



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

NEWS RELEASE

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State Court Administrator Reaction to County *Commissioners v. Commonwealth* decision

HARRISBURG, July 26, 1996 – Noting the need for extensive analysis of facts, careful study of issues and thoughtful communication among all branches and levels of Pennsylvania government, Court Administrator of Pennsylvania Nancy M. Sobolevitch today said she welcomes the challenges posed by the state Supreme Court's most recent decision to fully unify the administration of the state's courts.

Sobolevitch was reacting to today's decision by the Supreme Court in *Pennsylvania Association of County Commissioners et al. v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, which names former state Supreme Court Justice Frank J. Montemuro as Master to study the issues in court unification, including making recommendations to the Court to define the scope of Pennsylvania's Unified Judicial System, to assess the current state of administrative unification of Pennsylvania courts, and to determine a logical progression of steps necessary to achieve greater administrative unity.

"My tenure as state court administrator almost precisely coincides with the nearly nine years since the Supreme Court handed down its initial decision in *County of Allegheny*," said Sobolevitch. "Constitutional issues aside, during that time it has become clear to me that greater unification of Pennsylvania's court system has the potential to improve both understanding of the judicial process itself and the underlying administration of that process by more clearly defining the Judiciary's management authority and accountability, particularly at the county level of government.

"Clearly, the concept of a unified state-funded court system has considerable precedent within the United States. Although governance structures vary widely among the fifty states, a study by the National Center for State Courts, published in a parallel survey with the National Conference of State Legislatures, indicated that at least 20 state court systems are heavily or predominantly funded by their state governments.

"I believe that the approach outlined by the Supreme Court in its Order and Opinion provides the first real opportunity for Pennsylvanians to examine the many aspects of a state-funded and unified judicial system in a reasoned manner. I also believe that Judge Montemuro, who is widely respected for his breadth of experience, his integrity and his ability to communicate forthrightly, will be of invaluable assistance, not only to the Supreme Court but also to the Legislature, the Governor, those within the Commonwealth's existing court system, the Bar, and Pennsylvanians at large as the process of fashioning recommendations moves forward.

"My staff and I look forward to working closely with Judge Montemuro as he assesses the ramifications of unifying Pennsylvania's courts and helps to more closely define precisely what 'unification' means for Pennsylvanians."

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