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## NEWS RELEASE

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### **President Judge Emeritus McEwen to Leave Judicial Independence Panel**

**HARRISBURG, January 23, 2008** - Superior Court President Judge Emeritus Stephen J. McEwen Jr. has resigned as co-chair of the Judicial Independence Commission, a panel formed by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court in 2005 to foster better understanding of the courts and to counter unfair attacks on the judiciary.

McEwen and Supreme Court Chief Justice Emeritus John P. Flaherty jointly led the Judicial Independence Commission during a turbulent two-year period when salary increases for judges were controversial and dozens of judges running for retention were unsuccessfully targeted for defeat by a coalition of government critics.

In praise of McEwen, Supreme Court Chief Justice Ronald D. Castille said: "President Judge McEwen and the Judicial Independence Commission did a tremendous job last year in helping to explain to the public the importance of the merit retention system and why this nonpartisan system for reelecting judges was created. In that work, the commission did a great service to the judiciary and to the public.

"Under its leadership, the commission also has worked diligently to inform Pennsylvanians about how their court system functions and stressed the vital role the courts play, as a strong, independent of branch of government, in protecting the freedom of all citizens."

In his letter of resignation, McEwen said he would continue to work with the Judicial Independence Commission in an advisory capacity. McEwen currently is a senior judge on Superior Court. He previously was elected to two 10-year terms on Superior Court beginning in 1981, and was the court's president judge from 1996 to 2001.

The Supreme Court has named Senior Judge James J. Fitzgerald 3d, who recently completed an interim term as a justice on the Supreme Court, to replace McEwen as co-chair of the Judicial Independence Commission. Fitzgerald is now a senior judge on Superior Court. He is a former administrative judge of the trial division of Philadelphia's Court of Common Pleas.

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