



## ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

### NEWS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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#### **Pennsylvania Chief Justice Announces New Leadership for Supreme Court Advisory Council on Elder Justice in the Courts**

**HARRISBURG** – Chief Justice of Pennsylvania Debra Todd today announced that Montgomery County Judge Lois Murphy and Philadelphia County Administrative Judge Sheila Woods-Skipper have been named to leadership positions with the Supreme Court Advisory Council on Elder Justice in the Courts.

Murphy will serve as chair, replacing Senior Superior Court Judge Paula Francisco Ott who has served on the council since its inception. Woods-Skipper will replace former Pennsylvania Court Administrator Zygmunt “Zyg” Pines, who was also a charter member of the council.

Chief Justice Todd expressed her thanks to Judge Ott and Zyg Pines for their years of service to the Court and to older Pennsylvanians and their families.

“Ten years ago, we started down a path to ensure that the courts were addressing the growing issues that impact older Pennsylvanians, including guardianship, abuse and neglect, and access to justice.” Todd said.

“Judge Ott and Zyg Pines were at the table from day one, lending their experience and expertise to bring lasting change for some of our most vulnerable Pennsylvanians. Countless families all across Pennsylvania have benefited from the vision and mission brought to life through the council, and Judge Ott and Zyg Pines played a prominent role in the success of those efforts.

“We owe each of them a debt of gratitude and look forward to their continued advice as the council continues forging new ground under the leadership of Judges Murphy and Woods-Skipper.

A judge of the Court of Common Pleas in Montgomery County since 2010, Murphy serves as the administrative judge of the Orphans’ Court Division where she handles matters including guardianships, trust and estates, adoptions and cases related to minors’ estates and non-profit organizations.

In addition to her new role as chair of the council, Judge Murphy chairs the Orphans’ Court Section of the Pennsylvania Conference of State Trial Judges and the Montgomery County Elder Access to Justice Roundtable.

“I am delighted to continue the important mission of the Advisory Council on Elder Justice in the Courts, as we advance the goals of reforming guardianship, promoting alternatives to guardianship and

improving due process and access to justice” Murphy said. “The work we are engaged in to increase access to justice and improve outcomes for older Pennsylvanians is critical and meaningful work that will make a tremendous difference in improving the lives of older Pennsylvanians and their families.”

Judge Sheila Woods-Skipper has served as a judge in the First Judicial District in Philadelphia for nearly 25 years. During that time, she was unanimously elected to serve as president judge from 2012-2018 and currently serves as the administrative judge of the Orphans’ Court Division of the Common Pleas Court where she handles matters including guardianships, trust and estates, and cases related to minors’ estates and non-profit organizations.

During her tenure on the court, she has facilitated the establishment of an Elder Justice Committee and opened an Elder Justice Resource Center, providing referral services to seniors and education to the public on issues impacting litigants in the justice system.

“It is both an honor and a privilege to be part of such a distinguished group and surrounded by like-minded individuals committed to working together on behalf of older Pennsylvanians,” said Woods-Skipper.

“Membership on this council brings with it an awesome responsibility which we all share -- to educate, protect and provide for some of our most vulnerable citizens. I look forward to continuing my work with this esteemed group as we focus on demonstrating that Pennsylvania is a leader on issues affecting older adults and their families.”

Created in 2015, following the recommendations of the Supreme Court’s Elder Law Task Force, the Advisory Council has worked to identify and address elder justice issues in Pennsylvania. Along with the Office of Elder Justice in the Courts, the Council focuses on educating judges, court staff, attorneys, guardians and the public about the warning signs of elder abuse including:

- Judicial Education for judges and attorneys handling guardianship cases;
- Educational sessions for judges and court staff on abuse and exploitation; and
- Training for family and lay guardians about their powers, duties and responsibilities.

According to the Pennsylvania Department of Aging, currently, 25 percent of Pennsylvania’s residents are over the age of 60, with more than 10 percent of these older adults living below the poverty line. In the next 10 years, the population shift is expected to be such that nearly one-third of our population will be over 60 years old.

For more information on the work of the Advisory Council on Elder Justice in the Courts, visit <https://www.pacourts.us/judicial-administration/court-programs/office-of-elder-justice-in-the-courts>.

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