

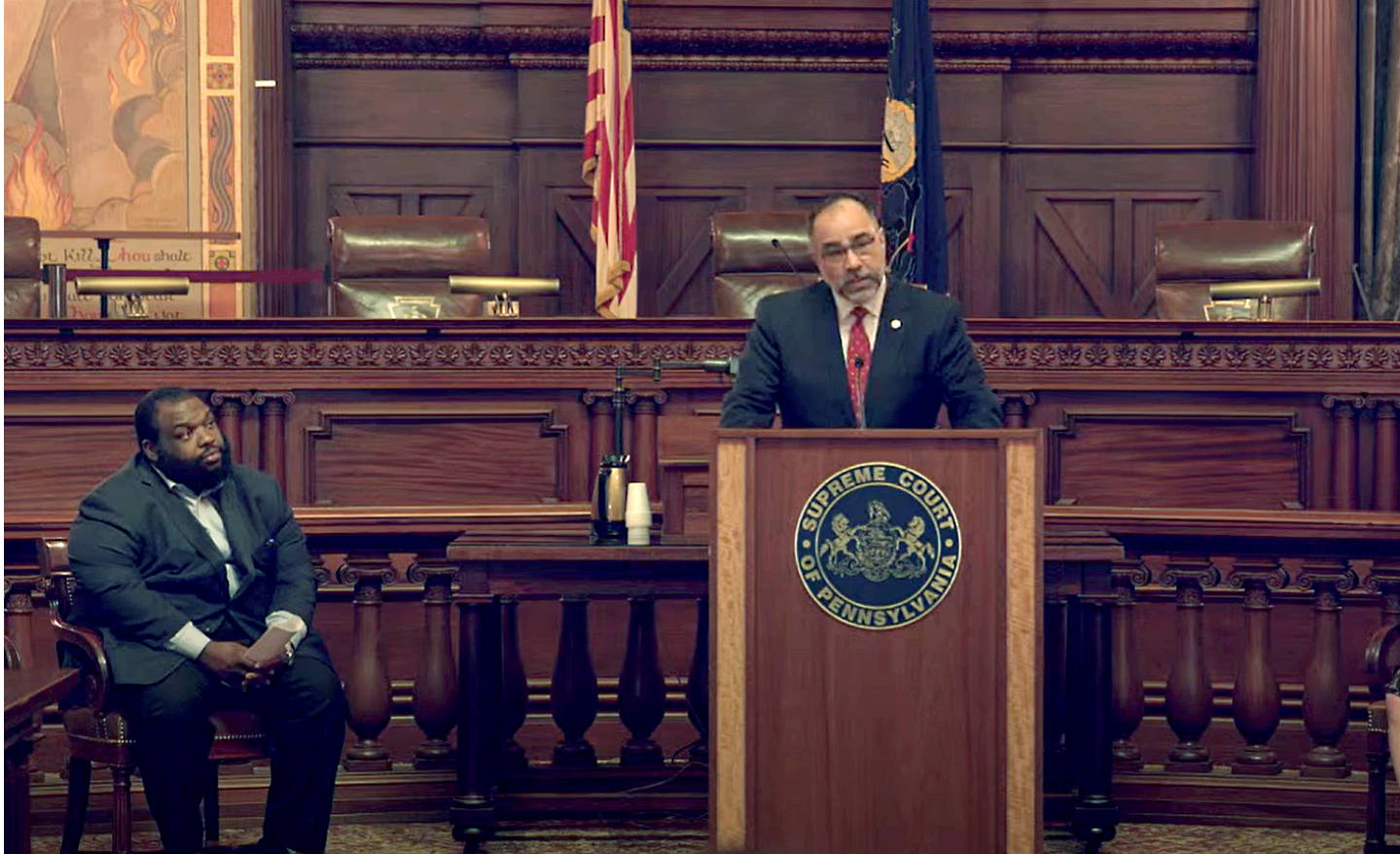
AOPC^{ON}NECTED



Issue 2, 2025

In this issue

In this issue, read about recent court activity and recognitions, a new statewide contest series for students, a newly-launched juror support program in Philadelphia, as well as other county court highlights.



PA Courts Celebrate National Treatment Court Month; Announce New Certification Program

Recognizing May as National Treatment Court Month, the Pennsylvania Courts recently joined with legislators, community partners, treatment court professionals and treatment court program staff and participants from across Pennsylvania to celebrate the success of Pennsylvania's treatment court program.

Standing inside the Supreme Court Courtroom, Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice **P. Kevin Brobson**, on behalf of the courts, noted that "treatment courts are built on a simple, yet powerful idea – that we cannot incarcerate our way out of addiction, mental illness or trauma."

"These courts are a critical part of the judicial system, and recognize that for many people, the underlying criminal intent is inextricably intertwined with other challenges, all which call for both accountability and treatment."

"By combining accountability with compassion, treatment courts are changing and saving lives while strengthening communities in the process."

To further support Pennsylvania's treatment court programs and participants, Justice Brobson also announced the launch of a certification program for treatment courts statewide.

"As a sign of our continued commitment to these critical programs, Pennsylvania is embarking on a certification process for its treatment courts – one that will promote effective, evidence-based practices, ensure consistent, high-quality services are available to participants which will in turn, increase positive outcomes," Brobson said.

"Certification is yet another way for the courts to further invest in the success of these programs and the futures of our participants."

Currently more than 137 treatment courts are operational across the state, assisting those with substance use disorders, mental health disorders and co-occurring disorders in maintaining a recovery-oriented lifestyle, thereby increasing recovery capital in their communities.

Watch the full press conference [here](#).

Justice Christine Donohue Receives 2025 Anne X. Alpern Award

On May 7, Pa. Supreme Court Justice **Christine Donohue** was presented with the 2025 Anne X. Alpern Award by the Pennsylvania Bar Association's (PBA) Commission on Women in the Profession.

