



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

NEWS RELEASE

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Announced Today by Senator Piccola and Pennsylvania Judiciary Nation's First Centralized, Automated System Providing Criminal Charge Information to Parents Goes On Line in 8 State Counties

HARRISBURG, September 25, 1997 - "Are your children safe?" That's the question Pennsylvania's Jen & Dave Line will help to answer when the nation's first centralized, automated system for providing criminal charge information to individuals involved in child custody cases goes on-line in eight southcentral counties today and throughout the state by the end of October.

Creation of the Jen & Dave Line is the result of legislation introduced by **state Senator Jeffrey Piccola** and 25 other co-sponsors following the tragic deaths of Jennifer and David Snead in the Harrisburg area on Christmas 1994.

Joining Senator Piccola for the announcement that the historic "round the clock" telephone service now is available for child custody cases filed in Adams, Cumberland, Dauphin, Lancaster, Lebanon, Juniata, Perry and York counties were **Mrs. Lynn (Snead) Shiner**, mother of the deceased children, and representatives of the **Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC)**, which has been charged with implementing the Jen & Dave Line based on Senator Piccola's legislation.

Jennifer and David Snead were stabbed to death by their father, who then took his own life. The murder-suicide was discovered by Mrs. Shiner when she arrived at her ex-husband's home on Christmas Day to get her children. During the investigation police learned that the ex-husband was facing criminal charges for stalking another woman.

Mrs. Shiner said that if she had known about the charges she would not have allowed the children to visit her ex-husband. Instead, she would have petitioned the court to modify her ex-husband's visitation rights in an effort to protect her children from potential violence.

Following the tragedy, Mrs. Shiner worked with the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Public Interest Clinic of Widener University School of Law to find a way for concerned parents to gain timely information on any criminal charges filed against the other parent.

In March 1996 Senator Piccola introduced a bill to establish a criminal charge information system for individuals involved in child custody cases. The bill was passed unanimously by both the House and Senate and Act 119 was signed into law by Governor Tom Ridge on Oct. 7, 1996. The Act permits a person involved in a custody proceeding or order to seek temporary custody or a change in an existing custody, partial custody or visitation order based on criminal charges filed in Pennsylvania against the other parent.

Senator Piccola, in his remarks, called this a "bittersweet day" and applauded Mrs. Shiner "for her courage, for her dedication, and for her success in turning a horrible tragedy into a victory." He said the Jen & Dave Line "will help prevent similar circumstances from occurring in the future." (Senator Piccola's complete remarks are attached below.)

The Act placed responsibility with the AOPC for creating and maintaining a criminal charge information system . The Act requires interactive voice response technology in order for parents to access the criminal charge information. The AOPC contracted with the VINE Company to provide the service through its state-of the art technology at its national call center in Louisville, Ky. The VINE Co. will provide continuous 24-hour support and maintenance of the registration and criminal charge information lines.

Establishment and maintenance costs of the program are supported by an additional \$5.00 filing fee on all child custody cases.

Under the Jen & Dave Line, individuals - or their attorneys - who are parties to child custody proceedings or orders may file an application - at no cost - for access to criminal charge information against other parties involved in the custody case. Applications must be filed at the office of the county prothonotary where the custody case or order is filed. The prothonotary then verifies that the applicant is a party to the child custody case and registers the applicant with the Jen & Dave Line. After the applicant is registered, the Jen & Dave database will keep a record of any charges specified in the Act filed in Pennsylvania against the other individual named in the child custody case order from that date forward.

The applicant - using an individually selected Personal Identification Number (PIN) and Social Security number - then can use a 900 telephone number 24 hours a day, seven days a week to learn if any charges have been filed against the other person involved in the custody proceeding. There is a charge of 50 cents per minute - with a three minute minimum - for accessing the database.

If criminal case filings are found, the caller will be given the criminal charge, filing date, telephone number of the police agency or district court and the Offense Tracking Number (OTN). Callers then will be able to call the police agency, district justice office or municipal or magistrates court to obtain more information about the specific case.

A parent who has learned that charges were filed against the other individual involved in the custody case then may ask for temporary custody or for a change in an existing custody, partial custody or visitation order. In evaluating the request for a change, the court is to consider whether the parent charged with one or more of the offenses listed in the Act "poses a risk of harm to the child."

Since the Jen & Dave Line is not intended to be a comprehensive criminal history record information system, the system's database does not include any charges not specified in the act or which might have been filed against an individual prior to an applicant applying for access and being registered for participation in the program. A person's complete criminal history is available from the State Police Criminal History Repository.

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**Senator Piccola's Remarks During "Jen & Dave Line" Press Conference
September 25, 1997**

Good morning.

I am Senator Jeff Piccola of Dauphin County, and I'd like to thank you for attending this morning's press conference on the inauguration of the "Jen & Dave Line."

This is a bittersweet day.

As you know, the Jen & Dave Line has been named for Jennifer and David Snead, two children from Dauphin County who were killed by their father on Christmas Day in 1994. Their father had recently been charged by police with stalking a woman outside of Dauphin County. Jen and Dave's mother Lynn had no way of knowing about her former husband's arrest, however, otherwise she would have seen the danger signs and she would not have permitted the children to visit his home that Christmas Eve.

The Jen & Dave Line, which we are inaugurating here today, will help to prevent similar circumstances from occurring in the future. This service -- the first of its kind in the nation -- gives parents in custody situations easy access to criminal charge records through a statewide system operated by the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts.

Following an application process, parents using a personal access code will be able to obtain timely information about criminal charges filed against the other parent, including telephone numbers of the local police department and court handling the case. The offenses covered include homicide, rape, indecent assault, stalking, kidnapping, unlawful restraint, endangering the welfare of a child, and sexual abuse of children.

Obviously, an arrest for any of these offenses would certainly raise a red flag in the mind of any parent, warning her or him that the perpetrator should not be alone with a child. With this information in hand, the concerned parent will now be able to ask the court for a change in the custody agreement, thereby assuring the child's safety.

For the next few weeks, the Jen & Dave Line will be available in eight counties, with the rest of the state to come online by the end of October. The counties now participating include Adams, Cumberland, Dauphin, Juniata, Lancaster, Lebanon, Perry and York.

I'd like to stress that the timing of this system being established is highly appropriate given the fact that October is Domestic Violence Month. As parents and as citizens, we need to do everything in our power to protect our children and our families, and the Jen & Dave Line is a prime example of the strides we are making in Pennsylvania to combat domestic violence.

Last fall, Governor Ridge signed "Jen & Dave's Law," a bill for which I was prime sponsor in the Pennsylvania Senate, and which allowed this new telephone hotline to be created. Lynn Shiner bravely initiated this legislation as a direct result of what happened to her children, and I'm gratified to be standing with her today as we announce that her hard work and vision have come to fruition.

As I said, this is a bittersweet day. I applaud Lynn Shiner for her courage, for her dedication, and for her success in turning a horrible tragedy into a victory.

I'd also like to thank the many other individuals and organizations who helped to make the Jen & Dave Line possible, including my co-sponsors and colleagues in the state Legislature, the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts, the Pennsylvania Coalition against Domestic Violence, the Public Interest Clinic of the Widener University School of Law, and members of my staff.

Now I'd like to introduce Judy Souleret, administrative coordinator for the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts, who will offer a more detailed explanation of how the Jen & Dave Line works, including an audio demonstration.