



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

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MAX BAER  
JUSTICE

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As a former juvenile court judge, I have 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 nearly thirty years. I am well aware of how much is at stake in each of these cases and how difficult they are.

One of the first efforts of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court roundtable movement was the creation of the Dependency Benchbook released in July, 2010. The Benchbook provides judges, lawyers and child welfare professionals with an extraordinary resource that combines Pennsylvania law, organized to allow quick and efficient use, with recommendations for best practices that inform decision-making and advocacy in a manner never before conceived.

Across the Commonwealth, new and experienced judges have embraced the Benchbook as a valuable resource, as have lawyers in their courtrooms. It is common to see all involved in these cases referring to the many specific checklists, suggested questions contained on specialized bench cards, and the best practice suggestions highlighted in blue throughout the book. My Court has thought enough of the Benchbook to cite it as a secondary source in several important decisions shaping the future of dependency jurisprudence.

The Benchbook has also served as the principle guidepost for most educational programs centering on Pennsylvania dependency. Indeed this is a crucial role for the book as one of the roundtable's constant aspirations is to deliver a consistent message of the best practices to engage and resolve the myriad of difficulties facing dependent youth. The Benchbook is at the core of this consistent message.

Unlike other treatises on child welfare which once completed are rarely updated, the Pennsylvania Dependency Benchbook is a living document. Since its initial release, State Roundtable Workgroups have worked tirelessly to advance our understanding of critical issues that impact dependency proceedings. These include family finding, family group decision making, reasonable efforts determinations, father engagement, incarcerated parents, judicial safety decisions, termination of court supervision, resumption of court adjudication, substance abuse recovery, trauma-informed courts, educational success, visitation, enhanced support for older youth and the reduced use of congregate care. Most recently the State Roundtable has embraced a significant reduction in use of congregate care as an important new goal.

This third edition of the Pennsylvania Dependency Benchbook incorporates discussions of congregate care reduction as well as all of these other topics. Notably, family finding is now set forth in its own chapter in recognition of its centrality to all of our other efforts. In addition, a number of new laws, rules, and decisions have emerged since publication of the prior Benchbook, and this new book reflects these many changes.

The auspicious success of the initial Benchbook and its subsequent editions could not have happened without the unending effort from a dedicated cadre of individuals. I especially acknowledge our effervescent and ubiquitous Chairperson, Judge Kim Berkeley Clark, as well as her entire committee. I also especially thank Sandy Moore. She works selflessly and with tireless energy for the good of all of Pennsylvania's children. A special thanks also to Sandy's tremendous staff, who match her energy, enthusiasm and resolve as they work daily in the far corners of Pennsylvania to make all of our children's lives better. In particular, I would like to thank Lynne Napoleon, judicial analyst who supported the unflagging efforts of the committee during this revision. Finally, I cannot close without a personal thanks to Michele Makray, who makes me far more than I am.

I especially acknowledge every person who read and used the original and revised Benchbooks, and will now enthusiastically embrace this latest version. At the end of days, what could be more meaningful than to say, "I made a difference." Well, you are. Through the combined efforts of all of you, the lives of children and families are improving, our communities are strengthening and our Commonwealth is becoming an enduring aspiration to the world. May we all continue to make a difference.

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

Max Baer