The Anne X. Alpern Award is presented annually to a female lawyer or judge of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania who demonstrates excellence in the legal profession and who makes a significant professional impact on women in the law.

"Justice Donohue has been described as a fierce advocate for women in the legal profession and as one who uses her voice in support of other women, never being shy about expressing her perspective. She is known for her intellect and talent

analyzing cases," said Lisa M. Benzie, executive director of the PA Association for Justice. "Her accomplishments remind us that the journey of women in the legal profession is one of perseverance and hard-fought progress. By celebrating her leadership and impact on women in the profession, Justice Donohue demonstrates that success is possible despite obstacles, barriers are meant to be broken and dreams chased."

"I am honored to be recognized with the PBA's Anne X. Alpern Award," Justice Donohue said. "Anne Alpern was a pioneer – a woman who broke barriers to pave the way for generations of female jurists and by her very nature, forged a path for women to succeed in this profession.



She is a testament to what can be achieved when you persevere and are determined to flourish, especially at a time when women, in any profession, were an oddity. She has been a role model for every generation of women who followed, and I am honored to receive this award named for her"

Free Backpack Program: A Resource for Judges Supporting Adoptive Families

Adoption is a profound journey that requires ongoing support. Recognizing this, the Jockey Being Family Foundation's Backpack Program helps provide comfort and connection to newly adoptive families as they embark on this life-changing path.

Available to judges, as well as adoption agencies and nonprofit partners, this program helps ensure that these families receive early assistance.

At the heart of this program is a simple yet impactful gesture: a free backpack personalized with the adopted child's initials. Inside, the child will find a cozy blanket and a teddy bear—



which, for some, may be their first personal belongings in their new home.

Adoptive parents also receive a resource-filled tote with educational materials, expert guidance and free access to

webinars and online courses, equipping them with tools to navigate adoption challenges, strengthen relationships and support their family's growth.

Through this program, judges and other key professionals help smooth the adoption journey—one backpack, one child and one family at a time.

Judges play a crucial role in the adoption process, and by engaging with this program, they can extend their support beyond the courtroom.

more information

visit <https://backpacks.jockeybeingfamily.com/backpack-program/>



Pennsylvania Courts Hold Second Guardianship Summit

Recognizing the need for continued guardianship reform, the Pennsylvania Courts held the second Pennsylvania Guardianship Justice Summit in May, focused on bringing together leaders from across the state to explore the use of alternatives to guardianship and expand access to justice.

"Guardianship carries profound responsibility, and our courts must lead in ensuring it is exercised with the utmost care, compassion and respect for individual rights," said Chief Justice of Pennsylvania **Debra Todd**. "This Summit provides a critical forum for collaboration, education and innovation as we work together to strengthen guardianship practices, promote alternatives to guardianship whenever possible and ensure access to justice for all Pennsylvanians."

Summit topics included national and state level perspectives on guardianship reform, alternatives to guardianship, elder abuse and financial exploitation, guardianship monitoring, advance planning and more. The sessions and subsequent discussions promoted collaboration across counties, agencies and professions to address issues facing older adults and persons with a disability who may need a guardian.

Attendees and speakers included Chief Justice of Pennsylvania Debra Todd, Court Administrator **Andrea Tuominen** and Secretary of Aging Jason Kavulich, along with judges, district court administrators, court staff, attorneys, professional guardians, doctors, advocates and representatives from the Pennsylvania Department of Aging and Department of Human Services, Pennsylvania Office of Attorney General, Adult Protective Services, financial institutions, medical facilities and other elder justice experts.

Sessions were recorded and will be made available on the [PA Courts website](#) after the event.

The Summit was hosted by the Office of Elder Justice in the Courts (OEJC) and Advisory Council on Elder Justice in the Courts and is funded through a grant awarded to the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts by the federal Administration on Community Living. The Summit is one of several grant projects supporting three overarching goals: (1) assuring due process for alleged incapacitated persons; (2) improving guardianship monitoring capabilities to prevent abuse and exploitation; and (3) promoting alternatives to guardianship.

"This article is 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 \$2,121,598.64 with 75% funded by ACL/HHS and \$530,399.66, 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."

Judge Michael Flannelly Elected as York County's Next President Judge

York County Court of Common Pleas Judge **Michael Flannelly** was recently elected by his colleagues to serve as the next president judge, succeeding President Judge Maria Musti-Cook. His term will begin in January 2026.

"I am deeply honored by the trust my colleagues have placed in me," Judge Flannelly said. "I look forward to continuing to serve the people of York County and to supporting our court's mission of delivering fair, timely, and compassionate justice."

Judge Flannelly brings to the role over a decade of judicial experience, as well as decades of public service and legal leadership. He was first appointed to the York County Court of Common Pleas in 2012 by then-Governor Tom Corbett and served until 2014. He was later



Judge Michael Flannelly

elected to a full 10-year term in 2015 and returned to the bench in January 2016, where he has served continuously since.

He currently serves as the Administrative Judge of the Family Division, where he has dedicated his entire judicial career to matters involving family law. He also presides over the county's Juvenile Wellness Court and Veterans Wellness Court.

Prior to becoming a judge, Judge Flannelly served as York County Solicitor for approximately 10 years. Prior to serving as Solicitor, Judge Flannelly was a civil litigator.

New Assistant Director of Finance

In May, the AOPC welcomed new Assistant Director of Finance **Darla Eager**. Darla brings with her over 20 years of experience in accounting and financial analysis, with the past eight years dedicated to supporting senior living communities through her work with large non-profit organizations.

Most recently, she has served in roles as assistant controller and director of finance, where she provided financial leadership for nursing communities across Pennsylvania. In both roles, Darla was responsible for managing budgeting, cost reporting, audits, procurement systems and financial operations.

Prior to those roles, she had spent nearly a decade in public accounting.

