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CONTACT:

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RELEASE **Art Heinz, communications coordinator**
(717) 795-2062

District Justice Schireson to Chair Statewide Court Security Subcommittee

HARRISBURG, July 24, 2003 — District Justice Henry J. Schireson of Montgomery County has been appointed by state Supreme Court Justice Sandra Schultz Newman to chair one of two advisory subcommittees to the Judicial Council of Pennsylvania on security issues.

The District Justice Security and Emergency Preparedness Subcommittee, which recently convened for the first time, is charged with evaluating the Commonwealth's district justice courts and recommending measures to improve security and emergency preparedness. A second Judicial District Subcommittee will work in tandem with the district justice subcommittee, addressing trial court issues and also reporting its findings to the Judicial Council's Committee on Court Security and Emergency Preparedness.

District Justice Schireson, a Lower Merion district justice for 19 years, represents Pennsylvania's 550 district justices on the Judicial Council of Pennsylvania — an intergovernmental group that advises the Supreme Court concerning administrative and other court matters. He is a former Montgomery County Assistant District Attorney, and past President of the Montgomery County Special Court Judges Association.

“District Justice Schireson has the kind of background and experience needed in this most challenging task that promises to deliver long-term benefits to the courts and the Commonwealth's citizens,” Justice Newman said. “Members of this work group represent the front lines of the criminal justice system and are uniquely qualified to offer input into decisions that will keep our courthouses safe for the public, judges, staff and litigants.”

Other district justice subcommittee members include: Philadelphia County Common Pleas President Judge Frederica A. Massiah-Jackson; Northampton County President Judge Robert A. Freedberg; Lehigh County Commissioner Roger Reis; District Justice M. Kay DuBree, Ottsville, Bucks County; District Justice Todd F. Kelly, Altoona; Bradford County Sheriff Steve Evans; Steve Spangenberg, director of training services for the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency; Philadelphia County Deputy Court Administrator David Lawrence and Aileen Bowers, deputy court administrator for special courts, Beaver County.

The creation of the subcommittees is the latest in a series of steps during the past year to systematically look at security issues in Pennsylvania's Unified Judicial System under the auspices of the Supreme Court and Judicial Council. The work is designed to assess and enhance security in Pennsylvania's court system.

Appointed last year by Chief Justice Emeritus Stephen A. Zappala to lead the effort to identify security issues in Pennsylvania for the Judicial Council, Justice Newman surveyed the state's president judges for information about their experiences and perceptions of safety in the state's 60 judicial districts. District Justice Schireson helped to develop a followup survey aimed at the special courts level that was distributed in February.

The need for added attention to security issues was underscored by a survey of judicial safety conducted in 1999 by the AOPC in conjunction with faculty of the University of Pennsylvania that quantified various types of threats and acts of violence against judges. "Violence in the Judicial Workplace: One State's Experience" was published in the Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science.

The research broke new ground at the national level in understanding the nature of threats to state jurists and has served as a theoretical underpinning for the development of assessing judicial security.

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