

# AOPC CONNECTED



Issue 3, 2024

## In this issue

In this issue, read about recent AOPC leadership transitions, events and initiatives, as well as county court highlights.

# Chief Justice Debra Todd Portrait Unveiled

The University of Pittsburgh School of Law unveiled an official portrait of Chief Justice of Pennsylvania **Debra Todd** during a ceremony at the law school in April.

“Chief Justice Todd’s legacy extends beyond her glass-ceiling-shattering elevation to chief justice,” said Mary Crossley, interim dean at the University of Pittsburgh School of Law. “The portrait of Chief Justice Todd that we unveiled honors her accomplishments, but it will do more than that for many years to come.”

*“By hanging it in the law school, it will serve to inspire current and future students, to remind them that the law should be a tool and a force for good and that any student – no matter their background or what they look like – can aspire to become an attorney who wields that tool with power, integrity and compassion.”*

Reflecting on the impact the law school has had on her life and career, Chief Justice Todd noted that she is filled with great pride with what she and other law school alumni have been able to accomplish because of the law degree they received from the University of Pittsburgh School of Law.

“I owe a debt of gratitude to this law school and to my professors. It was here that I learned to think like a lawyer, to



Chief Justice Todd’s portrait hangs in the Barco Law Building at the University of Pittsburgh.

stand up for myself and to understand the importance of the rule of law,” Todd said.

“It was within the hallowed walls of this law school that I developed an appreciation, and a passion, for the law, an inner strength and a collection of newly polished and refined ideals which I carry with me every step of the way.”

“My sincere thanks to the law school administration and Dean Crossley for this recognition, my professors for believing in me so many years ago and finally to David Stranger, who used his time and his talent to bring this portrait to life.”

The portrait, commissioned by the University of Pittsburgh School of Law, was painted by Pittsburgh-based artist David Stranger. Strangers’ paintings have been exhibited widely, including showings at the National Portrait Gallery in London, the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh’s Mattress Factory, the Butler Institute of American Art and the Westmoreland Museum of American Art.

## New OEJC Website and Guardianship Training Video Series Makes Debut

When an adult of any age is deemed incapacitated by a court, a professional or family guardian may be appointed who is responsible for making certain decisions on their behalf. The nature of these decisions can include financial, medical and personal matters the incapacitated person has been determined unable to make for themselves.

Recognizing the complex nature of guardianships, the Office of Elder Justice in the Courts (OEJC) recently produced a video training series focused on guardianship in Pennsylvania.

This 14-video [Guardianship Training Series](#) is designed to provide newly-appointed guardians, prospective guardians and other members of the public with guidance on the roles and responsibilities of a guardian. The videos are organized into four courses, including orientation, guardianship overview, guardian of the person and guardian of the estate. This allows viewers to watch the section that most pertains to them in their role as guardian of the estate, guardian of the person, or both.

In addition to the launch of the video series, the [OEJC webpage](#) has undergone a “refresh” with a new look, coupled with fresh content covering a variety of topics and extensive resources, including information on alternatives to guardianship, identifying and reporting elder abuse and financial exploitation, the Guardianship Tracking System, access to justice, the *Guardianship Training Series*, the *Pennsylvania Guardian Handbook*, and more.



Watch the [video series](#) now and visit the revised OEJC website for helpful information and resources.

*This project was supported by the Administration for Community Living (ACL), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$1,827,313 with 75% funded by ACL/HHS and \$631,644 and 25% funded by non-government source(s). The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by ACL/HHS, or the U.S. Government.*

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# Highlights from the 2024 CCJ/COSCA Conference: Focus on Guardianship Reform



*Chief Justice Debra Todd*

In August, the 2024 Conference of Chief Justices (CCJ) and State Court Administrators (COSCA) convened in Oregon, bringing together judicial leaders and court administrators from across the nation.

A standout session, led by Chief Justice **Debra Todd** of Pennsylvania, delved into the topic of guardianship and conservatorship reform.

The session, titled "Strategic Planning: What Should Guardianship/Conservatorship Reform Look Like in Your State?" aimed to explore how strategic planning can enhance the guardianship system by focusing on individuals' rights and dignity.

The discussion was informed by the 4th National Guardianship Summit's recommendations, which advocate for less-restrictive options, improved monitoring and better data collection.

Through roundtable discussions, participants shared successful state reform efforts and tackled critical questions regarding state-specific needs, priorities, and potential court partners. This session underscored the ultimate goal of ensuring that guardianship practices align with contemporary standards of individual autonomy and care.

Judge **Lois E. Murphy** of Montgomery County Orphan's Court also attended the conference representing the Pennsylvania Courts.

Judge Murphy participated in a panel session on 'Practical Tools to Enhance Guardianship Monitoring' alongside Minnesota and Nevada's state court administrators.

The session, moderated by Diane Robinson, principal court research associate from the National Center for State Courts, focused on ensuring effective oversight following the appointment of guardians or conservators.