Darla lives in Mechanicsburg, PA, with her husband of 21 years, their



Darla Eager

three children and two dogs. In her free time, she enjoys family gatherings, cooking and baking, playing pickleball and taking on home improvement projects.

She is also a dedicated community volunteer. For the past 20 years, she has served as treasurer of the GLY Foundation, a volunteer-run non-profit that raises funds and awareness for cancer treatment initiatives in central Pennsylvania.

Please join us in giving Darla a warm welcome to the AOPC!

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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



by Damian J. Wachter, Esq.

Legislative Roundup

The governor presented his 2025-26 budget proposal to a joint session of the General Assembly on Feb. 4. Proposed funding for the judiciary reflected the entirety of the judicial budget as submitted to the governor. Justices Christine Donohue and Kevin Brobson, along with Court Administrator Andrea Tuominen, appeared before the House Appropriations Committee on Feb. 26 to present and answer questions on the judicial budget.

The 2025-26 judicial budget request reflects a seven percent increase in state funding and relies on \$57.9 million in Act 49 augmenting revenue. Additionally, the judiciary is seeking the reauthorization of Act 49, which expires on July 31. Meetings with legislative and executive leadership commenced in May and June. Legislative vehicles for the General Appropriations Act – [House Bill 1330](#) and [Senate Bill 160](#) – have started to move through the chambers. One will ultimately serve as the bill that will be sent to the governor incorporating the final agreement.

Judicial Vacancies

Currently two appellate, 35 common pleas, four municipal, and 14 magisterial district vacancies exist. Whether a spring vacancy package will materialize is unknown at this time. If so, it will be at the discretion of the governor and the Senate, would focus on current vacancies and likely those seats where candidates wrapped up both tickets in the municipal primary.

Treatment Courts

[Senate Bill 475](#) – amends Title 42, replacing all statutory references to “problem solving courts” with “treatment courts.” It passed the Senate 49-0, was reported from House Judiciary 26-0 and is currently pending further House action.

Streamlining the Custody Factors

[House Bill 378](#) – amends Title 23, consolidating and updating the factors by which courts determine the best interest of the child in custody cases and requiring that courts provide a copy of the custody factor section of law to all parties named in the complaint or petition. It passed the House 202-1 and was referred to Senate Judiciary.

Election Code

[House Bill 771](#) and [House Bill 1396](#) – amend the Election Code to, respectively, provide for voter-ID requirements, and increase election official

compensation, update drop box requirements, require logic and accuracy testing for election systems and post-election ballot audits, provide for in-person early voting, update absentee and mail in ballot provisions, and allow pre-canvassing. House Bill 771 was reported from House State Government 14-12 and is currently pending further House action; House Bill 1396 passed the House 102-101 and referred to Senate State Government.

Civil Suits for Childhood Sexual Abuse

[House Bill 462](#) and [House Bill 464](#) – respectively, amend Title 42 and Article 1, Section 2 of the constitution, creating a two-year window in which to bring a civil suit alleging childhood sexual abuse, notwithstanding any other statute of limitation. The Title 42 legislation clarifies that waivers of sovereign/governmental immunity for civil actions alleging sexual abuse of a minor apply both prospectively and retroactively to any causes of action that arose prior to the effective date of the bill. The statutory amendment vests the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania with extraordinary jurisdiction to hear challenges or render declaratory judgment as to the constitutionality of the bill. The bills were reported from House Judiciary 15-11 and are pending further House action.

Concurrent Jurisdiction – Military Bases

[House Bill 491](#) – amends Title 42, providing for concurrent jurisdiction with federal courts for proceedings under the Juvenile Act for violations of federal law committed by a child on a U.S. military installation if the federal court or other authorized official waives exclusive jurisdiction and the violation is also a crime under state law. It passed the House 203-0 and was referred to Senate Judiciary.

Tenant Clean Slate

[House Bill 1095](#) – amends Title 42, prohibiting a court or the AOPC from disseminating or posting eviction files subject to an order for limited access – eviction case information must be placed under limited access after seven years have elapsed since the filing of the eviction case. It was reported from House Judiciary 23-3 and pending further House action.

Marijuana Legalization

[House Bill 1200](#) – a standalone act, providing for the legalization and regulation of adult-use cannabis. The legislation includes comprehensive chapters

governing, and establishing significant provisions applying to, cannabis convictions and expungements, including:

Vacating all cannabis convictions and sentences for which there was no mandatory minimum imposed prior to the effective date, notwithstanding contrary laws, regulations or court orders.

Requiring credit for time served for vacated cannabis convictions toward another sentence under the same OTN by the same court.

Reallocating fines previously paid to counties for vacated cannabis convictions to other outstanding fines in the same county.

Nullifying remaining unpaid financial obligations connected to vacated cannabis convictions.

Allowing individuals to file petitions to update, correct or expunge records if they believe that their criminal history is inaccurate or contains incomplete information and requiring AOPC to create a free, online petition for this purpose and prohibiting the assessing of any fees.

The bill passed the House 102-101, but was defeated in Senate Law and Justice 7-3.

Tik Tok Ban

[Senate Bill 376](#) – amends Title 71, prohibiting individuals from downloading or installing an unauthorized application on a state-owned electronic device, or accessing an unauthorized application on a state wireless network. The term unauthorized application is defined as “the social networking service TikTok or any successor application or service.” The bill passed the Senate 49-0 and was referred to the House Communications and Technology Committee.



*{Damian Wachter, Esq.
is the director of
Legislative Affairs.}*

Pennsylvania Courts Announce New Statewide Contests for Students

The Supreme Court of Pennsylvania Historical Commission recently launched a statewide initiative aimed at engaging students in grades K-12 through creative educational activities highlighting the importance of the judicial branch of government.

