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ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### Commission on Juvenile Justice Sets Public Hearings

**HARRISBURG, October 1, 2009** - The Interbranch Commission on Juvenile Justice which is investigating failures in the juvenile justice system in Luzerne County will hold its first hearing on October 14 at the Pennsylvania Judicial Center.

Commission Chairman John M. Cleland said the commission is scheduled to hear testimony from Luzerne County President Judge Chester B. Muroski on reorganization and reform measures taken since the disclosure of a judicial corruption scandal in the county earlier this year.

Cleland, a judge of the Pennsylvania Superior Court, said other scheduled witnesses will include officials of the state Judicial Conduct Board and the state Disciplinary Board who have been asked to testify about ethical standards governing the conduct of judges and lawyers.

The hearing is to begin at 9 a.m. in the Pennsylvania Judicial Center, 601 Commonwealth Avenue, Harrisburg, and is expected to last through the afternoon. Please note: Seating in this facility is limited to approximately 100.

The Interbranch Commission on Juvenile Justice plans to hold additional public hearings in Wilkes-Barre on November 9 and 10.

The commission was established in August by an act of the General Assembly with the support of the Supreme Court and the Governor.

Its purpose is to conduct a noncriminal investigation of the circumstances that led to corruption of the juvenile justice system in Luzerne County, to restore public confidence in the administration of justice and to make recommendations to prevent a recurrence of a similar situation in Luzerne County or elsewhere.

Two former Luzerne County judges, Mark A. Ciavarella and Michael T. Conahan, currently are under indictment on federal racketeering and related charges, accused of receiving \$2.8 million from the developers of two juvenile detention facilities.

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Ciavarella, while presiding in juvenile court, is alleged to have denied many juvenile defendants the constitutional right to counsel and to have improperly ordered many youths to serve time in detention or in other out-of-home placements.

Since its formation, the Interbranch Commission on Juvenile Justice has held two organizational sessions, one in Pittsburgh on August 26 and 27, and one in State College on September 29 and 30.

The commission is authorized to hold public hearings and has the power to subpoena witnesses.

At the planned November hearings in Wilkes-Barre, Judge Arthur E. Grim, a special master appointed by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court to review thousands of juvenile cases handled by Ciavarella, is scheduled to testify.

Other witnesses invited to testify in November will include juvenile defendants who appeared before Ciavarella without counsel or who were committed to detention by him.

Individuals who wish to testify before the commission in November should contact the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts. A form with instructions is available online at <http://www.pacourts.us/Links/Public/InterbranchCommissionJuvenileJustice.htm> or by writing to:

The Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts  
c/o Darren Breslin  
1515 Market Street -- Suite 1414  
Philadelphia, Pa. 19102

Commission Chairman Cleland said that because of time constraints at the November hearings, a limited number of people will be able to testify, but the commission will accept written submissions from all members of the public.

The Interbranch Commission on Juvenile Justice has 11 members. Four members, including the chairman, were chosen by Chief Justice Ronald D. Castille; three members were chosen by Governor Rendell, and four were chosen by leaders of the House and Senate.

In addition to Cleland, other commission members are Tod C. Allen, Director of Court Advocacy, the Crime Victim Center, Erie County; Valerie Bender, Senior Research Associate, National Center for Juvenile Justice, Pittsburgh; Honorable James A. Gibbons, Magisterial District Court, Lackawanna County; Kenneth J. Horoho, Jr., Esq., former President, Pennsylvania Bar Association, Pittsburgh; Jason J. Legg, District Attorney, Susquehanna County; Robert L. Listenbee, Chief, Juvenile Unit, Defender Association, Philadelphia; George D. Mosee, Jr., Deputy District Attorney in charge of the Juvenile Division, Philadelphia District Attorney's Office; Honorable John C. Uhler, Court of Common Pleas, York County; Ronald P. Williams, Regional Director, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, Lake Winola; Honorable Dwayne D. Woodruff, Court of Common Pleas, Allegheny County.

The commission must file a final report with recommendations to the Supreme Court, the Governor and the General Assembly by May 31, 2010.