



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

## News for Immediate Release

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### **New Bench Cards Further Enhance Training for Jurists Handling Sex Crime Cases**

**HARRISBURG**— New bench cards and instructional videos intended to enhance judicial education efforts will soon be provided to more than 450 trial jurists hearing cases involving sexual assault and violence statewide.

The project, headed by Superior Court Judges Jack Panella and Victor Stabile and working with a subcommittee of trial judges, makes Pennsylvania the first state in the nation to employ dedicated educational resources like these to jurists.

Jurists participating as members of the subcommittee include President Judge Richard Lewis, Dauphin County; Judge James A. Gibbons, Lackawanna County; Judge Ann Marie Wheatcraft, Chester County; and Judge Tina Polacheck Gartley, Luzerne County

“Victims of sexual assault and violence have been silenced for too long, as we’ve seen in recent high-profile cases,” Panella said. “While continuing to assure the legal rights of criminal defendants, these new bench cards and videos add another educational opportunity for jurists to know and understand changes to the law and evidentiary rules while respecting the important interests of victims.”

Judicial education and training plays a critical role in the administration of justice, especially with cases involving victims of trauma and sexual assault. Statistics show that only 20 percent of victims will report cases of sexual assault. Keeping judges up-to-date and educated furthers the courts’ commitment to judicial education and ensures cases are handled appropriately.

The bench cards and instructional videos are part of the ongoing statewide effort to make judicial education a priority, especially in cases of sexual assault and violence. Each card covers topics related to cases involving sexual assault or violence including bail, expert testimony, forensic evidence, rape shield laws and victim responses/behaviors. The educational materials will also provide direction to jurists managing cases involving children, specifically when children are serving as witnesses.

In 2011, Pennsylvania unveiled the nation’s first Sexual Violence Bench Book. The book was designed specifically to guide judges in the handling of crimes of sexual violence. The book is now in its third printing and continues to be part of the judiciary’s groundbreaking effort to

provide information to help judges reach informed decisions when hearing cases of sexual assault and violence.

“These reference cards will assist in providing certainty and instruction in the trial of these cases that, more so than many other types of cases, have an extreme emotional and traumatic impact upon their victims,” Superior Court Judge Victor Stabile said.

Work on the bench cards and educational videos was completed with support from the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape and funded by a grant from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency.

“Training for judges is critical, especially when dealing with cases involving victims of sexual assault,” said Delilah Rumburg, CEO, Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape. “Our partnership with the courts is unique and one that allows us to bring the right people to the table, to reinforce our shared commitment to justice for victims, at exactly the right time. This is truly groundbreaking work and we’re proud to be part of it on behalf of all victims and their families.”

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