



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

NEWS RELEASE

CONTACT:

Steve Schell, AOPC Communications Coordinator
(717) 795-2000 ext 3269

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WWW.COURTS.STATE.PA.US

Lynn Carson, PCAR, Judicial Project Specialist
(717) 728-9740

Collaborative Effort Yields Benchbook on Crimes of Sexual Violence

HARRISBURG, PA, January 9, 2008 – A comprehensive reference guide, sponsored by the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, and designed to help prepare judges for the complex and ever-changing criminal justice issues surrounding sexual violence is being released today in Allegheny County. The Sexual Violence Benchbook will eventually be distributed to all trial judges Pennsylvania.

The book's principle author was Pennsylvania Superior Court Judge Jack Panella. Also contributing to the book was Leemie Kahng Sofer, Esquire, former deputy chief of the Sex Crimes Prosecution Unit, Manhattan District Attorney's Office. The benchbook was completed in collaboration with the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape and supported by a grant from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency. The awarded funds originate with the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Violence Against Women.

Benchbooks provide commentary and information regarding relevant laws, statutes, administrative code provisions and case law on a particular subject or subjects. The books do not try to tell the judge how to rule, but rather attempt to provide information to help the judge reach a decision when a relevant case arises.

"This should be a valuable resource for trial judges statewide," Chief Justice of Pennsylvania Ronald D. Castille said. "I thank all those involved, especially Superior Court Judge Jack Panella for leading this effort and pulling together a balanced advisory committee of judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, researchers and practitioners with the expertise to assist in this endeavor."

Judge Panella said, "Our goal is that this benchbook will be an integrated resource for judges who address all stages of the criminal justice system as well as the impact of the crime on victims."

Delilah Rumburg, executive director of the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (PCAR) said, "I am awed by the collaboration of those who provided their valuable expertise in the development of this benchbook. Because of the dedication of these individuals, Pennsylvania will be better prepared to address sexual violence issues."

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The first benchbook copies were delivered to Philadelphia's president judge last week. Copies will be delivered to president judges in Allegheny and Westmoreland today, and Erie and Mercer counties later this week. Later this month the benchbook will be posted on the Pennsylvania Unified Judicial Systems' Web site at www.courts.state.pa.us.

The benchbook is divided into the following major sections:

- 1) **Understanding Sexual Violence** provides an in-depth discussion of the history and development of laws criminalizing sexually violent behavior, and is intended to provide a comprehensive understanding of Pennsylvania's current sexual offense laws. Special emphasis is given to the physical and psychological impact of sexual assault on a victim as well as victims' rights under Pennsylvania law.
- 2) **The Process of a Sex Offense Case** addresses the procedural and practical steps of a sex offense case, from pre-trial issues to appellate review. This section also provides assistance for sentencing preparation, clarifying the oftentimes complex guideline factors and mandatory penalties that apply to a convicted sex offender.
- 3) **Life after Megan's Law** reviews and compares collateral ramifications of a sexual offense conviction, including sex offender registration laws and profiling.
- 4) **Resources** provides information on victim services, a list of experts in the field of sex offending behavior and Web links to agencies that provide support in sex offender management.

In addition to Judge Panella and Leemie Kahng Sofer, other notable contributors include Lynn Carson of PCAR and Teresa Scalzo, Esquire, of the American Prosecutor's Research Institute.

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Editor's Note: A list of Sexual Violence Benchbook Advisory Committee members is attached.

Sexual Violence Benchbook Advisory Committee

Honorable **Correale F. Stevens**, Superior Court of Pennsylvania
Honorable **Mary Jane Bowes**, Superior Court of Pennsylvania
Honorable **Paul Panepinto**, Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas
Honorable **Carol K. McGinley**, Lehigh County Court of Common Pleas
Honorable **Joseph M. Augello**, Luzerne County Court of Common Pleas
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