



## ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

### News for Immediate Release

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### Commission on Judicial Independence turns 10 and welcomes new members

**HARRISBURG** — The Pennsylvania Commission on Judicial Independence (PCJI) was established in 2005 by the state Supreme Court amid growing concerns over unwarranted criticism of courts across the country. Membership has included leaders from Pennsylvania’s state and federal courts, prominent attorneys and distinguished academicians.

Now in its 10<sup>th</sup> year, Chief Justice of Pennsylvania Thomas G. Saylor has recently renewed the commission’s membership, under the co-leadership of former Justice James J. Fitzgerald III and Judge John E. Jones III of the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Pennsylvania. Members include:

- Andrew F. Susko, Esq.; White and Williams LLP (current member)
- Edward W. “Ned” Madeira Jr.; Esq., Pepper Hamilton LLP (current member)
- D. Michael Fisher, judge, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit (new member)
- Charisse R. Lillie, Esq.; vice president for community investment, Comcast (new member)
- William M. Carter Jr., Esq.; dean and professor of law, University of Pittsburgh School of Law (new member)
- Christylee Peck, judge, Cumberland County Court of Common Pleas (new member)
- Charles L. “Chip” Becker, Esq.; Kline & Specter, P.C. (new member)

“Judicial independence can be a misunderstood concept,” said Chief Justice Saylor. “It isn’t about courts that aren’t accountable. It is about the ability of courts to fulfill the Founding Fathers’ intent that there are checks and balances between the three separate governmental branches.

“Through advocacy, education and civil engagement, the Commission on Judicial Independence helps people understand these important concepts.”

Over the past 10 years, the commission has led initiatives highlighting the importance of an impartial and independent judiciary, including:

- sessions to explain Pennsylvania’s merit retention system and why reviewing the body of a judge’s work can help voters make selections in retention elections
- forums to improve judiciary/media relationships, including discussions on court funding in the context of an independent, functioning judicial system
- programs, often in collaboration with other groups, to help enhance civics education through day-long programs across the state with K-12 social studies teachers
- a forum, co-hosted with the National Constitution Center, based on the book, *Blindfolds Off – Judges on How They Decide*, featuring distinguished local and national jurists discussing how they presided over difficult high-profile cases

PCJI programs have included retired U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor, Pennsylvania’s former first lady and current Senior U.S. Circuit Court Judge Marjorie O. Rendell and former Pennsylvania governor and U.S. Attorney General Richard L. Thornburgh.

The commission's goals will continue to be vigilance in recognizing threats to judicial independence; work to promote fairness, impartiality and accountability in the judicial branch; and efforts to improve civics education.

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