

## NEWS RELEASE

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### Supreme Court creates committee to look at capital case representation

**HARRISBURG, March 31, 2003** — Chief Justice of Pennsylvania Ralph J. Cappy today announced that the Supreme Court has created a special committee to study the legal representation of defendants charged with first-degree murder.

The Chief Justice has appointed Justices Russell M. Nigro and J. Michael Eakin as facilitators with Justice Nigro serving as chair of the Capital Case Standards Committee. The members include judges, prosecutors and public defenders from across Pennsylvania. The committee will study select first-degree murder cases from around the state with an eye toward identifying any systematic deficiencies, and recommend ways to solve any recognized shortcomings.

“Confidence in our judicial system grows out of a commitment to the fair and efficient adjudication of cases brought before the court system,” Chief Justice Cappy said. “Justices Nigro and Eakin have put together a committee whose members have considerable experience to help identify any deficiencies or problems in our system of representing first-degree murder defendants. We look forward to the committee’s analysis and any recommendations it may offer.”

The creation of the Capital Case Standards Committee is one of a series of efforts by the Supreme Court to both assure equity of process as well as the public’s perception that processes are equitable in the Commonwealth’s justice system.

In a similar vein, last month the Court announced the establishment of two task groups to carefully study and recommend the means of implementing provisions of a released report by the Committee on Racial and Gender Bias. A moratorium on the death penalty was among the committee’s recommendations.

Capital cases have drawn increased attention across the country in recent years amid charges of alleged discrimination in the imposition of the death penalty and ineffective representation. The charges have prompted legislators, advocacy groups and others to call for review of existing processes.

(MORE)

Committee members include:

- Hon. Robert A. Graci, Superior Court of Pennsylvania
- Hon. Jane Cutler Greenspan, Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas
- Hon. Ricardo C. Jackson, Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas
- Hon. James A. Lineberger, Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas
- Hon. John C. Mott, Bradford Court of Common Pleas
- Gary Neil Asteak, Esq., Easton, Northampton County
- Lynne M. Abraham, Philadelphia district attorney
- John Elash, Esq., Criminal Procedural Rules Committee
- Bradley H. Foulk, Erie County district attorney
- Ellen T. Greenlee, Defender Association of Philadelphia
- Anthony M. Mariani, Esq., Pittsburgh
- Edward M. Marsico Jr., Dauphin County district attorney
- Brian J. McMonagle, Esq., Philadelphia
- John M. Morganelli, Northampton County district attorney
- M. Susan Ruffner, Allegheny County public defender
- Janis Smarro, Esq., Philadelphia
- Stephen A. Zappala Jr., Allegheny County district attorney

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