



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Commonwealth Court Judge Doris A. Smith-Ribner to Retire**

**HARRISBURG, June 10, 2009** - Commonwealth Court Judge Doris A. Smith-Ribner announced today that she intends to retire from the bench this summer after concluding work currently assigned to her on the court's docket.

Judge Smith-Ribner, who has served on Commonwealth Court for 21 years, said she plans to travel, write and pursue other interests after leaving the court.

The judge said her tenure on the court has been a "richly rewarding experience, shaped by an extraordinary array of original and appellate jurisdiction matters involving local and state governments and the superb jurists with whom I have worked and become friends."

Commonwealth Court is one of two statewide appellate courts in Pennsylvania. The nine-member court hears cases involving state government, regulatory matters, election disputes and a range of municipal government and school-related matters.

Commonwealth Court President Judge Bonnie Brigance Leadbetter said of Smith-Ribner's decision to retire:

"The retirement of Judge Doris A. Smith-Ribner is a great loss to the Commonwealth Court. For over 21 years, she has served the citizens of Pennsylvania with great and unfailing dignity and devotion to her judicial duties. She is extremely hardworking and has a deep and abiding sense of fairness. Within the court, she has fought relentlessly for the rights of all people, always with an eye for those without a champion, and always pressing her arguments in a courteous and collegial manner."

Smith-Ribner was elected to Commonwealth Court in 1987 and was retained for additional 10-year terms in 1997 and 2007.

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While on the bench, she developed a national Judicial Externship/Clerkship Program in 2000 which seeks to promote diversity and to provide opportunities for law students and law school graduates to work in the offices of federal and state judges. To date, more than 150 individuals have been placed through the program.

"I have been fortunate to have had great mentors throughout my career, some of whom guided me as I worked my way through college and law school," said Judge Smith-Ribner. "In law school, I worked as a paralegal with prominent Pittsburgh attorneys, one of whom was former Speaker of the House K. Leroy Irvis."

Prior to joining the Commonwealth Court, Smith-Ribner was in private law practice in Allegheny County as a partner with trial lawyer Byrd R. Brown. She also was solicitor for the Allegheny County Controller from 1980 to 1984 and served an interim term on the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas from 1984 to 1985.

She also served for eleven years on the Pennsylvania Judicial Auditing Agency which reviews and approves audits of state court expenditures.

She was a Supreme Court designee to the Pennsylvania Inter-branch Commission for Gender Racial and Ethnic Fairness and served on the committee that developed a new "Policy on Non-Discrimination and Equal Employment Opportunity" which the court adopted for the Unified Judicial System effective January 1, 2008.

Smith-Ribner is a graduate of the University of Pittsburgh and its School of Law. She currently serves on the law school's board of visitors.

She is married to former Philadelphia Common Pleas Judge Paul Ribner, and they have one daughter.

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*Judge Smith-Ribner's biography is attached.*

***Biographical Material – 2008***

***JUDGE DORIS A. SMITH-RIBNER***

*Commonwealth Court of Pennsylvania*

*The Widener Building*

*Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19107*

Judge Smith-Ribner currently serves as a Judge on the Commonwealth Court of Pennsylvania, a statewide appeals court. She attended the University of Pittsburgh where she obtained a B.S. Degree in Economics and then received her J.D. Law Degree in 1972. Judge Smith-Ribner resides in Philadelphia and maintains Commonwealth Court Chambers in Philadelphia and in Harrisburg.

Judge Smith-Ribner was first elected in 1987 to a ten-year term on Commonwealth Court (jurisdiction is original and appellate and covers, among other matters, lawsuits involving state and local governments). In November 1997 Judge Smith-Ribner won her retention election for a second ten-year term on the Court and in November 2007 won her retention election for a third term.

Judge Smith-Ribner was selected in 1991 to serve as a member of the Pennsylvania Judicial Auditing Agency (an agency created by statute to review and to approve audits of all state court expenditures). She served as Chairperson from 1999 through 2004. Also during her tenure on Commonwealth Court, Judge Smith-Ribner developed a successful Commonwealth Court statewide mediation program, now in its sixth year of operation, and she received a Certificate of Completion of the course in "Mediation for the Professional" conducted by the Center for Dispute Settlement. In 1984 Governor Richard Thornburgh nominated Judge Smith-Ribner to a seat on the Court of Common Pleas of Allegheny County where she served an interim term as a judge in the Juvenile Division until 1986.

Prior to judicial office, Judge Smith-Ribner practiced law in Allegheny County for over twelve years (state and federal court/civil and criminal litigation); served as Solicitor for five years to the Allegheny County Controller litigating court cases involving surcharge and government audit matters; served as Commissioner,

Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission, by gubernatorial appointments from Governors Milton Shapp and Richard Thornburgh in 1974 and 1980; served five years as a member of the Supreme Court Disciplinary Board Hearing Committee conducting attorney professional-responsibility hearings (last two years as Chair); and served as a board member of Warner Cable Corp. of Pgh and trustee for cable stock owned by 16 religious and civic organizations (Warner Communications).

In 1997 Judge Smith-Ribner was appointed by the Chancellor of the University of Pittsburgh to the Board of Visitors, University of Pittsburgh School of Law. In 2000 Judge Smith-Ribner was appointed by the National Bar Association Judicial Council as Law Clerk Committee Chair to implement the national Judicial Externship Program that she developed. In 2003 the Widener University conferred upon Judge Smith-Ribner an Honorary "Doctor of Laws" Degree. In 2005 Judge Smith-Ribner joined the Board of the "Just the Beginning Foundation," a national organization of federal and state court judges, to implement an expanded Judicial Externship/Clerkship Program nationwide. In 2006 she was appointed by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court as its designee to the "Pennsylvania Interbranch Commission for Gender Racial and Ethnic Fairness."

Judge Smith-Ribner is a member of various professional associations, including the American Bar Association and the Pennsylvania Bar Association. She has served on the boards of various civic and community organizations as a jurist and as an attorney admitted to practice law before all Commonwealth state courts, the U.S. District Court (Western District) and the Court of Appeals, Third Circuit.

Judge Smith-Ribner has served as guest lecturer/speaker at law schools and other forums on many occasions, including the United States District Court (Eastern District) 2007 Naturalization Ceremonies Guest Speaker and the Pittsburgh University School of Law 2007 Commencement Speaker.

She has received many civic, community, educational and professional awards/recognitions, including among others: National Bar Association "The Raymond Pace Alexander Award"; National Bar Association Judicial Council's "Distinguished Service Award"; University of Pittsburgh Alumni Society "1999 Distinguished Alumni Award"; Pennsylvania Bar Association, First "Chairman's Independent Jurist Award" (Minority Lawyers' Division); Barristers' Association of Philadelphia "Judge A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr. Award"; and University of Pittsburgh School of Law "Outstanding Alumna Award/Class of '72."

Additional awards/recognitions include: "Women's Movers and Shakers Award" given by the American Women's Heritage Society/National Association of University Women (Philadelphia Chapter); Induction by the Philadelphia South West Belmont Community Association into the "1996 Women Pioneers' Hall of Fame"; Omega Psi

Phi Fraternity, Inc. "Citizen of the Year Award"; Delta Sigma Theta Sorority "Certificate of Recognition"; Philadelphia Martin Luther King, Jr. Association for Nonviolence, Inc. "Drum Major for Social Justice Award"; Women Police of Western Pennsylvania "Decade of Achievement Award"; and Friends Indeed, Inc. "Big Sister of the Year Award."

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