



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

News for Immediate Release

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AOPC Publishes Revised Guide to Assist State Trial Judges in Handling Sex Crime Cases

HARRISBURG – A just-released, third edition *Benchbook on Crimes of Sexual Violence in Pennsylvania* will help the state’s trial judges comply with newly adopted laws on sex crimes and recommendations regarding sexual offender registration and reporting laws.

“The benchbook is an essential guide for trial judges to fully understand the nuances of sexual crimes and issue sentences that reflect the seriousness of the crime,” said Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice Debra Todd. “Judicial education is a crucial element toward ensuring justice for all.”

According to the book’s principal author, Superior Court Judge Jack Panella, “We focused on incorporating the new requirements of the Sexual Offender Registration and Notification Act (SORNA), allowing Pennsylvania to close potential gaps and loopholes that existed under prior laws, and to strengthen the nationwide network of sex offender registrations.

“Our overarching purpose is to provide trial judges with best practices and access to information to help them reach informed and prompt decisions when relevant cases arise – not to tell the judge how to rule,” said Judge Panella.

This is the first time that the AOPC was the lead publisher of the book – previously published by the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (PCAR) in partnership with the AOPC – and supported by a grant from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency. Many judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, researchers and practitioners dedicated their time and expertise to produce this guide.

“PCAR’s ongoing collaboration on this project is just one example of our legacy of partnerships with dedicated professionals to hold offenders accountable for their actions and to provide a justice system that recognizes the impact these serious crimes have on the victim,” said Delilah Rumburg, chief executive officer of PCAR.

The benchbook includes a complete listing of all crimes of sexual violence and is divided into the following sections:

- 1) **Section One – Understanding Sexual Violence** – Examines the dynamics of sexual assault crimes. Definitions associated with sexual offenses are provided as well as

discussions of Pennsylvania's current sexual offense laws and an overview of common defenses to sexual assault.

- 2) **Section Two – The Process of a Sex Offense Case** – Addresses the practical aspects of a sex offense case, including pre-trial issues, such as bail and preliminary hearings, and useful information in the form of legal discussions.
- 3) **Section Three – Registration of Sexual Offenders** – Reviews and compares what happens when one is convicted of a sexual offense, including a summary of the Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act (SORNA) and DNA data retention and testing laws.
- 4) **Section Four – Resources** – Lists published references and resources on sexual assault as well as a list of Pennsylvania's rape crisis centers and child advocacy centers.

The book is available to the public and can be [downloaded electronically](#).

Editor's Note:

A complete list of all those individuals and organizations involved in this project is [available for download](#).

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