



# Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Historic Law Clerk Placement Program Seeks to Broaden Experience and Opportunities**

**HARRISBURG, July 26, 2002** — The Judicial Council of the National Bar Association is expanding the nationwide reach of a successful program launched in Pennsylvania that places minority and/or economically disadvantaged law students in federal court clerkships.

More than 80 judges in U.S. District and Circuit Courts have agreed to participate since its inception less than two years ago by accepting student referrals through the Judicial Council/Judicial Externship Program. A pilot program of participating law schools that began in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, Washington, D.C., California and Arizona is being expanded this summer and fall to include other schools.

Administrators plan to seek added participation from more judges and law schools armed with a recently awarded \$50,000 Thurgood Marshall Legal Educational Opportunity Program grant to assist in operations. Pennsylvania's law schools — Dickinson, Duquesne, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Temple, Villanova and Widener — are among program participants. Half of the 14 externs in this year's program are from Pennsylvania law schools.

“Judicial clerkships represent prestigious and valuable opportunities for law students to enhance their careers, through developing greater skills in legal writing and analysis, and to develop meaningful mentoring experiences,” said the Hon. Doris A. Smith-Ribner, a judge on Pennsylvania's Commonwealth Court and creator of the program.

The innovative program was designed and developed in Pennsylvania to maintain a national reservoir of talented and highly motivated law students from minority and/or economically disadvantaged backgrounds who possess the skills necessary upon graduation from law school to successfully serve as judicial law clerks in state and federal courts nationwide.

Smith-Ribner, who serves as Chair of the National Bar Association's Judicial Council Law Clerk Committee, noted that “the program makes those prestigious and valuable opportunities and experiences available to minority and disadvantaged students alike.”

(MORE)

The program began in January 2001 with the placement of a second-year minority student from the University of Pittsburgh School of Law with a member of the Third Circuit Court of Appeals. Since then, more than two dozen students have served judicial externships.

Participating judges provide students with assignments to enhance their legal research and analytical writing skills, including but not limited to the development of effective outlining techniques and drafting of memoranda of law and judicial opinions.

Students are required to perform a minimum of 10 hours per week of actual assignments during the academic year, and they either receive a modest stipend from the program or course credit from their law school. Both law students and judges will be requested to evaluate the program each year. The Judicial Council also plans to develop a national database of well-qualified participating law students who are available for judicial clerkship referrals throughout the nation.

This historic program was enthusiastically endorsed from its inception by the Hon. Sylvia A. James of the 22<sup>nd</sup> District Court, Inkster, Michigan, and immediate past president of the Judicial Council, and by the Hon. Cecil B. Patterson of the Arizona Court of Appeals, Phoenix, Arizona, the current president of the National Bar Association's Judicial Council.

“Thanks primarily to Judge Doris Smith-Ribner, well meaning justices and judges can no longer claim an inability to find qualified minority law clerks. This program not only establishes a reservoir of trained clerks but it also levels the playing field for minorities and the economically disadvantaged,” Judge James said.

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