

MASS. J. 3: 989/11-15

**PRESS RELEASE**

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**FOR RELEASE**  
November 15, 1989  
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**SJC EXTENDS TIME STANDARDS ORDER FOR SUPERIOR COURT CIVIL CASES**

**BOSTON, MA (November 15, 1989)** - - Recognizing that the Superior Court department of the Massachusetts Trial Court has insufficient resources to fulfill its commitment to the SJC order, known as Time Standards, the Chief Justice and Associate Justices of the Supreme Judicial Court today announced an extension to 36 months for the disposition of Superior Court civil cases filed on or after July 1, 1988. The previous Time Standards order, promulgated by the SJC in April, 1986, established that civil cases filed on or after July 1, 1988, had to be tried or disposed of within two years. The new order will take effect on January 15, 1990, until further order of the Court, and applies only to cases in the Superior court.

Supreme Judicial Court Chief Justice Paul J. Liacos announced the modification of the Time Standards order in a speech given today to the Massachusetts Academy of Trial Attorneys at their annual meeting. In his speech, Chief Justice Liacos emphasized the Supreme Judicial Court's continuing commitment to the Time Standards program to ensure fast, expeditious and fair treatment in serving the public. Chief Justice Liacos said, "It is our firm intent to return to the two-year concept as soon as the resources to do the job are in place."

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Chief Justice Liacos said that a combination of factors have thwarted the Superior Court's ability to dispose of cases within 24 months. He cited the conscientious efforts of Superior Court Chief Justice Robert L. Steadman and the Superior Court judges and clerks in trying to honor their commitment to the Time Standards order. He acknowledged, however, that the original order was adopted with the belief that the judicial branch would have an adequate number of judges, support personnel and automated information systems to fulfill the commitment. Chief Justice Liacos said, "Our great effort to implement efficient management of our case load in the Superior Court is the first casualty of the failure to fund our courts adequately."

In addition, Chief Justice Liacos cited the increased and unforeseen volume of economic loss cases and criminal cases filed in the Superior Court resulting from the state's recent economic downturn and explosion of drug related crimes as contributing factors in straining the Superior Court's ability to fulfill the Time Standards order. He said that a recent study by the National Center for State Courts revealed a 175% increase in the percentage of drug related cases in Boston courts between 1983 and 1987.

The Chief Justice will appoint a select committee of judges, clerks and litigators to advise him and the Court on the issues raised by the Time Standards modification. The Superior Court has been requested to submit a plan for implementing the adjustment by January 15, 1990.

Although the extension of Time Standards does not affect the District Court, Boston Municipal Court, Probate and Family Court or the other Trial Court departments, the Supreme Judicial Court together with the Chief Administrative Justice of the Trial Court, Arthur M. Mason, and the Trial Court Chief Justices will monitor the progress of Time Standards in those courts.

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COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

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At the Supreme Judicial Court holden at Boston within and  
for said Commonwealth on the sixteenth day of November,  
in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and  
eighty-nine: present,

HON. PAUL J. LIACOS, Chief Justice  
HON. HERBERT P. WILKINS )  
HON. RUTH I. ABRAMS )  
HON. JOSEPH R. NOLAN ) Justices  
HON. NEIL L. LYNCH )  
HON. FRANCIS P. O'CONNOR )  
HON. JOHN M. GREANEY )

ORDERED: Effective January 15, 1990, the Time Standards  
Order issued by this Court on April 7, 1986 is hereby  
amended nunc pro tunc to provide that the time standard for  
the trial, settlement or other disposition of civil cases  
(jury and non-jury) entered in the Superior Court shall be: -  
within 36 months after filing.

Paul J. Liacos , Chief Justice  
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Herbert P. Wilkins )  
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Ruth I. Abrams )  
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Joseph R. Nolan ) Justices  
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Neil L. Lynch )  
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Francis P. O'Connor )  
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John M. Greaney )