



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

NEWS RELEASE

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Standardized forms soon available online

New Orphans' Court Forms Adopted by Pennsylvania Supreme Court

HARRISBURG, October 16, 2006 — The Supreme Court of Pennsylvania today adopted new rules for standardized forms for use in estate, trust and guardianship matters to make them easier to use and more accessible to lawyers and citizens across the Commonwealth.

The action creates — for the first time — a uniform set of filing forms for use statewide in Pennsylvania's Orphans' Courts and the Offices of the Register of Wills. The new forms will be available on the Internet through a section of the Pennsylvania Judiciary Web site (www.courts.state.pa.us) by the time the new rules take effect within 30 days. The Supreme Court directive promotes uniformity in the state's 67 counties and standardizes Orphans' Court matters in counties where no judge is assigned exclusively to such cases.

Because the forms will be available online, users will no longer be limited to completing only preprinted forms supplied by a Register of Wills or Clerk of Orphans' Court that required information to be typed or written onto the documents. Attorneys and citizens filing such forms may fill them out directly on a computer, and print them for submission at a county courthouse or file them electronically in counties with that capability. Electronic filing of Orphans' Court matters is now available only in Philadelphia County, but is expected to expand throughout the Commonwealth.

The online forms are grouped in an appendix which includes forms for use in both the Orphans' Court Division and the Office of the Register of Wills. As an added convenience provided by the court Web site, the Pennsylvania Department of Revenue's Estate Information Sheet is included in the listings. This sheet is used by the Department of Revenue to track the filing of Pennsylvania Inheritance Tax Returns and is submitted to the Register of Wills at the commencement of the estate administration process.

"These new forms further underscore the Supreme Court's commitment to consolidate Orphans' Court procedures to make sure they are more easily understood and uniformly applied," Chief Justice of Pennsylvania Ralph J. Cappy said. "Ending this lack of uniformity will certainly make the forms less confusing and streamline their use by citizens and our courts."

(MORE)

Chief Justice Cappy said the changes were adopted after careful study by the Orphans' Court Procedural Rules Committee over several years with input from judges and lawyers from various parts of the state. The changes come amid a number of initiatives in the area of family-related court procedures previously launched by the Supreme Court, which earlier this year established new uniform statewide practices for foreign adoption registrations and a separate set of new standards for juvenile court cases that involve children who are abused or neglected.

The Committee is chaired by Mary Jane Barrett, Esq. of Philadelphia County. Committee members include Richard E. Flannery, Esq. Lawrence County; Kristen M. Del Sole, Esq. Allegheny County; Montgomery County Judge Calvin S. Drayer Jr.; Shari J. Odenheimer, Esq. Wilmington, Del.; Michael L. Mixell, Esq., Berks County; Chester County President Judge Paula Francisco Ott and Carolyn C. Thompson, Esq., Dauphin County. Dean R. Phillips, Esq., is the committee's counsel.

The Orphans' Court mostly handles matters that require some kind of judicial decision concerning estate or trust matters. The court also maintains dockets and files for adoptions as well as petitions for incapacitated persons, trusts, estates of decedents, appointment of guardians and other issues. In Philadelphia County, adoption matters are handled by Family Court.

Pennsylvanians have benefited from a number of initiatives launched this year within the Judiciary by the Supreme Court, which dates to 1684 and is thought to be the oldest court in North America.

In the area of automation, recent accomplishments include the implementation of a new statewide case management system for the criminal division of the Courts of Common Pleas and the expansion of online information about the Judiciary. The Supreme Court also approved a pilot project that permits lawyers to earn continuing legal education credits through teleconferencing and has created new online resources to gauge medical malpractice case filings and new court rules. And new security measures have been taken at magisterial district judge office across the state under the auspices of the Supreme Court, which also has adopted new procedural rules to authorize judges to place tighter pretrial restrictions on persons accused of domestic abuse.

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