

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Implementation in nine months **Supreme Court revises civil rules to unify/simplify local practice**

HARRISBURG, October 24, 2003 — Chief Justice of Pennsylvania Ralph J. Cappy today announced implementation of a series of new civil procedural rules that will further unify the Commonwealth's judicial process by allowing litigants to more easily obtain details of a local trial court's practices, procedures, and rules.

"My colleagues and I are committed to effecting changes in our court system that will enhance its efficient performance at all levels," Chief Justice Cappy said. "These new rules will promote the uniform practice of law across the Commonwealth for the betterment of litigants and their lawyers."

The new rules were created under the auspices of the Committee on Statewide Rules of the Supreme Court's Judicial Council, chaired by Supreme Court Justice Sandra Schultz Newman, and in collaboration with the Civil Procedural Rules Committee of the Supreme Court and its chair, Allegheny County Common Pleas Court Judge R. Stanton Wettick.

"The primary obstacle to the statewide practice of law has been the inability of lawyers to learn how each Court of Common Pleas actually operates, particularly with respect to pre-trial procedures," Justice Newman said. "These new rules will solve that problem by creating a clear system that allows attorneys to understand local practices and specifying a single location – a Web site – for the updated posting of those practices."

In their essential form, the rules changes will allow a litigant to learn from the Web site of Pennsylvania's Unified Judicial System (UJS) whether a particular court has promulgated a specific local rule and, if so, the requirements of that rule.

Because the rules changes announced today represent a fundamental shift in the manner in which local rules are crafted and administered, the Supreme Court has set an effective date for its Order of nine months from today's date of issuance. This will allow local courts to take all necessary steps to comport their existing rules with the provisions announced today.

(MORE)

Among the changes outlined in today's court Order are those that will require a standardized numbering system for local rules and a requirement that local courts describe the steps that litigants must take to have pre-trial matters decided, all to be published on the UJS Web site: (www.courts.state.pa.us)

Today's announcement follows earlier work of the Judicial Council's Statewide Rules Committee, also led by Justice Newman, that oversaw in 1998 posting for the first time of local court rules on the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts' Web site. Since then, local rules have been accessible to Internet users, although in a format that has increasingly proven to be difficult to use. Steps announced today will assist in simplifying that Internet access for local civil rules.

(The new rules are available on the UJS Web site through the Supreme Court Opinions' current month's opinions and postings link.)

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