



Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Pennsylvania's Trial Court Judges Honor Philadelphia Family Court Judge Esther R. Sylvester

HARRISBURG, July 27, 2001 — The Hon. Esther R. Sylvester, administrative judge of the Family Court division of the Court of Common Pleas of Philadelphia, was honored by the Pennsylvania Conference of State Trial Judges for her case-management accomplishments within the state's busiest judicial district.

Judge Sylvester's initiatives in the Dependent, Delinquent and Domestic Relations branches of Philadelphia's Family Court Division earned her this year's "Golden Crowbar Award," an annual honor bestowed on an individual or court for making significant contributions to the effective management of cases within the judicial system. The award was presented Thursday during the 482-member conference's annual meeting of elected and senior trial court judges in Hershey.

"Her initiatives in our Family Court Division have indeed been unique and significant," Philadelphia Common Pleas Court President Judge Frederica A. Massiah-Jackson said. "Administrative Judge Sylvester is committed to achieving effective case processing to insure due process and meaningful service to every child in the dependency system."

Shortly after her appointment as head of the Family Court Division in December 2000, Judge Sylvester began a major reorganization that — among other changes — resulted in the establishment of a Dependent Court Operations Office to focus exclusively on dependent matters. The changes emerged from a systematic review of all departments within the Family Court Division designed to increase services to every new dependent case entering the system while reducing caseloads to enable judges to spend more time on cases. Judge Sylvester previously had served as administrative judge of the Family Court Division from July 1992 to March 1996.

Each judicial district typically handles three types of cases involving children younger than 18: delinquency cases involving juveniles charged with misdemeanors or felonies; dependency cases involving children who are alleged to be abused or neglected; and criminal cases involving an adult offender and a juvenile victim. Juvenile Court judges have a range of services available for assisting children found delinquent or dependent, including residential programs and foster care.

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Philadelphia's Family Court has a significantly higher number of cases than any other judicial district in the Commonwealth. Last year, the court saw more than 10,000 dependency cases; in excess of 10,000 new delinquency petitions and 140,000 active domestic relations cases.

Judge Sylvester also was cited for her convening of a task force of child welfare professionals charged with recommending procedures to make the courts more efficient. Among the changes was the creation of a major new unit of the division to refer, remediate and divert incorrigible juveniles from court activity. She also began the Court Appointed Special Advocated initiative to enhance dependency court proceedings.

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