

Press Release



Pennsylvania Commission for Fairness & Justice Convenes in Person, Celebrates Tenure of Outgoing Executive Director

Gettysburg, PA — The Pennsylvania Commission for Fairness & Justice (PCFJ) convened at the Courtyard Marriott on Friday, September 25 for its latest quarterly meeting. The meeting, which was PCFJ's first in-person conference since 2024, generated lively discussion and new collaborative opportunities, highlighting the direct benefits of PCFJ's successful advocacy for a budget that permits the organization to resume critical operations and continue pursuing its myriad strategic initiatives.

The meeting served as a celebration of the momentous tenure of outgoing Executive Director, Maraleen Shields, Esq., who formally announced her intended departure in July. As only the Commission's second Executive Director in its 21-year history, Executive Director Shields secured historic achievements for the Commission, including a full complement of appointments to the Commission, the Commission's first budget increase in nearly two decades, and the expansion of professional partnerships across the Commonwealth.

More so than these tangible accomplishments, Commissioners and staff honored Ms. Shields' profound ability to lead the organization with limitless grace and empathy, as well as a strong vision for the organization's continued success and viability. As PCFJ's leader, Attorney Shields brought others along with her, ensuring that our work reflects the valued perspectives of all voices and communities.

With significant gratitude for her efforts and no shortage of tears, the Commission presented Attorney Shields with several departing gifts, while also officially recognizing Brendan Bertig, Esq., in his new role as Interim Executive Director. Mr. Bertig has served as PCFJ's Staff Attorney since March 2021, during which time he has led statewide educational programming and efforts to update key non-discrimination laws and regulations, among other things.

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In addition to a historic leadership transition, the meeting featured a powerful presentation by Ashley Walkowiak on the history and current efforts of the Governor's Advisory Commission on Women, for which she serves as the Executive Director. The presentation spurred both continuing and new opportunities between the two groups on initiatives ranging from civic engagement to judicial training.

Commissioners also received detailed updates from the Chairs of PCFJ's standing committees. Over the course of these reports, Commissioners were apprised of and provided feedback on cutting-edge topics including Commission-led efforts to offer mental health services to Pennsylvania's jurors, elevate the importance and availability of court-sponsored childcare programs, and expand training opportunities on subjects such as implicit bias, the legal name change process, and trauma-informed practices in family court.

The meeting in Gettysburg concluded with a robust staff report, highlighting the Commission's continued social media growth, upcoming internal elections for its Executive Committee, and efforts to rebuild PCFJ's network in light of staffing changes at AOPC and other institutions. The report also featured several recent and upcoming speaking engagements, designed to boost PCFJ's work:

- May 11, 2026 PDAP Presentation on Implicit Bias in Non-Capital Homicide Cases (Commissioner Cathy Law, Staff Attorney Bertig)
- September 17, 2026 PLAN Excellence Awards (E.D. Shields)
- October 28, 2026 PBA Diversity Summit Panel on Language Access Rights in Pennsylvania Courts and Agencies (Staff Attorney Bertig)

PCFJ's next quarterly meeting is scheduled for December 11, 2026.

About the Pennsylvania Commission for Fairness & Justice

PCFJ was established in 2005 by the three branches of Pennsylvania government and is dedicated to promoting fairness and justice in the Commonwealth through collaborative policy development, research, advocacy, and community engagement.

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