The discussion highlighted essential tools, including monitoring protocols and technology-driven solutions such as online portals for accessing information and submitting reports. These measures aim to enhance accountability and ensure guardians and conservators meet the needs of those they serve effectively.

## Blair County Adult Probation and Parole Selected for National Technical Assistance Program

Blair County Adult Probation and Parole, a division within the Blair County Court of Common Pleas, was recently selected as one of five agencies across the U.S. to participate in a technical assistance (TA) program focusing on recruiting, retention and staff wellness.

TA is provided through the Community Supervision Resource Center (CSRC), managed by the Center for Effective Public Policy and funded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance.

These agencies help support community supervision (pretrial, probation and parole) by sharing and creating resources, highlighting innovations, sharing funding opportunities and providing TA.

"Blair County Adult Probation and Parole is honored to have been selected from a national pool of highly qualified applicants, and our team looks forward to absorbing the specialized guidance, assessments and trainings offered by the TA providers," said Scott Bailey, chief of Blair County Adult Probation and Parole.

Blair County was chosen as one of these agencies due to its demonstrated commitment and preparedness to undertake this important initiative – and to share the knowledge across Blair County government.

"This training opportunity will help strengthen the Adult Parole and Probation office and therefore the Court's ability to serve justice fairly," said President Judge **Wade A. Kagarise**.

"The selection marks a significant opportunity for the Blair County Courts to receive personalized support tailored to our unique needs, which will contribute to the well-being and retention of our staff by assessing and developing recruitment and retention strategies, creating policies on compliance and non-compliance, training on trauma-informed community supervision practices and aligning with evidence-based policies."

As the recipient of the CSRC's TA, Blair County will benefit from more support to continue to improve outcomes for the people they serve and their community, while pursuing innovative and best practices.

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## Montgomery County Judge Nominated to Federal Bench

In July, President Biden nominated Judge **Gail A. Weilheimer** for a position on the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania.

With a notable history in Southeastern Pennsylvania, including roles as an assistant district attorney, a Montgomery County Court of Common Pleas judge and various legal positions, Weilheimer's career reflects a strong commitment to justice and public service.

Both U.S. Senators for Pennsylvania Bob Casey, Jr. and John Fetterman support her nomination, praising her dedication and skill. Her diverse legal background and dedication to the rule of law make her a strong candidate for the federal bench.

Weilheimer's educational background includes both a J.D. and a B.A. from Hofstra University.

The AOPC congratulates her on this historic achievement!



*Judge Gail A. Weilheimer*

# The Progress and Promise of Kinship Care in Pennsylvania

September is National Kinship Care Month, a time to recognize and honor family members who help to take care of their own in a time of need. Removing a child from their home can be a traumatic experience for children and their parents, but one that can be lessened by the support of relatives and people they know.

In October 2020, the Pennsylvania State Roundtable commissioned the Office of Children and Families in the Courts to convene a Kinship Care Taskforce to examine the use of kinship care in Pennsylvania. The taskforce, led by Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice **Kevin M. Dougherty**, has spent the last four years identifying barriers and strategies to kinship care.

During that time, the taskforce has also:

- Completed a kinship care county analysis
- Compiled over 40 statutes, rules and case laws supporting the use of kinship care
- Provided statewide education to dependency judges, juvenile court hearing officers, attorneys and other dependency professionals
- Completed ongoing, in-depth data analysis.

*“Every day, dependency judges across Pennsylvania are charged with making difficult decisions about a child’s safety and well-being. With increased awareness and focus on mental health and reducing trauma, it is imperative*



*that when necessary and safely possible, children are placed with someone they know and love,” said Supreme Court of Pennsylvania Justice Kevin M. Dougherty.*

Nationally, about 35% of all children placed in out-of-home care are living with relatives or someone they know, according to data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System. Closer to home, Pennsylvania’s percentage is much higher than the national average, with 43% statewide kinship care use.

In fact, 16 counties in Pennsylvania have a 50% or higher kinship care use, including the two largest jurisdictions of Allegheny and Philadelphia.

Since the taskforce began, 24 counties have seen increases in kinship care use by 5% or higher.

**Counties participating in the State Roundtable’s Family Engagement Initiative (FEI) are experiencing a much higher use of kinship care than non-FEI counties with 71% at or above the statewide average compared to only 30% of non-FEI counties.**

This is evidence that FEI counties are utilizing evidence-based practices to meaningfully involve healthy family members and close friends in the lives of child welfare families.

“When a child is told they get to stay at grandma’s for a little while, it is much less traumatic. Children who are placed in kinship care are more likely to maintain connections to their culture and other family members, including parents and siblings,” said Fayette County Judge **Linda R. Cordaro**, whose county recorded 61% kinship care use in 2024.



## New AOPC Chief of Litigation



Michael Daley

**Michael Daley**, the longest-serving member of our litigation team, was promoted from senior counsel within AOPC's Legal department to chief of litigation.

