



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

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Reduction in number of judges envisioned

Supreme Court to update MDJ boundaries for next 10 years

HARRISBURG — The statewide process of redrawing magisterial district court boundaries began this week with the distribution of detailed instructions for the preparation of plans for every Pennsylvania community outside of Philadelphia, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court announced today.

Judicial redistricting, also referred to as re-establishment, is a statutorily required process that takes place once every 10 years to determine how to allocate state court system resources to best serve the Commonwealth's citizens.

The review covers the number and boundaries of each of the state's 539 magisterial districts. The City of Philadelphia has no magisterial district judges, and does not participate. Conducted by each judicial district, under guidelines established by the Supreme Court, the statewide process is administered by the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts.

"This comprehensive analysis helps ensure that the configuration of each magisterial district is appropriate to serve its residents over the next decade," Chief Justice of Pennsylvania Ronald D. Castille said of the upcoming process.

New to this year's process is a directive from the Pennsylvania Supreme Court to develop a statewide plan to reduce the overall number of magisterial district court judgeships to address a series of financial shortfalls Pennsylvania's Judiciary has struggled with over the last several years.

A preliminary step took place in 2010 when the Supreme Court asked president judges to examine the feasibility of eliminating then-existing vacancies, or those scheduled to be unfilled through mandatory or voluntary retirement or the completion of a term by the end of the year. Ten judgeships were eliminated. The Supreme Court has set as a goal a 10 percent overall reduction in magisterial district judgeships through that first step and the upcoming re-establishment combined.

(MORE)

AOPC has provided each judicial district with a variety of resources to assist in the development of a plan, including detailed instructions on how to navigate the process along with demographic and population data culled from the U.S. Census Bureau. Case filing and disposition statistics for the last six years also were provided.

“Our goal is to arrive at a statewide plan — conducted in a balanced way — so we can effectively function within our limits,” the chief justice added.

Because cases vary in complexity and time needed to adjudicate them, counties will be provided with “weights” for each docket type to guide the decision-making process in crafting a plan. The case weights also take into account required administrative, or non-case related activities, that impact workload that are not captured by statistics. The weighted criteria were developed by a committee of magisterial district judges, court administrators and AOPC staff over the last two years.

Each president judge will submit a draft re-establishment plan to the AOPC for preliminary review by spring 2012.

The county plans can become effective immediately, or up to six years into the future, when a sitting judge’s term expires or when a judge reaches mandatory retirement age. Proposals are expected to be made available for public comment under a process to be outlined by each county.

Final proposals will be presented to the Supreme Court for review and approval on a “rolling” basis or in phases over a period of time. The process is expected to be completed, and final orders issued, sometime in fall 2012.

(For more about realignment guidelines, caseload statistics and other info, see [more](#))

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Media contact: Art Heinz, 717-231-3317

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