



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

News for Immediate Release

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Pennsylvania Courts Develop New Resources for Judges

HARRISBURG — Committed to helping judges navigate the complex issues surrounding elder abuse, dependency and domestic violence cases, the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC) has developed a combination of judicial bench cards and bench books for Pennsylvania judges.

These resources work to supplement the numerous continuing education programs that the Supreme Court requires all Pennsylvania jurists to complete each year. While these courses cover an extensive range of judicial topics, recent focuses have included Protection from Abuse orders (PFA), family law (including divorce and custody) and trauma victims in the court room.

Elder Abuse Bench Book

In September, the Advisory Council on Elder Justice in the Courts will publish the first edition of the Pennsylvania Elder Abuse Bench Book. The bench book will serve as the primary resource for Pennsylvania's common pleas judges facing issues involving elder abuse, regardless of the court division in which they sit.

The bench book reflects the accumulated wisdom of both judges and practitioners who focus on elder justice, and combines an outline of the laws pertaining to elder abuse with medical information and subject-specific lists of practical questions.

Dependency Benchbook, 3rd edition

Released in July, the third edition of the Pennsylvania Dependency Bench Book offers best practices to engage and resolve the myriad of difficulties facing dependent youth. The book serves as a comprehensive reference guide designed to assist family court judges and child dependency practitioners in the process of helping abused and neglected children and their families.

The first version, released in 2010, proved invaluable to judges, lawyers, child welfare professionals, and has been cited as a secondary source in Supreme Court decisions shaping the future of dependency jurisprudence.

As a living document, the Pennsylvania Dependency Bench Book is routinely updated to reflect further advancements in the understanding of critical issues involved in dependency proceedings – including father engagement, incarcerated parents, substance abuse recovery, reduced use of congregate care etc.

Relinquishment of Firearms Judicial Bench Cards

In addition to the Sexual Assault Judicial Trial Packet published in 2017, the AOPC has recently developed three new Bench Cards focused on the mandatory, court-ordered relinquishment of firearms in domestic violence cases.

Resembling a detailed checklist, the new bench cards itemize the amended statute definitions and provide consequent procedures judges should consider when ordering a defendant to relinquish their firearm(s) in certain domestic violence cases – including both temporary and final protection from abuse (PFA) orders.

The bench cards reflect the recent amendments to both the PFA law and the Crimes Code and will ensure that trial courts know how to protect victims of domestic violence and individuals who are granted PFA orders.

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