"By inviting young people to explore the courts through their own voices and talents, we're helping them build a deeper understanding of the justice system and inspiring the next generation of informed, active citizens and leaders," said Pa. Supreme Court Justice **Sallie Updyke Mundy**, chair of the Historical Commission. "Our goal is to make civics education accessible, engaging and empowering for all Pennsylvania students."

The Courtroom to Classroom initiative is made up of a dynamic series of contests and interactive projects that include the following:

- **Drawing Contest** (Grades K-5) – Students are invited to illustrate what justice means to them. Whether it's judges, courtrooms or symbols of justice, students are encouraged to let their imaginations soar and show what justice means to them – through art.
- **Essay Contest** – Students are invited to submit a 1-page essay responding to one of the following prompts:
 - (Grades 3-5) – Imagine you are a Justice on the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. What would your day be like, and what kinds of cases might you hear?
 - (Grades 6-12) – How do decisions made by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court impact your community, school or family life?
- **Infographic Contest** (Grades 6-12) – Students can combine research and design to create an engaging infographic that explains the structure and role of the judicial branch, focusing on how it interprets laws and ensures justice.

- **Video Activity** (Grades K-12) – Students are invited to produce short videos responding to one of the following prompts:
 - *What do you think judges do?*
 - *Do you think you would make a good judge?*
 - *Why do we need judges?*
- **Flat Judge Project** (Grades K-5) – Inspired by the "Flat Stanley" concept, this activity invites students to decorate a paper judge and take it on real or imagined adventures to learn more about the courts and the work judges do.
- **Social Media Activity** (Grades 6-12) – Students are invited to create a dynamic social media campaign focused on educating their peers and the public about the judicial branch using engaging posts and/or videos.

Submissions will be accepted on a rolling basis, and winners may receive an official certificate of recognition from the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania. To learn more, visit www.pacourts.us/civics-ed.

FOR CONTEST DETAILS & RESOURCES,
VISIT PACOURTS.US/CIVICS-ED

HOW TO ENTER:

Students can participate in any of the contests by submitting their work in one of the following ways:

- **Online:** Tag @PACourts on X or @pennsylvaniacourts on Instagram
- **By Email:**
communicationsoffice@pacourts.us
- **By Mail:**
AOPC Communications
601 Commonwealth Avenue
Harrisburg, PA 17120



**COURTROOM TO CLASSROOM
STUDENT CONTESTS
PENNSYLVANIA COURTS**

**WINNERS TO BE RECOGNIZED
BY THE PA SUPREME COURT**



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Philadelphia Courts Launch Program to Support Jurors' Mental Health



In a new initiative aimed at supporting jurors who may experience emotional stress after serving, the Philadelphia court system has partnered with West Chester University to provide post-service mental health resources.

As part of the program, jurors will be informed at the conclusion of each trial about the availability of professional support through West Chester University's Community Mental Health Services – a training clinic located on the university's campus.

Although many jurors complete a trial without lasting effects, some may experience vicarious trauma due to exposure to disturbing evidence and testimony.

Administrative Judge of the Trial Division **Daniel Anders** echoed that sentiment, acknowledging the emotional burden that jury service can carry.

"Serving on a jury is a vital civic duty that helps maintain the integrity of our justice system," Judge Anders said. "But it can also be mentally and emotionally taxing. We want jurors to know that if they're feeling overwhelmed or distressed, support is available."

The new support service officially launched in April and is now available to all jurors serving in Philadelphia courtrooms.

Pennsylvania Continuing Legal Education Board Receives National Recognition



The Pennsylvania Continuing Legal Education (PA CLE) Board has received national recognition in the recently published *Journal of Legal Education*, which featured the Board's 2023 symposium on Continuing Legal Education and the Professional Legal Education of Lawyers.

The *Journal of Legal Education* is published by the Association of American Law Schools and is the journal of record for the American legal academy.

"Magic happens when the practicing bar, legal educators and regulators work together to improve and align CLE offerings with attorneys' needs and

interests as adult professional learners," said PA CLE Board Chair and symposium organizer, Tuan Samahon.

"Beyond improving the existing ways of approaching continuing legal education, the symposium also served as an opportunity to think about changes in the ways CLE can be delivered to promote attorney engagement and learning," Samahon added.

"I am hopeful these articles will serve as a springboard for legal educators and regulators across the country reconsidering how to advance the educational objectives of MCLE."

The symposium resulted from the Board's close collaboration with the *Journal*, Villanova University Charles Widger School of Law and the David F. and Constance B. Girard-diCarlo Center for Ethics, Integrity and Compliance.

Symposium speakers included legal educators, mandatory CLE regulators, course providers, members of the bench and bar and experts in foreign and medical professional educational accreditation.

All the published articles on improving CLE are available online to the public and CLE providers for free download [here](#).

Pa Supreme Court Historical Commission Hosts Students for Mock Trial Event



Focused on the importance of the intersection of civics education and the judiciary, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court Historical Commission invited a group of Philadelphia students into the courtroom for hands-on, legal experience during a mock trial event.

Organized in partnership with the Rendell Center for Civics and Civics Engagement, students from St. Mary's Interparochial School took part in a mock courtroom event designed to provide them with a practical understanding of courtroom procedures and legal reasoning.

"Today's mock trial gives students first-hand experience in how the judicial system works," said Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice Sallie Mundy.

"This kind of event helps make civics real for students. Instead of reading about the courts in a textbook, students stepped into courtroom roles and learned how our legal system works from the inside, helping them to turn abstract ideas into real decisions."

During the event, participants played key courtroom roles – including attorneys, witnesses, judges and jurors – while presenting a fictional case before a panel of local legal professionals including Justice **Kevin Dougherty** and Justice **Daniel McCaffery**. The experience allowed students to build critical thinking, public speaking and teamwork skills, while learning about due process and the rule of law.



