

NEWS RELEASE

CONTACT:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Honorable Christine L. Donohue
(717) 234-7911

New Leaders, Members and Projects Re-energize the Judicial Conduct Board

Harrisburg, September 23, 2010 – The Judicial Conduct Board of Pennsylvania announces new leadership, a record number of new members, revised operating procedures, and the engagement of a team of experts independently selected under the auspices of the American Bar Association to conduct a thorough review of the current disciplinary process that ensures the integrity of the Commonwealth's nearly 1,200 jurists.

Superior Court Judge Christine Donohue was elected chair of the 12-member disciplinary agency, and Mark Aronchick, Esq., a former chancellor of the Philadelphia Bar Association, was elected vice chair. In addition, Ayanna Lee, Esq., an Allegheny County attorney, was elected secretary of the group, which investigates complaints of misconduct against judges.

The election of new officers is accompanied by the appointment of seven new board members: Peter Capolino, founder of a Philadelphia area athletic clothing maker; Dr. Philip Ripepi, a Pittsburgh-area surgeon; James McErlane, Esq., a West Chester lawyer; Magisterial District Judge Thomas Placey of Cumberland County; Delaware County Judge James P. Bradley; Francis Bianconi, a Lackawanna County businessman and C. Eugene McLaughlin of Montgomery County, president of a publishing company.

The new members join current board members Samuel Magaro of Dauphin County, a retired magisterial district judge, and Hank Abate, an Allegheny County businessman.

“The current judicial disciplinary process has served Pennsylvanians well since voters created it in 1993,” Judge Donohue said. “However, recent experiences have signaled a need to provide a better sense of how things are executed and communicated. We look forward to meeting those even higher expectations.”

As a result of a self-examination of past policies and practices, the Board earlier this year adopted a new 78-page set of internal operating procedures.

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“We were talking about many of these adjustments internally, and then once we got the input from the Juvenile Justice Commission, it was clear that we needed to continue moving in this direction,” Judge Donohue said. “The impact of these moves on an already sound judicial disciplinary process is to shed greater light on the Board’s efforts to safeguard the integrity of Pennsylvania’s Judiciary.”

The ABA’s Standing Committee on Professional Discipline will lead a review process that will include interviews of judges, lawyers and non-lawyers — and examine case records and administrative files — to get a comprehensive picture of the work of the Judicial Conduct Board. The work is expected to culminate in a report that evaluates current practices along with recommendations on how to enhance those practices and other procedures.

“Selection of the Standing Committee to review the board’s business process will help us further establish ‘best practices,’” Judge Donohue said. “The board had anticipated taking this step before receiving the Juvenile Justice Commission’s report. Its findings confirmed the value of moving in that direction.”

The Conduct Board also is collaborating with the Pennsylvania Bar Institute in educating lawyers and the public about the judicial discipline system.

For more information about the Judicial Conduct Board, its members and operating procedures, visit: www.judicialconductboardofpa.org

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