

NEWS RELEASE

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Supreme Court of Pennsylvania consolidates district court judgeships

HARRISBURG, Feb. 15, 2011 — The Supreme Court of Pennsylvania is eliminating eight magisterial district judgeships, through orders issued today. The action will save the state an estimated \$1 million and additional savings will accrue to counties. But the \$1 million saved will barely dent the state Judiciary's sixth straight year of underfunding.

The positions eliminated are either existing vacancies, or scheduled to be unfilled by the end of this year, because of death, mandatory retirement or the completion of a term. The Supreme Court last spring asked president judges in each of the counties to develop a plan regarding the feasibility of reducing the number of vacant, or soon to be vacant, magisterial district posts as part of a cost-cutting move.

Workloads in each of the areas covered by the eliminated positions will be assigned to other magisterial district judge offices. One position each will be eliminated in Berks, Delaware, Lackawanna, Northumberland, Schuylkill and Snyder counties; two judgeships in Allegheny County. A Blair County post was cut last year.

"The Judiciary is trying to address a six-year structural deficit — not of our making — that strikes directly at our ability to fund the salaries of our judges," said Chief Justice of Pennsylvania Ronald D. Castille. "By today's action, the Judiciary again demonstrates that it is financially mindful of the need to economize. All of the savings realized through the reductions are a drop in the bucket compared to serial funding deficits the Judiciary has faced over the last six years. Full funding of the Judiciary budget request is needed because current levels of funding are insufficient to pay as many as 54 judges in the current year alone."

Consolidating the vacant positions is the initial phase in a number of adjustments planned to Pennsylvania's 544 magisterial district court judge complement. Every 10 years, following the latest U.S. Census, the Supreme Court conducts a statewide review of the number and location of magisterial district judgeships to determine any need to realign the posts based on shifts in things such as population and caseloads. The Court has said it hopes to reduce the number of magisterial districts by 10% overall, both through the upcoming decennial re-establishment and today's consolidation of vacant posts.

The Supreme Court is authorized to adjust the number of magisterial district posts as part of its role as administrative leader of the state court system. However, reductions in Common Pleas Court judgeships require statutory action. The Court plans to look at the feasibility of recommending appropriate reductions in Common Pleas judgeships to the governor and General Assembly as part of further cost-savings.

(Copies of the orders can be found on the UJS Web site: www.pacourts.us)