



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

# NEWS RELEASE

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## Pennsylvania Supreme Court Calls on Attorneys to Provide More Pro Bono Publico Service

**PHILADELPHIA, May 15, 1998** - Chief Justice of Pennsylvania John P. Flaherty today issued a call to the Commonwealth's 40,000 attorneys to volunteer more of their time and talents to help insure that indigent Pennsylvanians receive legal representation.

Chief Justice Flaherty reminded Pennsylvania's attorneys of their professional obligation in individual letters mailed through the cooperation of the Pennsylvania Bar Association (PBA) and the Interest on Lawyers Trust Account (IOLTA) Board.

"Virtually every study of the legal services delivery system in the last decade has shown that the current system is meeting - at most - 20 percent of the legal needs of our indigent population. Clearly, the need continues to far exceed available assistance," said Chief Justice Flaherty in his letter.

In order to help meet this need, Chief Justice Flaherty called on Pennsylvania's lawyers to renew their commitment to the professional obligation to provide pro bono publico service as outlined in the Rules of Professional Conduct governing Pennsylvania's attorneys.

Rule 6.1 of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court's Rules of Professional Conduct states: "A lawyer should render public interest legal service. A lawyer may discharge this responsibility by providing professional services at no fee or a reduced fee to persons of limited means or to public service or charitable groups or organizations, by service in activities for improving the law, the legal system or the legal profession, and by financial support for organizations that provide legal services to persons of limited means."

Chief Justice Flaherty called on the attorneys to evaluate their present pro bono involvement and "re-commit yourself to handling cases for your fellow citizens who are unable to afford legal representation. Working together, we can ensure that the doors of justice will be open to everyone through the good deeds and compassion of the legal profession."

Chief Justice Flaherty's call coincides with PBA President Leslie Anne Miller's creation of a Task Force on the Delivery of Legal Services, which is to hold its initial meeting in Harrisburg on May 21. The new PBA task force is composed of representatives of the judicial, executive and legislative branches of government, the organized bar, law schools and the legal services community. Its aim is to study legal services funding and delivery issues, innovative approaches to providing legal services, the use of technology to ensure efficiency in case management, and the development of increased support within the legal profession itself.

Heading the PBA task force are attorneys Joy Flowers Conti, of Pittsburgh; Jeffrey Ernico, of Harrisburg, and Clifford E. Haines, of Philadelphia.

Chief Justice Flaherty's letter to Pennsylvania's attorneys reads in full:

"Dear Pennsylvania Counselor:

"Virtually every study of the legal services delivery system in the last decade has shown that the current system is meeting - at most - 20 percent of the legal needs of our indigent population. Clearly, the need continues to far exceed available assistance. Because Pennsylvania's legal profession has a long and proud history of responding to the legal needs of our impoverished citizens through volunteer service, I am asking you to renew your commitment to your professional obligation to pro bono publico service as outlined in Rule 6.1 of the Rules of Professional Conduct.

"You can help fill the gap by giving of your time and talents to the many pro bono programs sponsored by local bar associations across the state. The Pennsylvania Bar Association can assist you should a pro bono program not exist in your community.

"In the spirit of pro bono publico, I am calling upon you, as an officer of the court, to perform a personal evaluation of your pro bono involvement and re-commit yourself to handling cases for your fellow citizens who are unable to afford legal representation. Working together, we can ensure that the doors of justice will be open to everyone through the good deeds and compassion of the legal profession."

Sincerely,

JOHN P. FLAHERTY  
Chief Justice of Pennsylvania

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