

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**MAY 4, 2000 PROCLAIMED JURY APPRECIATION DAY!**

On May 4, 2000, Philadelphia will salute those who serve as jurors in the Court of Common Pleas. A press conference sponsored by the Court of Common Pleas and Pennsylvanians for Modern Courts will be held at 8:00 a.m. sharp, in the Criminal Justice Center, 1301 Filbert Street, Room 201. The purpose of this press conference is to explain the need for Jury Appreciation Day, to kick off a public awareness campaign on the importance of jury service, and to describe proposed improvements in the jury system. A short ceremony will immediately follow the press conference during which, Renee Chenault, NBC-10 News Co-Anchor, will address jurors in the Jury Assembly Room. Refreshments, movies, prizes and gifts will mark the day, along with City Council and Mayoral Proclamations.

As stated by President Judge Alex Bonavita, "Jury Appreciation Day was instituted to achieve two goals: first, to thank the many individuals who take time out of their busy schedules to fulfill the important civic responsibility of jury duty, and second, to increase awareness among the general public of the need for citizens to respond for jury duty."

In January, 2000, the Court of Common Pleas began a partnership with Pennsylvanians for Modern Courts, a citizens advocacy group, to improve the Philadelphia jury system. "So far, the focus of the collaboration has been on making the jury system more 'juror-friendly'. Future steps will include educational events in neighborhoods and schools, as well as a public awareness campaign on the importance of jury duty," said Lynn A. Marks, Executive Director of Pennsylvanians for Modern Courts.

According to Joel S. Johnson, Esquire, the newly appointed Jury Commissioner, "The Court is also looking into ways to increase the number of people who respond to jury summons, since less than 50% of those called actually respond." The Court is considering several reforms to address this problem, such as increasing the amount of information available on the Internet about jury service, improving the jury service telephone answering system, and implementing a juror scofflaw court.

Jury Appreciation Day coincides with Law Week, during which judges and legal professionals speak throughout Pennsylvania's schools about the justice system, including the importance of jury service. This year, approximately forty (40) Common Pleas judges will address interested area students at middle and high schools on Law Day, May 1, 2000. The Honorable Genece E. Brinkley, who has spearheaded the Court's Jury Appreciation Day efforts, and who participates each year in Law Week by visiting Philadelphia schools, believes " . . . it is very important for judges and other legal professionals to engage young people by going into the schools to teach them about the importance of jury service, so that when they are summoned to participate in this civic duty, they will respond positively."

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:**

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