

PENNSYLVANIA

Racial and Gender Bias, Futures Commission, Judicial Independence

This state's summary includes reports from the following:

[Pennsylvania Bar Association](#)

[Pennsylvania Supreme Court](#)

The [Supreme Court's](#) *Committee on Racial and Gender Bias in the Justice System* began its work in earnest during 2000 and currently anticipates completion of its work during 2003. Public hearings have been held or are scheduled throughout the state and smaller focus group sessions are also planned. Working groups from throughout the state are collecting data and a major state-related university has agreed to provide statistical assistance in interpretation of data collected. Additional research in specific areas of concern is planned, with consultants likely to undertake that research. These activities are being coordinated with a variety of interested groups throughout the state, including several academic institutions. Funding is primarily being supplied by state appropriations.

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The *Pennsylvania Futures Commission on Justice in the 21st Century* continues its work since publication of a report in May, 2000 on a wide range of topics. The Commission is a 104-member public/private venture. Operating funds for the Commission are provided through the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts with additional funding through grants from private sector organizations. The Commission has now entered a new phase of operation, organizing a series of court/community town meetings. The first was scheduled for October 30, 2001, with the Westmoreland Bar and the University of Pittsburgh/Greensburg as community partners. The local group is the newly created Westmoreland Court/Community Outreach Committee, and the topic will be "Win/Win Solutions for Juvenile Justice and Family Issues that Challenge Our Community." The local committee is made up of court officials, educators and leaders from all segments of the community, and the first priority is to build partnerships between the courts and local citizens that address the juvenile justice and family issues. The objective of this town meeting is to engage citizens in proposing community-based programs, in partnership with the courts, that help all children become responsible, productive members of our community. It is the Commission's intention to hold a number of similar town meeting throughout the state in order to seed court/community partnerships.

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The Supreme Court of Pennsylvania has recently adopted a "*Code of Civility*" to guide lawyers in the practice of law within the Commonwealth. Chief Justice of Pennsylvania John P. Flaherty, in public and written comment, continues to actively promote the interest of *pro bono* representation by Pennsylvania's bar. Several different activities to increase public understanding of the justice system continue notably under the auspices of the Pennsylvania Conference of State Trial Judges. Among newer initiatives are regional "Commonwealth Partnership Conferences" among trial jurists, legislators, and court administrators.

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The Pennsylvania Supreme Court's Domestic Relations Procedural Rules Committee is considering new rules designed to ensure that courts better serve the needs of children and families who become involved in the justice system as a result of divorce or other family problems. The proposed rules call for substantial change in the manner in which cases are managed and heard as well as increased training for professional participants in the justice system and other reforms. The proposals represent the work of the committee as well as that of members of the Pennsylvania Bar Association, the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, and others. Funding for conferences and task forces is from various sources including the Pennsylvania Bar Association, with rules committee funding from Commonwealth of Pennsylvania general government appropriations through the Supreme Court. **Contact:** Patricia Miles, Counsel, Domestic Relations Procedural Rules Committee, Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, 5035 Ritter Road, Suite 700, Mechanicsburg, PA 17055; 717/795-2037; fax: 717/795-2116; e-mail: patricia.miles@supreme.court.state.pa.us

The [Pennsylvania Bar Association Council on Judicial Independence](#), a group of PBA and local bar association leaders and former members of the judiciary, continues to work on projects to assist the media and the public in understanding judicial decisions and the justice system. It has two components: the Judicial Response Division, designed to provide a response regarding questioned judicial decisions, and the Public Education Division, charged with creating educational programs about the fundamental concepts of the law and the role of jurists in society.

In the *judicial response* area, the Council received three complaints of media attacks on judges. The Council did not feel the attacks warranted special letters to the editors of various newspapers. The Council also sponsored an educational teleconference session on the state Sentencing Commission's new policy of releasing judicial sentencing records to the public and the media. This session was held with the purpose of educating the media on how to understand the sentencing statistics and how to use the data correctly and responsibly.

In the area of *public education*, the PBA continued its sponsorship of a broad menu of law-related education programs to help schools strengthen their law and citizenship curriculum. These programs included Constitution Day; Law Day: "Judges and Lawyers Go Back to School," during which more than 1,000 lawyers and judges taught classes on the law and citizenship to students in grades K-12; and Project Peace, a dispute resolution program for elementary school students sponsored in concert with Pennsylvania Attorney General Mike Fisher.

Continuing PBA's commitment to improving the public's understanding of the law and the decisions of judges, a special public education campaign dealt with two different topics: new state child support laws and elder law issues. The campaigns were fashioned after two previous public awareness campaigns using special advertising provided in concert with the Pennsylvania Newspaper Association and a statewide toll-free hotline for callers to receive a free brochure. Bar association lawyers were also featured on a statewide viewer call-in television show. Local bar associations served as partners and held community activities during the March campaign. The PBA Family Section and Elder Law Committee served as partners. Funding was provided by the PBA, the Pennsylvania Bar Foundation, and the Pennsylvania Bar Trust. More than 4,000 inquiries for information were received from the public.

According to the June 2001 *Pennsylvania Bar News*, the PBA participated with a broad group of leaders from all aspects of the state in both meetings of Gov. Ridge's summit on reforming the selection process for appellate court judges. Proponents and opponents of an appointive system of selecting appellate court judges were able to agree that the present selection system needs to be

changed and that any changes proposed must include the input of a broad representation of the citizenship of the commonwealth.

The Pennsylvania Bar Association worked in concert with Pennsylvanians for Modern Courts on the publication of a booklet for the public explaining the *responsibilities of serving on a jury*. The booklet will be distributed to potential jurors through the local court system.

The Pennsylvania Bar Association *Judicial Evaluation Commission*, which included non-lawyers, issued ratings for 31 potential judicial candidates seeking election to the state's appellate courts in November 2001. For the 2001 election, there will be a total of seven open seats at the appellate level. Upon releasing the ratings, PBA JEC Chair Michael A. Bloom said, "When citizens enter the voting booth in the May primary and in the November general election, they will be faced with a long list of candidates from which to choose. It is our job to provide guidance and information needed to help voters make informed choices.

The *Hornbook on Client Relations*, a project of the PBA Client and Community Relations Committee, assists lawyers in developing sound marketing and management plans to attract and retain clients. It includes helpful hints on maintaining clientele, returning phone calls, effective billing, and examples of good and bad advertising. Included are sample documents to draft financial statements, news releases, and fee-agreement letters. The printing and design of the publication were funded by a \$12,000 grant from the Pennsylvania Bar Trust.

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