Pennsylvania Courts Hold Third Annual Take Your Child to Work Day

On May 14, the Pennsylvania Courts held their third annual Take Your Child to Work Day event, inviting staff to bring their children to work to learn about the function and the role of the state court system.

Nearly 70 children and their parents joined us for the half-day program to learn about the key role the judiciary plays in the lives of Pennsylvania families.

This year, children had the opportunity to be recognized by the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania before the Court was set to start their oral argument session. Kids also got to experience different parts of the judicial system first-hand – including meeting the people who keep the judiciary running on a day-to-day basis, demonstrations from Capitol Police and the Cumberland County Sheriff's department. They also engaged in activities led by the AOPC's Human Resources department and Office of Elder Justice in the Courts.



Protection for Victim-Survivors of Sexual Violence

By: **Jamie Pizzi**, STOP Grant consultant

In recognition of Sexual Assault Awareness Month, the AOPC STOP Violence Against Women Grant Program hosted the live webinar, *Understanding Protection Orders under the Pennsylvania Victims of Sexual Violence or Intimidation Act*, on April 29.


The training was provided by Andrea Levy, JD, legal director at Pennsylvania Coalition to Advocate Respect (PCAR) and Robbin McMillon, legal advocate at Passages Inc.

In 2015, Pennsylvania enacted the Protection of Victims of Sexual Violence or Intimidation Act (PSVI) which provides a civil remedy for victim-survivors who may not qualify for a Protection From Abuse Order (PFA) and/or may not necessarily feel comfortable reporting abuse to law enforcement. While sexual violence is unfortunately common, it is rarely reported. In fact, according to the PA State Police Uniform Crime Reporting System, the 2022 offense count for rape reached approximately 3,500. However, during that same period PCAR rape crisis centers provided services to approximately 28,753 persons.

The Continuing Judicial Education and Continuing Legal Education credit-eligible training provided attendees with general information about Sexual Violence Protection Orders (SPVO) and Protection from Intimidation Orders, including how they work and how to determine which type of relief is appropriate. The presenters used Pennsylvania case studies and fact patterns to provide on-the-ground context, ensuring attendees understood the particular requirements of each order.



You are not alone.
Sexual Violence Protection Orders are available. No police report required.
[LEARN MORE AND GET HELP](#)



Help is available.
Parents can obtain a Sexual Violence Protection Order for their children. No police report required.
[LEARN MORE AND GET HELP](#)



You have options.
Sexual Violence Protection Orders are available. No police report required.
[LEARN MORE AND GET HELP](#)



You don't have to live in fear.
Sexual Violence Protection Orders are available. No police report required.
[LEARN MORE AND GET HELP](#)

The training also explained the differences and similarities between the PA Victims of Sexual Violence or Intimidation statute and the better-known PFA statute. The primary distinction lies in the relationship between the abuser and the victim-survivor. While PFAs require an intimate or household relationship between the two parties, a SVPO does not and is available to victim-survivors of sexual violence who are at continued risk of harm from their perpetrator.

Attendees also learned about recent case law in Pennsylvania which provided insight into how Sexual Violence Protection and Protection from Intimidation Orders can be used to protect victim-survivors in the commonwealth. The presenters closed out the training with a brief overview of trauma and its impact, highlighting how extremely common it is for

victim-survivors of sexual violence to wait long periods of time to report abuse.

A recording of the training can be found [here](#). [Subscribe to the STOP Program's monthly newsletter](#) to stay up to date with their next training opportunity.

Working with the STOP Grant team, AOPC Communications developed and launched a digital ad campaign in April to help inform Pennsylvanians about the resources available for victim-survivors who seek the courts' assistance, specifically in the form of SPVOs.

To increase awareness about this form of protection, the targeted ads ran on Google and social media, linking to a new [E-Learning page](#) with helpful safety information.

County Courthouse Spotlight: **History of the Venango County Courthouse**

By: Senior Judge **Thomas Kistler**

During the 1700s, the area now known as Venango County, along the banks of the Allegheny River, was claimed by the French, the British and the colonies of both Virginia and Pennsylvania. The sorting out of all of that conflict is reflected in the Courthouse.

France claimed all the lands which flowed into the Ohio River (now the Allegheny) as their own, and constructed forts to keep the British at a distance. The British, represented by her several colonies, opposed this claim, and the Governor of Virginia, Robert Dinwiddie, sent 23-year-old Lt. George Washington from Williamsburg, VA, to warn the French to vacate.

The French declined the threat to vacate, and the French and Indian War was the result. The British, of course, triumphed, and France ceded all claims to the area to England. The moment of Washington's arrival in the settlement which would become the county seat of Venango County, is captured in a priceless mural which hangs behind the bench in Courtroom #1, in Franklin, PA.

Local noted artist Deac Mong, working with then-President Judge H. William White, captured the stunning moment in frontier history, showing young Washington arriving on Dec. 3, 1753.

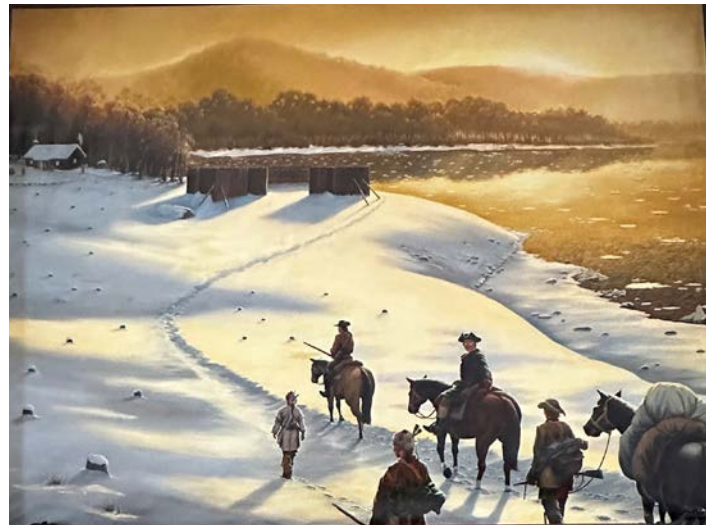
Oil would later be discovered outside Titusville, in Venango County, in 1859, and changed the economy of the county, the country and the world. The moment of the discovery, made by a worker for Col. Edwin Drake, is captured in Courtroom #3 with another mural by Mong depicting the moment of discovery.