Michael has garnered a wealth of institutional knowledge through his service to the judiciary and with AOPC Legal for more than 15 years. In the previous decade, Michael honed his technical litigation skills in other avenues of government service and in private practice. His deep knowledge and experience make him an ideal mentor for our junior litigation attorneys.

In his new role Michael leads the litigation unit which represents judges, judicial districts and judicial personnel as respondents in matters arising in both federal and state courts, as well as agencies.

He also regularly provides support to other departments within AOPC, by providing legal counsel about the application of the Supreme Court's public access policy relative to financial records. Litigation attorneys provide counseling on a wide variety of policy matters and conduct training on topical issues for judges and court personnel.

## OEJC Welcomes New Director



Amy Whitworth

The Office of Elder Justice in the Courts officially welcomed **Amy Whitworth** as their new director following the retirement of **Cherstin Hamel** in April.

*"I am very grateful for the opportunity to serve in this position as I believe deeply in our mission to expand access to justice for older Pennsylvanians," Whitworth said.*

Amy began her service as a AOPC Systems Trainer in 2002 before becoming a manager overseeing the team responsible for UJS Web Portal design and development. This team works on a multitude of applications and projects, such as online appellate briefs and the Guardianship Tracking System (GTS).

Specifically, regarding GTS, Amy led the IT team that implemented this now-nationally recognized system in 2018.

"I believe that Pennsylvania is positioned to take a giant leap forward in terms of guardianship monitoring. We have a plan to leverage the statewide data collected in the GTS to increase the support we provide to counties in terms of guardian report review," Whitworth said.

"The guardianship project has been personally very important to me, and we are proud to assist families who must navigate difficult circumstances."

"Amy's professional experience and commitment to elder justice issues make Amy uniquely suited to succeed Cherstin," said Court Administrator **Andrea Tuominen**.

# CGALS Take Flight: Family Court Launches Custody Guardian Ad Litem Program

By Lydia Terrill, Esq.

*Reprinted with permission from the Montgomery Bar Association (MBA) and Hoffmann Publishing*

Over 40 attorneys attended a special Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) training at the MBA in early April as the official "kick off" to a new pilot program being implemented by our Family Court.

In announcing the new program, Judge Daniel Clifford, Administrative Judge of Family Division, indicated that funding would now be available for Family Judges to appoint a Court Guardian Ad Litem (CGALS) in low, or no, income child custody cases. "The ability to appoint a CGAL in these types of custody cases will be immeasurably helpful both to our Judges and the families," Judge Clifford stated in opening remarks at the CLE program.

Until now, Family Judges have relied on a small number of attorneys to serve as GALs on a pro-bono basis in custody cases where there are no financial resources for parents to pay for a GAL. "While we greatly appreciate the volunteerism of this small cadre of attorneys, over the course of many, many years, we should be able to provide compensation similar to the Court appointed GAL's for children in our other Court divisions," Judge Clifford stated.

The CGAL pilot program was submitted by Judge Clifford as part of the Court budgeting process which was ultimately approved by the County Commissioners in December 2023. Judge Clifford credited the Court Budget Committee, President Judge Carolyn Carluccio, Judge Thomas DelRicci, Judge Lois Murphy, Judge Steven O'Neill and Court Administrator Michael Kehs, for signing off on the pilot program and the County Commissioners for their ultimate approval. "No way this gets up and running without the initial support of that Committee and the leadership of PJ Carluccio," Judge Clifford said.

For her part, President Judge Carluccio stated "We were happy to support this pilot program which we believe to be the first of its kind in Pennsylvania. A CGAL will be very beneficial to both assist our Family Judges in the disposition of their custody case and, at the same time, in serving the residents of Montgomery County."

Starting May 1st, Family Judges may submit an application to the Family Court Administrative Judge to request the appointment of a CGAL in one of their assigned custody cases. Provided the case meets the criteria of the program, to benefit low or no income families, a flat fee of up to \$1,000 will be provided to the CGAL upon completion of the appointment.

The inspiration for this program was motivated coming out of the COVID-19 Pandemic "Our Family Judges started noticing a number of new circumstances coming out of Covid," Judge Clifford stated. "First, we witnessed an increase in new custody cases. Since 2020, the number of new custody cases filed in Montgomery County increased by 16%.

In 2023, there were over 4,000 new custody filings. In addition, we've observed a substantial rise in mental health issues impacting both parents and children. When you factor that into the overall contentiousness of custody cases, particularly those involving challenging issues such as school choice, vaccinations, housing instability and parental substance abuse, we are in desperate need of resources,"

Judges presiding over child custody cases are required to address sixteen (16) custody factors when awarding any form of custody. "The child's emotional needs, educational needs and stability appear at least 3 times each throughout these 16 factors; in addition to abuse and safety considerations. In cases with parents without counsel, and without any financial resources to retain a GAL, Judges are without any ability whatsoever to analyze these issues which require vital information from third parties. The



Court does not have the resources to solicit this input on its own. A CGAL can do all of that and assist us in satisfying what the legislature envisioned in the statute," Judge Clifford stated.

