

**TESTIMONY OF THE HONORABLE JOHN D. KUHN,
COURT OF COMMON PLEAS OF ADAMS COUNTY**

**ON THE WORK OF THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE ROUNDTABLE'S EDUCATIONAL
SUCCESS AND TRUANCY PREVENTION WORKGROUP**

HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

SEPTEMBER 22, 2014

GOOD MORNING. MY NAME IS JOHN KUHN, AND I AM A JUVENILE COURT JUDGE OF THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS OF ADAMS COUNTY. I ALSO SERVE AS CO-CHAIR OF THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE ROUNDTABLE'S EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS AND TRUANCY PREVENTION WORKGROUP. THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE ROUNDTABLE IS AN INITIATIVE CREATED BY THE PENNSYLVANIA SUPREME COURT, UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF JUSTICE MAX BAER, IN COLLABORATION WITH THE PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WELFARE'S OFFICE OF CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES. THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE ROUNDTABLE IS DESIGNED TO GUIDE COLLABORATIVE REFORM EFFORTS IN OUR CHILD DEPENDENCY SYSTEM.

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE ROUNDTABLE HAS ESTABLISHED A NUMBER OF WORKGROUPS, INCLUDING THE TRUANCY WORKGROUP, WHICH WAS COMMISSIONED IN 2009. THE WORKGROUP'S MISSION INCLUDED: GATHERING INFORMATION ABOUT CRITICAL SYSTEMIC ISSUES IN PENNSYLVANIA REGARDING TRUANCY; TO IDENTIFY NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED AND PENNSYLVANIA-SPECIFIC PRACTICES THAT ARE EFFECTIVELY IMPACTING THE ISSUE OF TRUANCY; AND TO OUTLINE A STATEWIDE APPROACH TO THE ISSUE AND PROVIDE A COMPREHENSIVE SET OF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REDUCING TRUANCY IN PENNSYLVANIA.

SINCE ITS INCEPTION, OUR WORKGROUP HAS BEEN A COLLABORATIVE VENTURE, INCLUDING CROSS SYSTEMS STAKEHOLDERS FROM THE COURTS, CHILD WELFARE AND EDUCATION. AFTER SIGNIFICANT ANALYSIS AND THOUGHTFUL CONSIDERATION THE WORKGROUP CONCLUDED THAT TRUANCY IS NO ONE ENTITY'S RESPONSIBILITY. RATHER IT IS AN ISSUE THAT REQUIRES SHARED RESPONSIBILITY AND A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH.

MEMBERS OF THE WORKGROUP HAVE INCLUDED: JUVENILE COURT JUDGES; COURT ADMINISTRATORS; MAGISTERIAL DISTRICT JUDGES; COUNTY CHILDREN AND YOUTH ADMINISTRATORS AND OTHER CHILD WELFARE PROFESSIONALS; CHIEF JUVENILE PROBATION OFFICERS; REPRESENTATIVES FROM STATE ASSOCIATIONS INCLUDING THE PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION; THE PENNSYLVANIA ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS; AND THE PENNSYLVANIA ASSOCIATION OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY

SCHOOL PRINCIPALS; AS WELL AS REPRESENTATIVES FROM VARIOUS STATE AGENCIES INCLUDING THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WELFARE'S OFFICE OF CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES, THE PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, THE JUVENILE COURT JUDGES' COMMISSION, AND THE ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF PENNSYLVANIA COURTS' OFFICE OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN THE COURTS. OTHER MEMBERS INCLUDE REPRESENTATION FROM THE EDUCATION LAW CENTER, THE JUVENILE LAW CENTER AND THE PA COUNCIL OF CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILY SERVICES.

IN 2010, AFTER A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE REGARDING TRUANCY AND AN ANALYSIS OF BOTH EDUCATIONAL AND COURT-RELATED TRUANCY DATA, THE WORKGROUP ISSUED RECOMMENDATIONS IN ITS REPORT, "**TRUANCY: A CALL TO ACTION**". ([HTTP://WWW.OCFPCACOURTS.US/CHILDRENS-ROUNDTABLE-INITIATIVE/STATE-ROUNDTABLE-WORKGROUPS/EDUCATIONAL-SUCCESS-AND-TRUANCY-PREVENTION](http://www.ocfcpacourts.us/childrens-roundtable-initiative/state-roundtable-workgroups/educational-success-and-truancy-prevention)).