Together, these historical moments shaped the future of France, Britain, America, and indeed the world. Venango County is proud of the pivotal historic position it occupies, and celebrates that history through these Courthouse treasures.

Constructed in 1863, in response to the boom in oil claims and litigation, the Courthouse remains in its original form, and stands proudly in the center of Franklin, and at the center of American history.



Venango County Courthouse



Young Washington arriving on Dec. 3, 1753



Oil discovered outside Titusville



Ali Shamji



Ethan McKeehan



Camryn LaForge



Haven Harrington



Nate McDowell

Introducing AOPC's Interns

AOPC's IT Department recently welcomed two new summer interns – **Ali Shamji**, who joined the Web Development team at Ritter Road and **Ethan McKeehan**, who is working with the Audio-Visual team at the PJC. Ali is currently a student at Penn State University where he is studying computer science, and Ethan is attending Messiah University where he is studying broadcasting and media productions.

The Legal Department has welcomed **Camryn LaForge** and **Haven Harrington**, who will be interning with them for the next year. Both are students at Penn State Dickinson Law and are expected to receive their Juris Doctor degrees in May 2027. During their time with AOPC, they will support the department by conducting legal research and analysis, and by responding to inquiries related to court procedures,

policies and case statuses.

The Office of Judicial District Security continues to benefit from the ongoing contributions of **Nate McDowell**, who began as a college intern over a year ago. Nate has since been cross-trained in all eight of the department's core programs and now provides weekly office support. He holds a bachelor's degree in criminal justice from York College of Pennsylvania.

Fulton County Tipstaff Takes the Stage

Sandy Novak, Tipstaff in Fulton County, recently had the unique experience of being a contestant on the long-running television game show *The Price Is Right* – a personal dream that turned into reality.

A lifelong fan of the show, Sandy often told her husband that she'd love to be on it one day. With his encouragement and the support of a coworker, she recently traveled to Los Angeles to attend three live tapings. At the second taping, she was selected from the audience to "come on down."

"It was exciting and nerve-wracking at the same time," Sandy said. "Out of 120 people, I couldn't believe I was actually called."

After winning a bid on a 75-inch TV, she joined host Drew Carey on stage and played for a Nissan Leaf electric car.

Watching the broadcast with her family was a surreal experience.

"It felt strange to see myself doing something I've watched others do for years. Being on that stage was unforgettable."

Her episode aired nationally on May 5, 2025.



Enhancing Guardianship Monitoring Through Statewide Training

By: **Joan Bertone**, grant compliance coordinator

This spring, the Office of Elder Justice in the Courts (OEJC) conducted six full day, in-person, interactive trainings for guardianship report reviewers. These trainings, held regionally across the state, were offered to court staff and others involved with the guardianship report review process.

Reviewing the annual reports filed by court-appointed guardians for Pennsylvanians aged 18 and over is an essential part of monitoring the health, wellbeing and estate of individuals with a guardian.

More than 80 individuals representing 42 counties participated in the training, which introduced a statewide standard for the guardianship report review process, reviewed the Guardianship Tracking System (GTS) and its role in the process and engaged report reviewers through hands-on activities and discussions to share best practices.

Attendees were provided with a summary of their county's GTS data and had a chance to discuss any questions related to guardianship or their county's data with an OEJC staff member.

The training and handouts, including reference guides for reviewing annual reports of the guardian of the person and of the estate, were developed by the OEJC and funded through a grant awarded to the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts by the



federal Administration for Community Living. This training is part of one of the grant projects developed to support three overarching goals: (1) assuring due process for alleged incapacitated persons; (2) improving guardianship monitoring capabilities to prevent abuse and exploitation; and (3) promoting alternatives to guardianship.

The OEJC is eager to assist guardianship report reviewers through enhanced training, sharing of best practices, and individualized support. Future sessions will be scheduled at the Pennsylvania Judicial Center.

"This program is 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 \$2,121,598.64 with 75% funded by ACL/HHS and \$530,399.66, 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."

Bucks County Treatment Courts Earn National Recognition

Bucks County Recovery Court has recently been named a National Mentor Court for 2025-2027 – one of only ten adult treatment courts in the country to receive this designation.

AllRise, formerly the National Association of Drug Court Professionals, selected Bucks County Recovery Court after a comprehensive review of its policies and procedures to ensure alignment with best practices.

As a mentor court, Bucks County Recovery Court will provide training and technical support to other courts, and will host teams

from other jurisdictions to observe and educate in support of the nationwide network of over 4,000 treatment courts.

Additionally, Bucks County Treatment Courts have been selected as one of eleven programs nationwide to join a learning collaborative focused on integrating trauma-informed practices – a federal initiative through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Gain Center.

This opportunity provides specialized training, strategic planning, support and



collaboration with other court teams across the country to enhance services for those in need.

Bucks County Treatment Courts include its Recovery (Drug) Court established in 2010, as well as a Wellness/Mental Health Court that was added in 2021 and the Veterans program, which recently became Veterans Court.

2025 Spring Fun Fest at the Pennsylvania Judicial Center





2025 Family Engagement Initiative Leadership Forum

By: **Christy Stanek**, deputy director of Office of Children and Families in the Courts

On April 14 and 15, 20 counties came together in Harrisburg for the first Family Engagement Initiative (FEI) Leadership Forum hosted by the Office of Children and Families in the Courts (OCFC).