Sensitive to the concerns of some that a GAL may supplant the Judge's role, Judge Clifford stated, "That's not this program. The CGAL provides the vital information to the Judge. The Judge weighs the factors and the Judge makes the decision."

Relative to that goal, the CLE noted that GALs are authorized by Rule 1915.11-2 which was revised by the Supreme Court last year. GALs assist the Court with gathering information about the health and safety of the child's home, the child's academic progress, the child's emotional health, the parent's law enforcement records, and the availability and suitability of childcare.

GALs can also interview third parties, including medical and mental health professionals, teachers and counselors, social service agencies, and child protective service agencies, as well as the litigants and the child. At the conclusion of this information-gathering process, the GAL provides a written report, which can often assist the parties to achieve a resolution of the case without the necessity of further litigation.

At the CLE launch of the program, Family Law Section (FLS) Chair Liz Early remarked, "Having the insight of a neutral, child-focused professional is extremely valuable. We hope that this program will help us bring families out of the court system and encourage resolution with this access to an important resource." Judge Clifford recognized FLS Chair Early, Lisa Kane Brown, Christina DeMaueo and Kelley Fazzini in providing the Court with assistance in the implementation of the CGAL program as well as his former judicial law clerk, Mathew Gomez, in the preparation of the written budget proposal that was submitted and Court Clerk Chelsea Saylor for the forms.

Attorneys seeking to serve as a CGAL must complete an Application to Family Court Administrator, Cheryl Leslie, verifying the following information:

- Licensed and in good standing to practice law in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.
- Practiced family law for at least 2 years.
- Maintain professional liability insurance covering the duties of a GAL.
- Attended or viewed the CGAL training presented by the MBA.
- Obtained PA Child Abuse and Criminal background Clearances.
- Viewed the on-line mandated reporter training.

Given that this is a pilot program, CGALs will be asked to provide feedback to the Court, upon completing their assignment, to offer input and to assess the value of the program going forward.

# Pennsylvania Courts Represented at National Aging and Law Conference



(l to r) Karen Buck, Judge Lois Murphy, Judge Sheila Woods-Skipper



Judge **Lois Murphy** (Montgomery) and Administrative Judge **Sheila Woods-Skipper** (Philadelphia), the chair and vice chair of the Advisory Council on Elder Justice in the Courts, and Karen Buck, Esq., executive director of the SeniorLaw Center, presented at the National Aging and Law Conference.

The conference is hosted annually by the American Bar Association's Commission on Law and Aging.

Their presentation highlighted Pennsylvania's leading role nationally in guardianship reform and elder justice issues.

Highlights of the program included the development of the nationally recognized Guardianship Tracking System, the receipt of an Elder Justice Innovation Grant from the Administration for Community Living, recent efforts to improve due process and access to justice for older Pennsylvanians and monitoring of court-appointed guardians.

The panel also discussed the recent enactment of Act 61 of 2023, which requires appointment of counsel for all individuals facing a guardianship petition, certification of professional guardians, and specific findings of fact regarding whether there are adequate less restrictive alternatives to guardianship.

## Congratulations Are In Order!

**Laurie Besden**, executive director of Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers of Pennsylvania, Inc. (LCL PA) has successfully completed her interior firefighter training and is now certified by the state fire academy and is one of Hampden Township's newest interior firefighters.

Over four months, Laurie demonstrated incredible dedication balancing her work and academy schedule, not missing one Minor Judiciary Education Board class during the training.

Laurie dedicated 24-30 hours each week outside of her LCL PA work hours to complete her training, which included classes, lectures, skill training with fire gear, self-contained breathing apparatus and multiple written exams.

She has achieved something that attests to her courage and grit as she now joins the ranks of the few women in the country to become an interior firefighter.

Congratulations Laurie!



Laurie Besden

# Superior Court Visit to Historic Bedford County Courthouse

In June, President Judge **Travis Livengood** and the Bedford County Courts welcomed the Pennsylvania Superior Court to the historic Bedford County Courthouse.

This marks the first time the Pennsylvania Superior Court has visited Bedford County's Courthouse to see the impressive courtrooms and learn about the county courts' place in Pennsylvania and U.S. history.

"We are very proud of Bedford County's history and were pleased to welcome the Pennsylvania Superior Court into the courthouse – specifically to see our original Courtroom No. 1, which is still in fulltime use and one of the oldest courtrooms in Pennsylvania," said Bedford County President Judge Livengood.

"Our historic courthouse is Bedford County's most iconic building. It represents the historical beauty for which Bedford County is known, and it reflects our community's dedication to preserving our history while also innovating for the future. Over the last few years, we have added numerous



*President Judge Travis Livengood and President Judge Anne Lazarus*

security improvements while also protecting the historical nature of the courthouse."

Superior Court President Judge **Anne Lazarus** said, "Serving as a unique chance for judges at both the court of common pleas and appellate court level, the Superior Court welcomes opportunities like this to continue building relationships within the judiciary and across the state."

