

February 28, 2007

To: All Judges
First Judicial District

Re: **2007 Election Court Assignment**

Dear Judges:

In light of: the recently implemented Provisional Ballot procedures which will permit any qualified voter to cast his or her vote without first obtaining an individual Court Order; the decreasing number of election matters heard by the judges assigned to the Divisional Election Courts; and, the large number of judges assigned to the Divisional Election Courts, I have decided to streamline the Election Court assignments as noted below. I have discussed my plans with various election entities (such as the Committee of 70) and note that the District Attorney's office is no longer staffing the Divisional Election Courts.

As you know, in the past, the President Judge of the Court of Common Pleas of Philadelphia County has assigned approximately thirty-five (35) judges on the day of both the primary election and general election to dispose of election related issues. The Court has staffed a "Central Election Court," located in City Hall, as well as fourteen (14) "Divisional Courts," located in various police districts.

On both election days, a substantial number of Court cases must be continued, or not scheduled or heard at all, due to the large number of judges assigned to election court duties. In fact, we have determined that on the 2006 Primary Election day (May 19, 2006) in the Family Court alone, a total of 142 cases could not be heard in the Juvenile Branch, and in the Domestic Relations Branch, 95 cases (out of which 70 were custody hearings) could not be heard. A similar impact was felt in the Criminal and Civil Divisions of the Court of Common Pleas. Moreover, the Court has incurred overtime expenses to staff all of the Divisional Courts.

As one can imagine, the impact on the case-disposition in the First Judicial District due to the loss of more than one-third of its Court of Common Pleas judicial complement has been substantial. Conversely, the benefit of staffing the fourteen Divisional Election Courts has been minimal. During the May, 2006 Primary, a total of 22 election matters were heard by the Divisional Courts (less than 2 per Divisional Court), and 104 matters were heard by the Divisional Courts during the November General Election (an average of 7 per Divisional Court). I am enclosing detailed statistics for the 2005 and 2006 elections.

Accordingly, in order to more properly utilize valuable judicial resources for the people of Philadelphia, and because all significant election issues can be promptly and properly heard at the Central Election Court located in City Hall, in the upcoming Primary Election on May 15, 2007, only four Divisional Election Courts will be scheduled in addition to the Central Election Court. Divisional Election Court judges will preside at the following Police Districts:

1st District	-	24th and Wolf Streets
5th District	-	Ridge Avenue & Cinnaminson Street
19th District	-	61st and Thompson Streets
24th District	-	Whitaker and Erie Avenue

It is my hope that all Divisional Courts may be eliminated for the 2007 General Election.

Finally, I trust that the Court will be fully able to comply with its mandate, as set forth in 25 P.S. § 3046, and will be able to decide all matters pertaining to the election as may be necessary to carry out the intent of the Election Code through the Central Election Court.

I thank you for your cooperation in this matter.

Very truly yours,

C. Darnell Jones, II
President Judge
Court of Common Pleas

Enclosure

CDJ/em