



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

# NEWS RELEASE

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## ***First in Nation to Provide Centralized Services to Parents –*** **Pennsylvania Courts Expand Automated System** **Providing Criminal Charge Information in Custody Cases** **to All Counties**

**PHILADELPHIA, October 23, 1997** - To help safeguard children involved in custody cases, the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC) today announced statewide implementation of the Jen & Dave Line. The nation's first centralized, automated system for providing criminal charge information to individuals involved in child custody cases, the Jen & Dave Line announcement coincided with a one-day conference on "The Impact of Domestic Violence on Children" held by the Philadelphia Child Abuse/Domestic Violence Task Force.

Last month the AOPC initiated the historic "round the clock" Jen & Dave telephone service in eight Central Pennsylvania counties: Adams, Cumberland, Dauphin, Lancaster, Lebanon, Juniata, Perry and York. Yesterday, the Jen & Dave Line expanded to Pennsylvania's remaining 59 counties.

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. Jennifer and David Snead were stabbed to death by their father, who then took his own life. The murder-suicide was discovered by their mother 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. Jen and Dave's mother, Mrs. Lynn (Snead) 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. Signed into law on Oct. 7, 1996, the Act also 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.

**Speaking during the conference, Mrs. Shiner urged all parents or individuals in Pennsylvania who are a part of a custody or visitation agreement to take the few minutes needed to complete the registration forms necessary to utilize the Jen & Dave Line. She said, "Even though you feel everything is going well with your custody/visitation arrangements, I would strongly urge you to register with the prothonotary's office where your custody proceedings occurred. You may never need to use the Jen & Dave Line. But if you do, it will be there along with any criminal activity that may have occurred as of the day you registered. I hope and pray that you**

**will never need to use this line, but in the event you do, you may be able to make a difference in your child's future.”**

“This law may be able to provide you with the red flag that I was not afforded. Please register. Think of it in the same respect as a seat belt, just one more measure of protection for your child.”

The Jen & Dave Line allows individuals - or their attorneys - who are parties to child custody proceedings or orders to 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.

**<http://www.jendaveprogram.us/>**

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