"President Judge Livengood graciously invited the Superior Court to visit one of our country's oldest courthouses, built in 1828, and we were thrilled to accept his invitation to learn more about the history of the courthouse."

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# Crawford County's Centralized Truancy Court Program Receives Innovation Award

The Pennsylvania Association of Court Management (PACM) has awarded Crawford County's Centralized Truancy Court program with the Innovation Award for their approach to addressing truancy issues within its jurisdiction.

The PACM Innovation Award recognizes a project, program or event that has had a perceivable impact in areas including case processing, case management, court security and access to justice.

This recognition underscores the importance of community collaboration and innovative problem solving in addressing complex issues such as truancy. The Crawford County's Truancy Court Attendance Program (TCAP) is structured to provide uniform and comprehensive enforcement, together with support to students and their families to address the root causes of truancy and ensure that every child has the opportunity to succeed academically.

Crawford County Magisterial District Judge **Adam Stallard**, Esq., handles all truancy citations, with access to an array of services. The creation of TCAP was a collaborative effort among Crawford County's court leadership and administration, magisterial

district judges, school district superintendents, juvenile probation department and children's services.

"I am very thankful for the committed effort of our participants, all of whom have made our program a success. On behalf of everyone involved, I express our gratitude in becoming recipients of the Innovation Award," said Crawford County President Judge **John Spataro**.

Truancy occurs when a school-age student accrues unexcused absences, regardless of whether they occur separately or happen all at one time. Truancy has been linked to poor academics, and serious delinquency, which can lead to a greater chance of incarceration, drug and alcohol use, poorer health outcomes and lower paying jobs.

The goals of resolving truancy matters are to deter further attendance issues, address the root cause of the problem and ultimately help the student create a habit of attending school.

To learn more about truancy, a [detailed one pager](#) is available on the courts' civics education [toolkit](#).

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## Erie County Courthouse Hosts Solar Eclipse

This past spring, Erie County played host to a monumental event—the total solar eclipse on April 8. The county was inundated with an estimated 100,000 visitors, leading to full occupancy in local hotels and a record-breaking weekend for many businesses.

The experience of witnessing the eclipse firsthand was nothing short of spectacular, exceeding expectations and leaving a lasting impression on all who were able to witness it.

The success of the event can be attributed to the exceptional planning and coordination by all community stakeholders. Thanks to their efforts, the eclipse



*Photo by Alexis Cantando Adams*

viewing went off seamlessly, with minimal to no issues. This feat is a testament to the collaborative spirit of Erie County, where private and public sector groups united with a common goal and achieved remarkable results.

"I am thankful to be a part of the planning and proud of such a significant event," said District

Court Administrator **Robert Catalde**. "It was a showcase of what the Erie area has to offer, and I am excited about the feedback we've received on how many visitors plan on returning."

The total solar eclipse was not just a celestial marvel; it was a testament to Erie County's ability to host and organize large-scale events successfully. As the region looks ahead, it does so with optimism, knowing that it has left a lasting impression on all who visited and that it has set the stage for future successes in tourism and event planning.



*The AOPC welcomed its new class of court administrators in May 2024.*

## AOPC Welcomes New Class of Court Administrators

By **Rick Pierce**, Judicial Programs Administrator

The Judicial District Operations and Programs department at AOPC recently completed the 21st session of the New Court Administrator Orientation program for 14 recently hired district court administrators and deputy administrators.

The administrators represented 11 judicial districts ranging from one of the largest in Allegheny, to one of the smallest in Elk/Cameron. The department's annual production of this program takes place virtually and in-person over a four week span every spring.

At the outset, we focus on the individual and the leadership role each administrator plays throughout their tenure in a county court. Relationship cultivation and growth, essential to the success of any leader, is the foundational element inherent in all of the objectives of this program. Attendees learn of the vital connection they must have with their president judge and that all relations radiate outward from that particular bond.

Building upon that relationship, administrators branch out and connect with justice partners such as record keepers (Clerks of Court, Prothonotaries, Clerks of

Orphan's Court), bar association and state court administration. Administrators must expand their sphere of influence to include court stakeholders such as local funding authorities who provide vital resources necessary for courts to adequately serve fair and accessible justice for all.

In addition to caseload management, the heart of court administration, other areas that administrators must become knowledgeable in include fiscal administration, data collection and statistical research, jury management, court security, language and court access, facilities and addressing the needs of our limited jurisdiction courts.

The program concludes with the spotlight returning to the individual and the importance of connecting with each person who comes through the courthouse doors such as litigants, jurors, witnesses or employees.

This highly successful program remains a staple for this department in establishing a forum for new court leaders to learn.





## Superior Court Central Legal Staff Holds Conference

The Superior Court Central Legal Staff (CLS) attended a two-day conference at the PJC with 25 of their CLS colleagues from across the state.

