

AJA BENCHMARK

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Recent Court-Related Deaths Raise Concerns for Judicial Community

The American Judges Association extends its deepest sympathies to the family of Atlanta Superior Court Judge Rowland W. Barnes, as well as the families of Deputy Sheriff Hoyt Teasley, Court Reporter Julie Brandau, and Customs Agent David Wilhelm, who were killed in Atlanta on March 11. In the wake of the recent murders of Federal Judge Joan Lefkow's husband and mother, this horrific event, once again, highlights the importance of court security for all judicial officers and employees of all courts.

Gayle A. Nachtigal, AJA's president and a circuit court judge in Washington County, Oregon, said, "This latest tragedy is of great concern to all of us who serve in the judiciary, not only for the safety of those who dispense justice on a daily basis, but for the entire court community. Violence or the threat of violence in connection with court proceedings is antithetical to the rule of law.

"We must remain vigilant in our role as a separate and independent branch of government and continue to

educate the public about the necessity for courthouse security," she said.

Concern about threats to judges has been widespread for many years. An article published in 2000 in AJA's *Court Review* cited a 1999 survey of Pennsylvania state trial judges in which 52 percent of the judges had experienced some action by a litigant or court participant that the judge perceived as threatening in some way.

"The safety of judges, court staff, and their families must be treated as an important foundation of our judicial system," Nachtigal said. "We should make sure that sufficient resources are provided to analyze the threats to safe courts and to make sure that reasonable steps are taken to safeguard the people who provide a system of justice for everyone."

AJA stresses that such acts of brutality directed at judges and other court employees underscore the important role that they play in maintaining the rule of law in our country. **bm**

NCSC Unveils "Blueprint" for Court Security, Will Convene National Security Summit in April 2005

A new security blueprint for America's state courts emphasizing critical review of operating procedures and facilities, planning, funding, and new courthouse design was released by the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., March 16.

In addition to presenting the ten-point blueprint, NCSC also announced plans for a National Summit on Court Safety and Security to be held on April 21, 2005, in Washington, D.C. The National Summit will bring together all members of the court community to provide a mechanism for reviewing current safety and security practices and needs. This effort will result in a strategic action plan that will draw from a compilation of best practices and will provide the mechanism for identifying

resource and funding needs. The Department of Justice has awarded NCSC \$100,000 to fund the summit.

"The National Center for State Courts is committed to ensuring that our partnership with the entire stakeholder community results in the development of effective safety and security measures for our courts," stated Mary McQueen, NCSC president. "With the commitment of resources from the U.S. Department of Justice, our community has support that can only further our efforts on behalf of America's courts."

See page 2 of this issue of *Benchmark* for the "Essential Ten Elements for Effective Courtroom Safety and Security Planning." Go to NCSC's Web site at www.ncsconline.org for more information. **bm**