 30 years as a trial attorney before being elected to the bench.

During that time, Justice Donohue says she witnessed a concerning decline in opportunities for young lawyers to hone their skills as trial attorneys. The downward trend in the number of cases being tried to juries has continued and seasoned attorneys are presenting those cases.

“We are at a tipping point within our own profession. Taking the LITIGATE pledge is a statement of commitment to preserving access to competent trial counsel in the future.”

During their recent conference, trial judges statewide adopted a resolution acknowledging the impact that the decline in civil cases moving to trial is having on future generations of trial attorneys and moved to support efforts to ensure the public will have continued access to properly trained attorneys.

Judge Christine Ward, immediate Past President of the Pennsylvania Conference of State Trial Judges, chaired a taskforce of trial judges who studied the participation of young lawyers in trials and developed recommendations to create more opportunities. “The Pennsylvania Conference of State Trial Judges was unanimous in its support of Project LITIGATE and of best practices which can be used by trial judges to facilitate participation of newer lawyers in court proceedings,” said Judge Christine Ward.

“Project LITIGATE not only benefits the next generation of trial lawyers and their clients but also the trial court in the efficient and orderly adjudication of cases.”

Montgomery County Common Pleas Court Judge Carolyn Carluccio was elected as the new PCSTJ president during the conference and has expressed support for this key initiative moving forward.

“It is important that we, as the conference representing all Pennsylvania state trial judges support this important initiative,” Carluccio said. “While law firms need to be proactive in allowing newer members of the bar to be actively involved in court room proceedings, our trial judges can encourage their participation and assure the client that the senior attorney will still be involved.

Project LITIGATE Chair Attorney John Gismondi noted that the support of the trial judges “lends credibility to the program. Trial judges are a vital cog in the overall effort because they have influence over what happens in the court room and who is being permitted to participate in oral argument and trials.”

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