Attendees had the chance to meet their teams from Philadelphia, Harrisburg and Pittsburgh – and interact with some of the Superior Court judges including President Judge **Anne Lazarus**. Some of the sessions offered focused on best practice sharing, policy review and CLE credits.

“It was wonderful to have staff be able to meet in person. Zoom is great, but there is nothing like the give and take between people meeting together. I thank all of the staff that were involved in planning and executing the meeting. I know it was well received and I look forward to an encore,” said President Judge Lazarus.

CLS is an office of the Superior Court that reviews and processes motions, screens cases, prepares memos, reviews proposed decisions for potential conflicts for the Court and accepts other responsibilities assigned by the Court.

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## NCSC Releases Court Explainer Video Series



The National Center for State Courts (NCSC) recently released an explainer video series to help communities feel more confident when dealing with the court system.

This series intends to break down legal terminology and supply information about court process, which will help prepare litigants for hearings.

To watch or download the videos, visit the [NCSC website](#).



# Crawford County District Court Administrator Elected as New PACM President

At a June meeting of the Pennsylvania Association of Court Management (PACM), Crawford County District Court Administrator **Heidi Shiderly** was installed as president of the statewide organization.

Shiderly was sworn in by Crawford County President Judge **John F. Spataro**. She will serve as president through May 2025, while continuing her service as district court administrator for Crawford County, a position she has held for eight years.

"I am humbled to be elected to this position," Shiderly said. "It is such an honor to be recognized by my peers and colleagues throughout the state."

Shiderly hopes to develop new ways to educate fellow court managers and administrators, improve job performance and hold meaningful conferences.

"The main focus of this association is education and a central theme this year will be looking at how we, as court managers, can be 'all in' as leaders."

Shiderly was a law clerk in Crawford County for 12 years, serving President Judges Gordon R. Miller and Anthony J. Vadaro, before becoming the first deputy court administrator in October of 2010 and then district court administrator in March 2016.



*Heidi Shiderly*

Established in 1989, PACM, a nonprofit, assists in providing education and training to advance and promote professionalism in the Pennsylvania Courts, creating opportunities for members to learn and grow as court professionals. The group comprises court professionals who develop and implement effective court management techniques, policies and standards to improve the efficient and effective administration of justice.

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## Supreme Court of Pennsylvania

