



Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Chief Justice Urges Attorney Support for Local Legal Services

HARRISBURG, June 18, 2001 — Chief Justice of Pennsylvania John P. Flaherty today appealed to the Commonwealth's nearly 55,000 attorneys to help Pennsylvanians who are unable to afford legal representation.

Chief Justice Flaherty urged Pennsylvania's attorneys to make a voluntary financial contribution in the form of a separate check accompanying his or her annual attorney registration renewal form. He outlined his request in a two-page letter mailed to attorneys across the Commonwealth, suggesting a minimum \$50 tax-exempt contribution.

Such a voluntary contribution, coupled with this year's increase, still leaves Pennsylvania with one of the lower overall annual registration costs for lawyers in the country, the chief justice noted.

"The challenge of ensuring appropriate representation for less fortunate Pennsylvanians remains constant," the chief justice wrote. "Virtually every study of the legal services delivery system during the past decade has shown that the current system is meeting — at most — 20% of the legal needs of our indigent population."

Attorneys wishing to make a donation must check off a "pro bono initiative" box on his or her annual registration renewal form and send a separate check. The proceeds will be forwarded to the Pennsylvania Interest on Lawyers' Trust Account Board, an agency of the Supreme Court, which, upon application, will make the funds available to local bar associations to administer or organize volunteer legal service programs for less fortunate Pennsylvanians.

"One of the great strengths of Pennsylvania is its rich diversity, including the significant variances in county populations," the chief justice added. "Corresponding to those variances however is often an equally significant disparity in economic wherewithal. Pennsylvania's attorneys have recognized their obligation in the past to directly provide legal services for Pennsylvanians who need them. This request for financial support represents an additional means of meeting their obligation."

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This marks the second time in the last three years that the chief justice has called on attorneys to provide more *pro bono publico* service — or when lawyers represent clients without a fee “for the public good.” Rule 6.1 of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court’s Rules of Professional Conduct requires attorneys to provide public interest legal service.

“I am always encouraged by the refreshing view of our profession that pro bono commitments are an essential aspect of service to the public,” the chief justice said. “I urge you to continue to meet or exceed those commitments for the good of the justice system, our fellow citizens and to the profession of law.”

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