Counties were invited to bring a team of eight dependency professionals. Each county team included the lead dependency judge and child welfare administrator. Over 170 dependency professionals were in attendance.

Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice **Kevin M. Dougherty** and Laval Miller Wilson, deputy secretary for the Office of Children, Youth, and Families, opened the Forum by emphasizing the importance of strong leadership and system collaboration.

"The work being done in FEI counties is making such a profound impact on children and families. The positive outcomes that we are seeing in these counties cannot happen without the strong leadership of our dependency judges and child welfare administrators," said Justice Dougherty.

Over the two-day Forum, counties participated in a mock trial and strategic planning sessions to support their continued progress in the FEI. Dr. Tammy Hughes, licensed psychologist, presented research on the importance of Positive

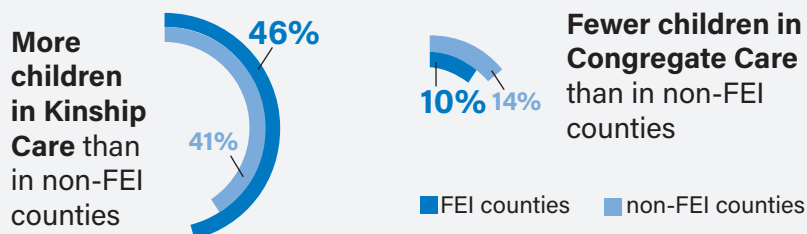


*l to r: **Sandy Moore**, director of OCFC, Justice Kevin Dougherty, and Laval Miller Wilson, deputy secretary of the Office of Children, Youth and Families*

Childhood Experiences (PCE) in reducing long-term risks associated with trauma from Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE).

2024 data outcomes show that, collectively, FEI counties have:

Reduced court-involved cases by 33%, with some individual counties much higher.



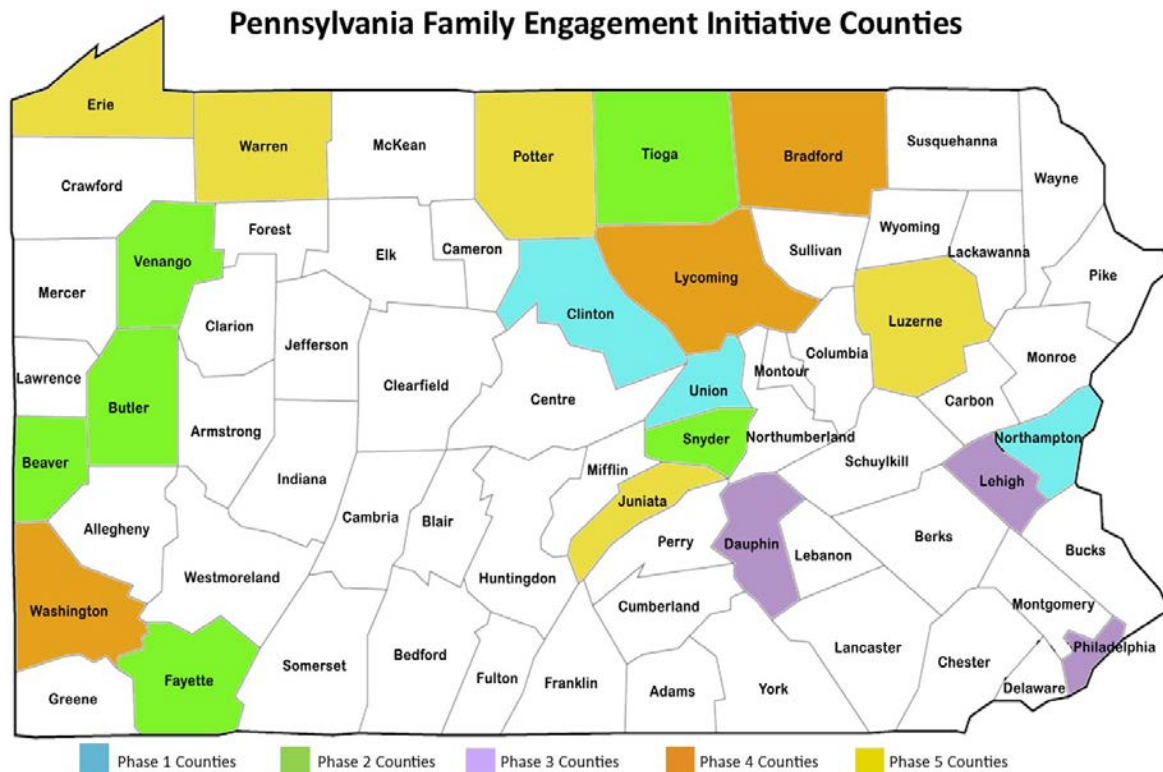
As of December 2024, there were 13,166 dependent children in Pennsylvania, a 6% reduction from 2023. 76% of this reduction occurred in FEI counties.

“As one of the newest FEI counties, we were amazed to see a 34% reduction of court involved youth within the first year of implementation.”

*- Erie County Judge **Erin Marucci***

The Family Engagement Initiative was developed by the Pennsylvania State Roundtable and is

supported by the OCFC and the Federal Court Improvement Program, in partnership with the Department of Human Services' Office of Children, Youth and Families and led by the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania. The FEI aims to increase family involvement in dependency cases, reduce trauma to children, and reduce the time children are separated from those who love and care about them.



Around the Judiciary



In recognition of the 175th anniversary of the Luzerne County Bar Association, the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania held a special oral argument session in the Luzerne County Courthouse on May 30.



Justice **Christine Donohue** gave the commencement address at her alma mater, East Stroudsburg University, on May 10.



Chief Justice of Pennsylvania **Debra Todd** delivered the commencement address at the Thomas R. Kline School of Law of Duquesne University on May 17, where she was awarded an honorary degree during the ceremony.