*Debra Todd*

Chief Justice of Pennsylvania

*Christine Donohue*

Justice

*Kevin M. Dougherty*

Justice

*David N. Wecht*

Justice

*Sallie Updyke Mundy*

Justice

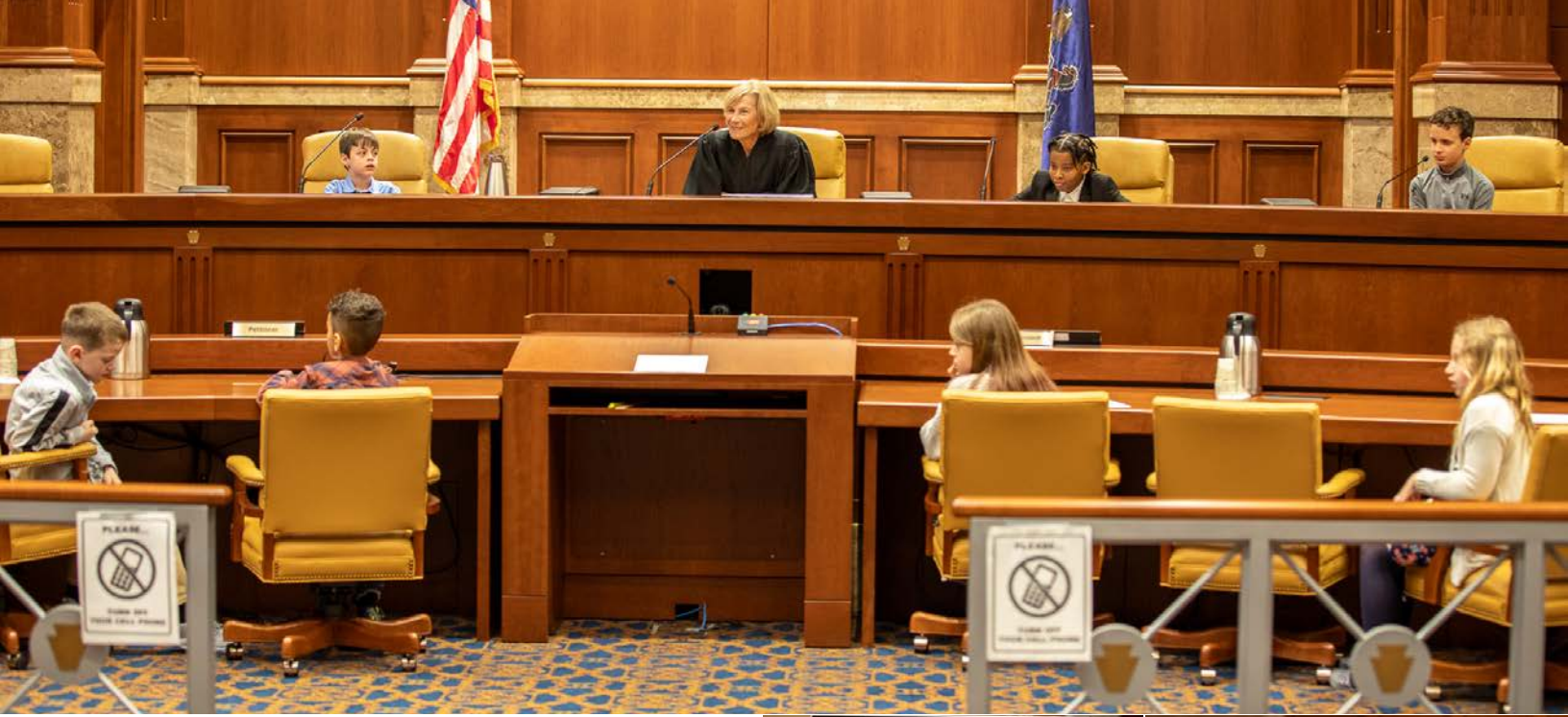
*P. Kevin Brobson*

Justice

*Daniel D. McCaffery*

Justice





## Pennsylvania Courts Hold Second Annual Take Your Child to Work Day Event

Focused on the importance of the Pennsylvania Judiciary in civics education, the Pennsylvania Courts held their second annual Take Your Child to Work Day event in April, inviting staff to bring their children to work to learn about the function and the role of the state court system.

“Investing in our future through knowledge and experience, the Pennsylvania Courts are once again opening our doors to the next generation,” said Pennsylvania Supreme Court Chief Justice **Debra Todd**.

“By bringing children into the heart of our judicial system, we empower them to understand the significance of justice and inspire the leaders of tomorrow. Together, we build a legacy of civic engagement and legal excellence, shaping a brighter future for all Pennsylvanians.”

Nearly 60 children and their parents joined judges and staff for the half-day program to learn about the key role the judiciary plays in the lives of those serving and seeking access to justice.

This year, children had the opportunity to experience different parts of the judicial system first-hand – including participating in mock trials and discussions with judges, demonstrations from Capitol Police, as well as meeting courthouse facility dogs and other fun activities throughout the day.





# Back to School: Traffic citations in school zones

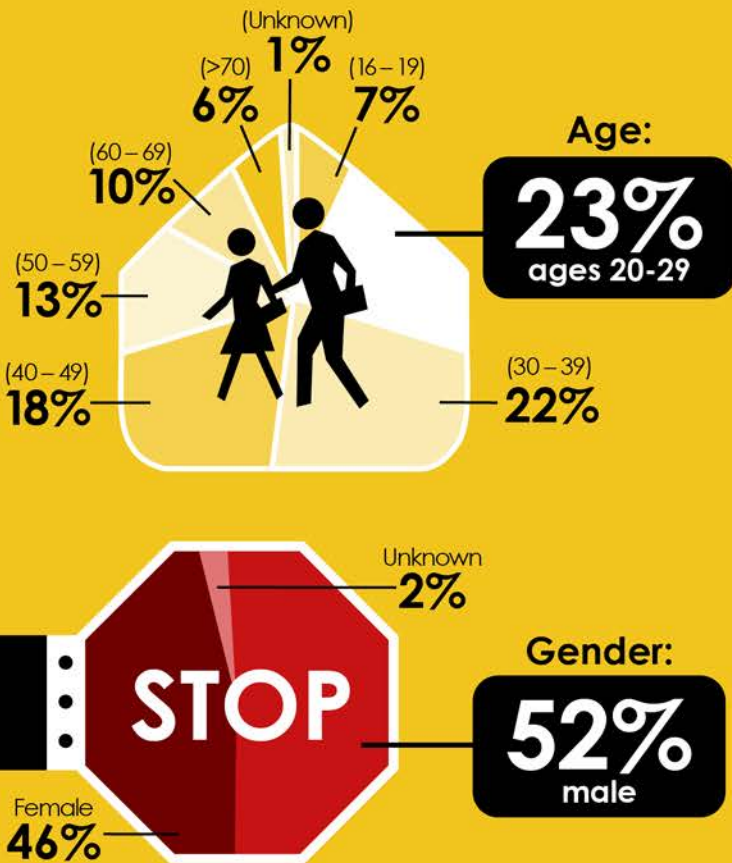
## Overtaking or passing a school bus (Title 75 section 3345)

Drivers of a vehicle shall stop at least 10 feet before reaching the school bus when the red signal lights are flashing and the side stop signal arms are activated.

## Speeding in a school zone (Title 75 section 3365)

When passing through a school zone, no person shall drive a vehicle at a greater speed than 15 miles per hour.

