



# The Pennsylvania Interbranch Commission for Gender, Racial, and Ethnic Fairness

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Interbranch Commission Convenes Quarterly Meeting of its Full Membership**

*The Meeting Welcomed Five New Commissioners, Featured Strategies to Further New and Existing Initiatives, and Affirmed the Interbranch Commission's Commitment to Promoting Equal Application of the Law in Pennsylvania*

**Harrisburg, July 5, 2024** – On Thursday, June 28, 2024, the Pennsylvania Interbranch Commission for Gender, Racial, and Ethnic Fairness (“Interbranch Commission”) conducted a four and a half hour virtual quarterly meeting of its full membership.

### ***The Quarterly Meeting: A Closer Look***

- **Welcoming New Interbranch Commissioners.** The meeting began with the introduction of the Interbranch Commission’s five newest members, Heather Batzel, Esquire, Darwin Beauvais, Esquire, Philip Friedman, Esquire, Honorable Nicole Henry-Taylor., and Rev. Dr. Darron McKinney, Sr. Attorney Batzel is a corporate and securities attorney based out of Allegheny County. Attorney Beauvais is a zoning and land use partner with Obermayer, a Philadelphia-based law firm. Dr. McKinney is the pastor of Bright Hope Baptist Church in Philadelphia. Attorney Friedman is a criminal defense and personal injury attorney with Purchase, George & Murphey, P.C. in Erie, PA. Judge Henry-Taylor is a judge in the Family Division of the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas. The newest members were all appointed by Governor Shapiro. There are still three remaining vacancies on the Interbranch Commission held by Sen. Kim Ward, Sen. Jay Costa, and Rep. Brian Cutler.
- **A Promising and Positive Executive Director Report.** The Interbranch Commission received a report from the Executive Director, Maraleen Shields, Esquire, who highlighted steady progress in raising the profile of the Interbranch Commission. Since December 2023, the Interbranch Commission has significantly expanded its presence across social media platforms with informative, engaging, and pertinent content, supported and organized a robust schedule of educational programming across the Commonwealth, and continued to develop working relationships with key stakeholders across the Commonwealth. The Interbranch Commission recently became an affiliate member of the Pittsburgh Legal Diversity & Inclusion Coalition.

The quarterly meeting also included robust discussion amongst Commissioners of the strategies the Interbranch Commission is pursuing to drive forward its existing initiatives. Among the Interbranch Commission’s recent and ongoing initiatives are:

- **Forming an *Ad Hoc* Bylaws Committee.** The Interbranch Commission decided to form an *Ad Hoc Bylaws* committee to review its succession planning, committee structure, and appointment process with an eye towards improving the Interbranch Commission’s internal operating system.
- **Working with the Executive Branch to improve access to interpretation and other language-based services in the Commonwealth.** The Interbranch Commission working with stakeholders, including Community Justice Project, Pennsylvania Legal Aid, and Justice at Work, to assess the status of language access programs in the executive branch and ensure compliance with the Court and Administrative Proceedings Certification Law (Act 172 of 2006). [Act 172 requires the Department of Labor and Industry](#) to establish parallel programs for the appointment and use of certified interpreters in administrative court proceedings. In addition, the Language Access Committee surveyed current interpreters to determine whether there are any areas for development or improvement in the AOPC Language Access Program.
- **Developing a program to improve the judicial clerkship program.** The Interbranch Commission received an update on a proposal to work with the Pennsylvania Bar Association to improve and strengthen the judicial clerkship pipeline for Pennsylvania law students.
- **Recommending modernized approaches to name change and legal parentage in Pennsylvania.** The Interbranch Commission made recommendations to the legislature aimed at modernizing and improving access to the [name change process](#) in Pennsylvania while assisting current practitioners with understanding how to navigate the process. The Interbranch Commission also joined an [amicus brief](#) to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court in *Glover v. Junior* urging the court to adopt the doctrine of “intent-based parentage” and made recommendations in support of [HB 350](#) to codify a uniform legal framework for determining parent-child relationships that reflect best practices and societal and technological developments.
- **Improving indigent defense services in the Commonwealth.** Executive Director, Maraleen Shields continues to serve as an *ex officio* member of the statewide Indigent Defense Advisory Committee, which recently approved more than [\\$6.6 million in funding to Pennsylvania counties for indigent defense services](#). The Interbranch Commission reviewed the lawsuit filed by the ACLU of Pennsylvania, how this litigation could impact future indigent defense funding, and reaffirmed its commitment to improving indigent defense services across the Commonwealth.

“It is an exciting time to be part of the Interbranch Commission. We have motivated and active Commissioners and committee members who are poised to drive our mission forward,” said Executive Director Shields. The next quarterly meeting of the Interbranch Commission will occur on September 27, 2024, in Harrisburg, PA.

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The Interbranch Commission for Gender, Racial, and Ethnic Fairness was established in

2005 by the three branches of Pennsylvania government. The purpose of the Interbranch Commission is to promote equal application of the law. The Interbranch Commission fulfills its purpose by implementing the findings and recommendations of the 2003 Final Report by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court Committee on Racial and Gender Bias in the Justice System; investigating and implementing new initiatives that may not have been addressed by that Report; suggesting ways to reduce bias in all three branches of Pennsylvania government and within the legal profession; raising both public and professional awareness of its work; and increasing public confidence in Pennsylvania government.

**For more information, press only:**

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**For more information on the Interbranch Commission:**

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