



Judicial Conduct Board
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Joseph A. Massa, Jr., Chief Counsel
717-234-7911

NEWS RELEASE

CONTACT:

Hank Abate
(717) 234-7911

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

www.judicialconductboardofpa.org

JUDICIAL CONDUCT BOARD RECEIVES INDEPENDENT REPORT ON THE JUDICIAL DISCIPLINE SYSTEM AND SOLICITS PUBLIC COMMENT

HARRISBURG, June 2011 – Judicial Conduct Board of Pennsylvania Chair Hank Abate today thanked the American Bar Association for conducting an in-depth review of the judicial disciplinary system in the state and issuing a report recommending improvements to the system. Abate pledged the Board would carefully study the report and seek public comment on the recommendations.

“Pennsylvania’s judicial discipline system, created by voters in 1993, has a strong foundation, but it became clear shortly before the juvenile justice scandal in Luzerne County that there needed to be internal adjustments and better communication about how we execute our work,” Abate said. “The Board began making changes before the May 2010 report of the Juvenile Justice Commission and adopted a new set of operating procedures on January 8, 2010.” Additionally, Abate added that “The Board has already implemented many of the changes suggested by the Juvenile Justice Commission in its final report and is continuing to work on additional reforms.”

“The result of these adjustments on an already sound judicial disciplinary process shed greater light on the Board’s efforts to safeguard the integrity of Pennsylvania’s judiciary. But even with these changes, the Board believed it would be useful to have a highly-respected organization perform an independent analysis to provide a fresh perspective on additional improvements to increase our effectiveness.”

“We now have that independent review in our hands. The Board offers its sincere thanks to the ABA for its work and the Pennsylvania Supreme Court for providing seed funds for the study when our budget wouldn’t allow us to undertake this important project.”

The Judicial Conduct Board is a 12-member disciplinary agency charged with ensuring the integrity of the Commonwealth's nearly 1,200 jurists. It is an independent body, established by the Pennsylvania Constitution, which investigates complaints of misconduct against judges. Abate, an Allegheny County businessman, was appointed to the Board in January 2009 and became chair in February 2011.

The ABA's Standing Committee on Professional Discipline performed an independent review of the judicial discipline system, met with scores of interviewees including, complainants, litigants, persons directly impacted by the Board's operation, judges, lawyers, current and prior Board members, Chief Counsel and staff, and other persons who wished to offer insight; and examined case records and administrative files to get a comprehensive view of the work of the Judicial Conduct Board.

The ABA Standing Committee, which has performed similar reviews in several other states, began its work in January 2011 and delivered the report yesterday. The Judicial Conduct Board did not receive an advance copy and will study the report immediately. To date, the Board has also received the reports and recommendations of several interested legal reform groups of particular note. The Board will jointly consider and review these other reports and recommendations with the report of the ABA Standing Committee in its efforts to revitalize the judicial disciplinary system in Pennsylvania.

"As we begin to study the ABA's evaluation of our current practices and recommendations on enhancing and improving our operation, we are asking the public to review the report and offer their comments," Abate said. "Our goal is to consider any and all recommendations that will improve our operation and increase public confidence in our disciplinary system."

Members of the public interested in making their views known are invited to submit written comment via email at ContactUs@jcbpa.org or via regular mail addressed to: Chairman Hank Abate, Pennsylvania Judicial Conduct Board, Pennsylvania Judicial Center, 601 Commonwealth Avenue, Suite 3500, Harrisburg, PA 17106.

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