THE FIVE RECOMMENDATIONS ADOPTED BY THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE ROUNDTABLE, VIEWED AS A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO LOCAL TRUANCY REDUCTION EFFORTS, INCLUDED THE FOLLOWING:

1. DEMONSTRATE EFFECTIVE COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS WHICH INCLUDE SHARING ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR TRUANCY;
2. CREATE AN EDUCATIONAL CULTURE / CLIMATE THAT PRIORITIZES STUDENTS' CONNECTIONS TO THEIR SCHOOLS AND ENGAGES FAMILIES;
3. IMPLEMENT SPECIFIC STRATEGIES WITH MEASURABLE OUTCOMES TARGETING PREVENTION, EARLY IDENTIFICATION AND INTERVENTION;
4. TRACK TRUANCY DATA AND PROGRAM OUTCOMES, AND SHARE INFORMATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS; AND
5. BUILD SUSTAINABLE FUNDING BASES AND ALLOCATE RESOURCES BASED ON DATA-INFORMED DECISIONS, AND PARTNERSHIPS THAT MAXIMIZE EFFICIENCIES.

THE WORKGROUP CONTINUED ITS EFFORTS OVER THE NEXT YEAR AND, IN 2011, ISSUED AN UPDATED REPORT TO THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE ROUNDTABLE. THE 2011 REPORT RECOMMENDED THAT THE WORKGROUP EXAMINE EXISTING LAWS GOVERNING SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND THAT IT PARTNER WITH STAKEHOLDERS TO ENHANCE EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS ABOUT TRUANCY. IN ADDITION THE WORKGROUP PROVIDED INFORMATION TO THE MINOR JUDICIARY EDUCATION BOARD TO ENHANCE THE REVISED TRUANCY CURRICULUM FOR MAGISTERIAL DISTRICT JUDGES.

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE ROUNDTABLE EXPANDED THE MISSION OF THE WORKGROUP TO INCLUDE ADDRESSING THE EDUCATIONAL STABILITY AND SUCCESS FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE, INCLUDING CONCERNS REGARDING THE UTILIZATION OF CYBER CHARTER SCHOOLS FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE. THE WORKGROUP'S 2012 REPORT TO THE STATE ROUNDTABLE PRESENTED INFORMATION IN TWO SECTIONS: EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS AND TRUANCY PREVENTION. THE REPORT OUTLINED RECOMMENDATIONS WHICH INCLUDED EDUCATIONAL GOALS FOR YOUTH IN OUT-OF-HOME CARE AND A NUMBER OF LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS TO REFORM PENNSYLVANIA'S SCHOOL CODE.

IN 2013, STAFF OF THE JUVENILE COURT JUDGES' COMMISSION (JCJC) INITIATED EFFORTS ON BEHALF OF THE WORKGROUP TO DRAFT LANGUAGE THAT COULD BE THE SUBJECT OF TRUANCY-RELATED SCHOOL CODE AMENDMENTS.

AT THE 2014 MEETING OF THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE ROUNDTABLE, THE WORKGROUP REPORTED ON ITS PROGRESS IN PROVIDING GUIDANCE AND DIRECTION REGARDING EXTENSIVE REVISIONS THAT WERE MADE TO THE CURRICULUM FOR CHILD WELFARE PROFESSIONALS WHO WORK WITH FAMILIES WHERE TRUANCY CONCERNS EXIST. THE WORKGROUP ALSO RECOMMENDED THAT DATA SHARING BE IMPROVED BETWEEN MAGISTERIAL DISTRICT JUDGES AND DEPENDENCY COURTS REGARDING TRUANT STUDENTS WHO ARE ADJUDICATED DEPENDENT.

ALSO, DURING THE 2014 MEETING, JCJC STAFF REPORTED ON THEIR EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE CONSENSUS AMONG STAKEHOLDERS REGARDING LANGUAGE THAT COULD BE THE SUBJECT OF TRUANCY-RELATED SCHOOL CODE AMENDMENTS. MY HOPE IS THAT THE COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS OF THE JUVENILE COURT JUDGES' COMMISSION, THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WELFARE'S OFFICE OF CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES AND THE PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION WILL LEAD TO A COMPREHENSIVE LEGISLATIVE PROPOSAL THAT CAN BE SHARED WITH YOU.

AS A JUDGE, I CANNOT COMMENT ON ANY SPECIFIC LEGISLATIVE PROPOSAL BEFORE YOUR COMMITTEE, BUT WOULD RESPECTFULLY RECOMMEND THAT YOU CONSIDER TAKING A COMPREHENSIVE, COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO REFORMING OUR TRUANCY LAWS. THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR ATTENTION TO THIS VERY IMPORTANT MATTER.