



## ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

Public Information Office

### **Focusing on Children at Risk**

Thousands of children in Pennsylvania's 67 counties are living in foster homes and other temporary settings such as group homes or residential institutions. In most cases, these children have been removed from their parents by court order because they have been abused or neglected. By legal definition, they are "dependent children" because they are dependent on the courts and the child welfare system for their protection.

When a family court judge orders a child removed from his or her parents, the child often remains in temporary care for a year or longer. Many children are shifted from one residence to another while judges, in consultation with lawyers and social workers, consider whether to return them to their parents or place them elsewhere on a permanent basis - with a grandparent, for example, or with an adoptive family.

The Supreme Court established the Office of Children and Families in the Courts in 2006 within the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC) to address the needs of dependent children and to attempt to reduce the time they spend in temporary homes.

Once a child has been removed from his or her parents, the goal is to get the child safely resettled as quickly as possible in a permanent home, whether back with parents in a stable environment, with grandparents, with other relatives, with a caring non-relative, or with an adoptive family. The focus is on establishing a healthy, permanent living situation for the child.

Working with county family courts and child welfare officials, the Office of Children and Families in the Courts seeks to provide more training for judges, to urge more leadership by judges in dependency cases and to ensure frequent hearings for each dependent child. Family courts also are encouraged to share information with each other as they develop "best practices" in the handling of dependency cases.

Supreme Court Justice Max Baer oversees the Office of Children and Families in the Courts. Funds for the office are provided through grants from the Court Improvement Project, which is run by the Administration for Children and Families in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

More information about the Office of Children and Families in the Courts is available at:  
<http://www.ocfpcourts.us/>