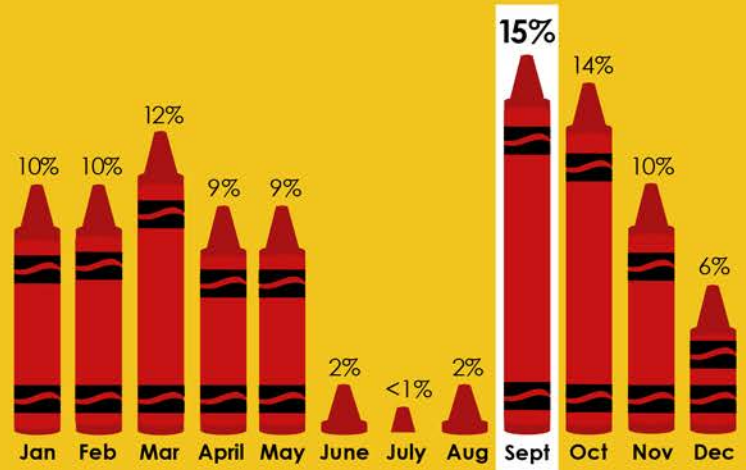
## Demographics of those cited for both violations:



## PA driver citations (2019-2023):



## School zone and bus citations by month:



## Counties with the highest driver citations:

### Speeding in a school zone



### Meeting/overtaking a school bus:



\*Data as recorded in the Magisterial District Judge System and Philadelphia Municipal Court Traffic Division eTIMS System between 1/1/2019 - 12/31/2023 under Title 75 sections 3345 and 3365.



# Around the Judiciary



In July, Chief Justice of Pennsylvania **Debra Todd** released the 2024 official Supreme Court photo. The new photograph, featuring all seven justices of the Court, was taken by Pittsburgh-based photographer Jen Barker Worley in the Supreme Court Courtroom in Pittsburgh.



Chief Justice **Debra Todd** had a great time participating in Allegheny County Courts' Take Your Child to Work Day in April.



Pennsylvania Judicial Center in Harrisburg had the opportunity to be trained in CPR in early spring.



In mid-August, Justice **Kevin M. Dougherty** traveled to Westmoreland County to help unveil a new courthouse waiting room for trauma victims and their families.



**Laurie Besden**, executive director of Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers of Pennsylvania, Inc. (LCL PA), with the Pennsylvania Bar Association (PBA) President's Award that LCL PA received for their dedication and commitment to fulfilling their mission. She accepted the award on May 10 at PBA's Annual Conference in Hershey.



Front row (l to r): Hon. Kay Yu, Vanessa Garrett Harley, Esq., Hon. Stephanie Domitrovich, Sam Milkes, Esq., Colleen Coonelly, Esq. Back row (l to r): Sharon Lopez, Esq., David Fine, Esq., Joe Price, Esq. Not pictured: Ken Argentieri, Esq.

The IOLTA Board finalized their 2024-2025 grant recommendations for the Supreme Court's review at their meeting in early spring. The IOLTA Board's mission is to support the delivery of civil legal aid to low-income Pennsylvanians across the Commonwealth. For more information about the Board and their grant recipients, please visit [www.paiolta.org](http://www.paiolta.org).



(l) Judge Timika Lane (r) Judge Tiffany Palmer

Superior Court Judge **Timika Lane** and Philadelphia County Common Pleas Judge **Tiffany Palmer** were honored by Rutgers Law School Minority Student Program, Women's Law Caucus and the Rutgers Law Alumnae Network alongside state and federal judges from New Jersey during a special ceremony in early spring.





Supreme Court Justice **Daniel McCaffery** attended the Pennsylvania Sheriff's Association in July where he swore in Montgomery County Sherriff Sean Kilkenny as the new president.



(l to r) Judge Steven Irwin, Judge Carolyn Nichols, President Judge Daniel Baranoski, Judge Jill Rangos, Judge Thomas Flaherty and Judge Jacob Corman (Not pictured: Judges Sonya Tilghman and Charles Becker)

Judges on the Court of Judicial Discipline pictured at the Trial Judges Conference in Hershey in July. Bucks County Magisterial District Judge **Daniel Baranoski** was elected as president judge of the court, replacing Ronald Marsico.



Chief Justice **Debra Todd** spoke as Clinton County Treatment Courts celebrated their 10th anniversary in July. Thank you to the dedicated judges, staff and community partners for transforming lives and strengthening your community!



(l to r) Judge Tarah Toohil, Judge Daniel Clifford, Rep. Tim Briggs (Chairman of House Judiciary Committee)

Luzerne County Common Pleas Judge **Tarah Toohil** and Montgomery County Common Pleas Judge **Daniel Clifford** testified before the House Judiciary Committee on House Bill 2018, legislation that would refresh and streamline the statutory custody factors.



IT Development Manager **Soumya Krishnamurthi** was recently recognized as one of Central Penn Business Journal's 2024 Women of Influence. Women of Influence Awards honor high-achieving women for their career accomplishments, and honorees are selected based on their professional experience, community involvement and a commitment to mentoring. Congratulations Soumya!

Franklin County President Judge **Shawn Meyers** presiding over a naturalization ceremony in June.

