



SUPREME COURT OF PENNSYLVANIA
SUITE 2525, ONE OXFORD CENTRE
PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA 15219

MAX BAER
JUSTICE

(412) 467-2220
FAX (412) 467-2221

July, 2010

As a sitting juvenile court judge, I personally handled thousands of cases involving abused and neglected children. As an administrative judge and Supreme Court justice, I have been involved with child welfare administration and policy for almost 20 years. I am keenly aware of how much is at stake in these cases and how difficult each one is. I also recognize that many times the judges, lawyers, and social workers participating in them are the newest and least experienced among their respective professions. Moreover, for the experienced practitioner, advanced resources are limited.

Anything that facilitates the expedited and ongoing development of specialized knowledge, skills, and insight so necessary to adjudicating these cases and allowing meaningful participation in system development should be eagerly anticipated and robustly welcomed. As such, it gives me great pleasure to announce just such an occurrence.

From the outset of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court roundtable movement, there was an acknowledgement that the creation of a dependency Benchbook would allow us to marshal our collective knowledge and experience, benefiting each of us and those who will follow. We also decided the focus of the Benchbook should be different from any prior treatise on child welfare. In addition to providing an easy to use quick reference guide to the law and practice of dependency, the book would also highlight the best available insight from the various fields of individual and family development.

Thus, we should make no mistake. This document is an historic effort. Being released in two phases (the Benchbook now, and its science companion in 2011), the document creates a first-time resource that combines Pennsylvania law, organized pragmatically to allow quick and efficient use, with a series of state and national best practices and guideposts from the scientific community that will inform decision-making and advocacy in a manner never before imagined.

I would like to thank everyone who contributed to this important work. I especially acknowledge our irreplaceable Chairperson, Judge Chester Harhut, and his entire committee. Never has a group worked harder or more meaningfully. Our Edit Committee, which tirelessly proofread the book offering invaluable suggestions, is also deserving of great praise. I would also like to thank Sandy Moore and her staff from the Office of Children and Families in the Courts who, as with all our initiatives, championed every phase of this project.

Finally and especially, I thank every person reading and using this Benchbook to help children and families. Through your efforts, the lives of children and families will be better, our communities will be stronger, and the Commonwealth will be an inspiration to the Nation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Max Baer', with a stylized, cursive script.

Max Baer