



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

News for Immediate Release

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Review of Lackawanna County Family Court's Guardian Ad Litem Program Completed

HARRISBURG — The Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts has completed an assessment of the Lackawanna County Family Court's Guardian Ad Litem Program and has provided recommendations for improvement. A guardian ad litem is a court-appointed advocate who represents the interests of a child or children in family law cases.

The 113-page study lays the groundwork for improved operations in the guardian ad litem program as well as related family court-ordered services through a series of financial, administrative and programmatic recommendations. The year-long review, which began in May 2011 at the request of Lackawanna County President Judge Thomas J. Munley, evaluated the guardian ad litem system and is based on the observations and findings of the AOPC's Judicial Programs Department.

"We all have a vested interest in making sure the court system is run properly," Chief Justice of Pennsylvania Ronald D. Castille said. "Lackawanna County is to be commended for requesting this thorough review and now needs to assess the results and take appropriate action."

Complaints about the guardian ad litem program from some litigants and family law attorneys prompted the review. The study recommends that empirical data be gathered and evaluated to determine if the family court model utilized in Lackawanna County is effective. The report also recommends that additional administrative oversight of family court is needed. More than 4,000 cases were filed in Lackawanna Family Court in 2010.

In response to the report, President Judge Munley has appointed Judge Patricia Corbett to oversee family court. In addition to her other responsibilities, Judge Corbett will be responsible for the overall administration of family court and implementation of recommendations in the report.

AOPC's Judicial Programs Department assists judges and staff with court operations in Pennsylvania's 60 judicial districts through a variety of services and programs that enhance the administration of justice and effectively serve the Commonwealth's citizens. By way of example, the department assists counties with the creation of problem-solving courts, the certification of-competent foreign language and sign interpreters, and the systematic placement of abused and neglected children in permanent homes.

(A full copy of the report can be found under the "Reports" section of the UJS website:

http://www.pacourts.us/NR/rdonlyres/27A05787-5AA8-42AC-B5A1-124A76BFD78C/0/GuarAdLit_070512.pdf

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