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State of Pennsylvania

February 18, 2009

The Honorable Zygmunt A. Pines
Court Administrator of Pennsylvania
Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts
Suite 1414, 1515 Market Street
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Dear Mr Pines:

Thank you for the timely and thoughtful response. Your acknowledgement of the seriousness of the situation and your evident commitment to constructive action are appreciated. Even more importantly, the naming of a special master is a crucial and welcome step.

People are stunned and dismayed by the breadth of the wrongdoing, which continues to unfold and will likely implicate additional individuals. The public is appalled and outraged as the details emerge on the mistreatment of kids by the legal apparatus. Many have read news accounts about substantiated accusations of denial of legal representation as far back as 2000, and wonder how it could persist and worsen in the years since. The February 9th article in The Legal Intelligencer has raised an entirely different set of potential improprieties, again long-running in nature.

This problem cannot just be viewed from the state government standpoint. Since the system did not have the answers for preventing this awful problem, the system should not presume to have the answers for repairing the damage. Those responsible for addressing the problem must respect and thoroughly understand the community point of view.

While I understand and respect all the strictures of law the court system must observe in responding to this matter, your best efforts will not yield the desired result if the process is largely done at a distance and without consultation with local citizens.

I believe it is absolutely imperative for representatives of the courts to hold a public input session in Luzerne County. Not to draw the sort of commentary that would interfere with any ongoing investigation. Rather, the purpose is to ask the people for their view of how bad the situation is, and for their advice and recommendations on how to restore their confidence in the system. Let families and professionals offer up their perspectives and suggestions. Some might want to do this on a confidential basis, but others will want the opportunity to do so face-to-face.

Restoring public trust in Luzerne County is going to take some extraordinary steps and a lot of time. But it is an element indispensable to our institutions and to effective governance.

Thank you for your consideration of this request, and I will be more than happy to discuss how to carry it out.

Sincerely,



Lisa Baker

Senator Lisa Baker

pc: The Honorable Ronald D. Castille
Chief Justice of Pennsylvania