On April 7, Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice **Kevin Dougherty** administered the oath of office to a new member of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, Rep. Dan Goughnour (35th Legislative District), who won a special election on March 25.



On May 15, Chief Justice of Pennsylvania **Debra Todd** attended the graduation of 10 participants from Lancaster County's Drug Treatment Court. It marked Judge **David Ashworth's** final ceremony, having presided over the court since its inception in 2005. To date, 294 people have graduated from the program.



Superior Court Judges **Carolyn Nichols** and **Megan Sullivan** and former Commonwealth Court Judge **Ellen Ceisler** joined Temple University Beasley School of Law faculty and student advocates at their Moot Court Competition in April.



Mercer County Treatment Courts received a proclamation in May from the County Commissioners recognizing their important work during National Treatment Court Month.



Washington County MDJ **Lou McQuillan** was recently shadowed by a local high school student, Thomas Throckmorton, who hopes to become an attorney or judge someday. He spent the day observing hearings and learning firsthand what it takes to serve in the courtroom.



Chief Justice of Pennsylvania **Debra Todd** joined Cambria County President Judge **Linda Fleming** to celebrate the 10-year anniversary of Cambria's Mental Health Treatment Court and highlight the importance of these courts during Mental Health Awareness Month and National Treatment Court Month.



On April 9, Luzerne County Court of Common Pleas Judge **Tarah Toohil** appeared before the House Children and Youth Committee during a public hearing on House Bill 350, amendments to Titles 20 (Decedents, Estates and Fiduciaries), 23 (Domestic Relations), and 42 (Judiciary and Judicial Procedure), providing for enactment of the Uniform Parentage Act (UPA). The UPA is a proposed act from the Uniform Law Commission providing states with a uniform legal framework for establishing parent-child relationships.

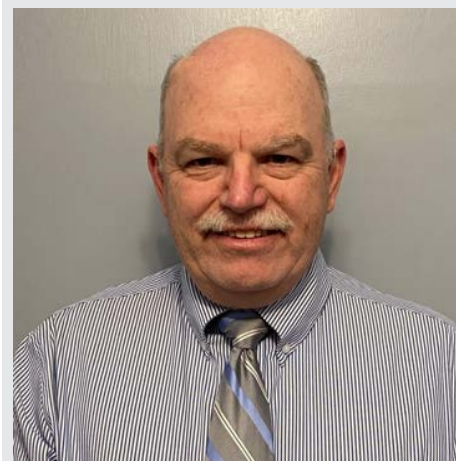
Judge Toohil joined members of the Family Law Section of the Pennsylvania Bar Association and a clinical professor of obstetrics and gynecology and psychiatry and behavioral medicine to discuss the legislation and answer questions from committee members.



The Pennsylvania Bar Association Plain English Committee recently honored Commonwealth Court President Judge **Renée Cohn Jubelirer** with the Clarity Award, which recognizes an individual who exemplifies the best in concise, clear legal writing. Congratulations on this well-deserved recognition!



Superior Court Judges **Mary Jane Bowes**, **Vic Stabile** and **Jill Beck** presented a program on appellate issues to attorneys attending the PBA Annual Meeting in May.



Berks County Magisterial District Judge **Richard Drumheller** was recognized as Boyertown's Citizen of the Year. MDJ Drumheller has dedicated his life to service – from a distinguished 30-year law enforcement career to mentoring young athletes and supporting several local organizations.



As part of the Pittsburgh Public Schools "Women Who Lead" program, Superior Court Judge **Mary Jane Bowes** spoke to the students at Pittsburgh Brookline Elementary School about the judicial system and the importance of judicial independence at the end of March.



Philadelphia County Judge **Rainy Papademetriou** visited students from kindergarten, 3rd, 5th and 7th grade at the end of March to talk about the work and role of the state's courts and what it's like to be a judge.

After noticing that many of the Wyoming Sullivan Treatment Court participants ride their bikes to attend court every week, President Judge **Russell Shurtleff** helped to get a bike rack installed to ensure there is safe, sufficient space to store them.



On May 15, the Fayette County Juvenile Probation Office was proud to receive the Community Partner Recognition Award from the Crime Victims' Center of Fayette County. The award was given in conjunction with celebrating the Center's 50th year anniversary and accepted by Senior Judge **John F. Wagner Jr.**



The Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts STOP Violence Against Women Grant Program 2025 Regional Training Series

Addressing Interpersonal Violence in Rural Communities

9 a.m. - 1 p.m. EST

Open to all Pennsylvania justice system stakeholders, including:
Judges, court administrators, court management staff, domestic relations,
PFA office staff, probation, sheriff, police, advocates, family law attorneys,
prosecutors, public defenders, interpreters and other aligned professionals.

Aug. 6 - Monroe County Public Safety Center
100 Gypsum Road, Suite 201, Stroudsburg, PA 18360

Aug. 7 - The Genetti Hotel
200 West 4th Street, Williamsport, PA 17701

Aug. 19 - Beaver County Courthouse
810 Third Street, Beaver, PA 15009

Aug. 20 - Holiday Inn Johnstown Downtown
250 Market Street, Johnstown, PA 15901

Presentation by Emily R. Strohacker, Ph.D., Penn State Harrisburg, on the Center for Rural Pennsylvania's report **Roadblocks to Reporting: Examining Barriers that Deter Domestic Violence Victim-Survivors from Reporting to Law Enforcement in Rural Communities of Pennsylvania.**

Local panels moderated by Hon. Charles Short (Okanogan County District Court, WA), Jaime Clemmer (Domestic Violence Programs & Services Manager, Office of Executive Secretary for the Supreme Court of Virginia), or Hon. Lee Chitwood (Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court of Pulaski County, VA).

Free to attend | Networking brunch provided | Continuing education credits approved for judges, lawyers, and interpreters | Certificates of attendance provided

Learn More & Register

