



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

# NEWS RELEASE

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## ***Pennsylvania Court System Continues Preparing for Public Health Threats*** **Judges Attend Public Health Law Seminar**

**STATE COLLEGE, PA, May 14, 2009** — Court Administrator of Pennsylvania Zygmunt A. Pines today announced that nearly 30 judges throughout the Commonwealth and beyond are attending a public health law and epidemiology seminar as part of ongoing efforts to prepare for public health threats and the unprecedented challenges they would face should a pandemic hit the United States.

“Fortunately the recent outbreak of H1N1 flu, or the ‘swine flu,’ to this point has been only cause for concern not panic,” Pines said. “Public health experts believe, however, that a global pandemic will occur at some point in the future, and in the view of many, it is not a question of ‘if’ but ‘when.’ That’s why we have been preparing judges and court officials for emergency requests for court action or intervention in a time of public health crisis.”

The three-day seminar, scheduled to conclude here today, is presented by the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Public Health Law Program and the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health’s Center for Public Health Preparedness.

Seminar topics include:

- The history of threats to the public’s health
- The nature of infectious disease
- Pennsylvania law and authorization to take action to control infectious disease
- Jurisdiction in public health matters
- The court’s role in the administration of public health law

Superior Court Judge John M. Cleland, a health law program faculty member and editor of Pennsylvania’s Public Health Benchbook, said, “this seminar is intended to be a national model to provide accurate scientific and legal information to judges throughout the country.”

Daniel Stier, a Senior Policy Analyst for the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said, “the curriculum was organized by Erie County Judge John Bozza, based on the recommendations of a distinguished advisory group of physicians, lawyers and public health practitioners.”

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The AOPC, the administrative arm of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, has been in the forefront in planning for a possible pandemic or public health crisis. In 2007 it was one of the first judicial agencies in the country to have developed a Public Health Benchbook for judges. A practical and useful resource, the benchbook will help Pennsylvania judges and court staff cut through a maze of public health law if an emergency arises. Much of the law is outdated and consists of a patchwork of statutes and state and local regulations. The benchbook also will help explain the often overlapping federal and state jurisdictional questions that would arise.

In conjunction with the Public Health Law Seminar and issuing the benchbook, the AOPC has developed a Continuity of Operations template for judicial districts to use in shaping their own emergency operations plans in the event a crisis, including pandemics, terrorism, biological threats, and natural disasters occurring in Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania's Public Health Benchbook and Continuity of Operations template are also being used as models for courts throughout the country.

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***EDITORS' NOTES: Seminar organizers will be available for comment immediately following the conclusion of today's seminar at approximately 12:30 pm.***

*Public health crisis preparedness is among a number Supreme Court of Pennsylvania "people-focused initiatives" to modernize and improve the state court system's ability to effectively provide services to its citizens. These initiatives include court safety and security, specialty courts, trained court interpreters, statewide judicial automation and access to court information, and responding to needs of families and children involved in court proceedings.*