



# Full Court Press



Newsletter of the District of Columbia Courts

April 2017

## Judge Anna Blackburne-Rigsby Sworn in as Chief Judge of the DC Court of Appeals

On Friday, March 17, 2017, Anna Blackburne-Rigsby was sworn in as the 11th Chief Judge of the DC Court of Appeals. Surrounded by her family, including her mother, a retired New York judge, and her husband Robert Rigsby, a DC Superior Court judge, as well as colleagues on both DC Courts and Justice Sotomayor from the US Supreme Court, Judge Blackburne-Rigsby took the oath of office in the Historic Courthouse's Ceremonial Courtroom.



*Chief Judge Blackburne-Rigsby is sworn in as chief judge. The oath of office was administered by outgoing Chief Judge Washington, while her husband, Judge Robert Rigsby, held the Bible.*

The event began with a presentation of colors by the Dunbar High School JROTC Color Guard; the pledge of allegiance, led by the Girl Scout Troop from Shiloh Baptist Church; and then the national anthem, by Mrs. Denize Shy, Judicial Administrative Assistant to Judge Rigsby.

Outgoing Chief Judge Eric T. Washington then greeted everyone and gave welcoming remarks. He dispensed with reading Judge Blackburne-Rigsby's bio and told the story of their friendship and common career paths, both starting with the same DC law firm and eventually moving – as intended – to public service.

Mayor Muriel Bowser then gave greetings. She began

by acknowledging the 12 years of service that Chief Judge Eric Washington had provided the DC Courts, which produced a long round of applause. The mayor said she was pleased to be there with representatives from all three branches of the DC government, and was speaking on behalf of the 680,000 people

who call DC home. She spoke of how Judge Blackburne-Rigsby, who she'd gotten to know when she represented the Rigsbys while serving as the Ward 4 councilmember, had sworn her in as councilmember. And, appropriate for St. Patrick's Day, she said that, as a result, she'd always felt that the judge was her "lucky charm."

Dr. Kathryn Woodbury Zeno, a college classmate of the Judge's, spoke next. She told how she met Anna Blackburne early-on at Duke, another African American kid from NYC, and knew right away that they'd be friends. All those years ago, Judge Blackburne-Rigsby was "intelligent, gracious, caring and inspirational."

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# DC Courts Celebrate Black History Month

## Black History Month Kicked Off With a Fashion Show



The DC Courts Black History Month celebration was initiated with a kickoff event in the Court of Appeals on Thursday, February 2. The event was a fashion show, complete with fashion from 1930's all through the 2000's. Chief Judge Eric Washington gave the opening remarks citing the beauty and richness that

is the African American experience. Court staff modeled down a runway while vital information was given about the events of the decade they represented, as well as what inspired the fashion choices of that time.

## Black History Month Jeopardy...we have a winner!

The Black History Month celebration also featured a Jeopardy match on Wednesday, February 15th, entitled Jeopardy: The Black History Edition. Superior Court Clerk James McGinley graciously served as Alex Trebek, and teams from various divisions and the Executive Office played two rounds of hotly-contested Jeopardy.

The winner was Team Guru, an all-male team of court employees. The E-team was a close second. All teams played well and the audience showed strong support (the Civil Division even had signs to support their team!).

## Black History Month Comes to an Eventful End

Friday marked the final 2017 Black History Month celebration at the DC Courts. Activities came to a close with a final program 'The Hidden Figures Cafe' and variety show. The event revealed an array of 'hidden figures' in black history, paying homage to the Oscar nominated film. Performances included the Court's very own Jonathan Hopkins and Marion Swingler who delivered a heartfelt duet. Mr.Hopkins gave an outstanding performance on guitar while Ms.Swingler beautifully sang along.

A new dancing activity was incorporated called 'Can You Keep Up', which involved the participation of the attendees in the audience. Participants gave their best version of popular dances such as 'the twist' and the 'running man.' Overall, the event was filled with education, laughter and good food.



# National Conference of Chief Justices Honors Former Chief Judge Eric T. Washington

## CONFERENCE OF CHIEF JUSTICES RESOLUTION 4

### In Recognition of Chief Judge Eric T. Washington, District of Columbia Court of Appeals

WHEREAS, Chief Judge Eric T. Washington has served as vice-chair or chair of the Access, Fairness and Public Trust Committee since its first meeting in 2010; and

WHEREAS, under Chief Judge Washington's leadership, the Access, Fairness and Public Trust Committee has served as a national voice for numerous critical issues, such as, expanding civil legal aid, enhancing the availability of high-quality language access services, improving services for self-represented litigants, reinforcing state court leadership to address both explicit and implicit bias within the court system, encouraging the creation of access to justice commissions, engaging marginalized and disenfranchised communities to ensure equal access to justice for all, and encouraging the development of technology solutions to address access and fairness issues; and

WHEREAS, the Access, Fairness and Public Trust Committee's success in these areas is due in large part to Chief Judge Washington's willingness to meet with funders who then supported the Committee's efforts and to present at meetings of critical stakeholders such as the Conference of Chief Justices, the Conference of State Court Administrators, the National Consortium on Race and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts, the ABA's State Access to Justice Chairs, and the Self-Represented Litigation Network who implemented the Committee's recommendations; and

WHEREAS, Chief Judge Washington has worked tirelessly and selflessly to champion the work of the Committee; and WHEREAS, Chief Judge Washington is retiring as Chief Judge of the District of Columbia Court of Appeals in March of 2017;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Conference of Chief Justices expresses its deep gratitude to Chief Judge Eric T. Washington for his leadership of the Access, Fairness and Public Trust Committee and his unfailing commitment and outstanding contributions to ensure access to justice for all who come before state courts.

*Adopted as proposed by the CCJ/COSCA Access, Fairness and Public Trust Committee at the Conference of Chief Justices Midyear Meeting on February 1, 2017.*

## Acting Director of National Drug Control Policy, Kemp Chester, Gives Remarks at March Drug Court Graduation



DC Superior Court held its third Drug Court graduation of the year on March 15 and there was a full house in courtroom C-10. After current program participants re-

ceived their certificates for transitioning into a new phase, the graduates were greeted by Acting Director of National Drug Control Policy, Kemp Chester, who encouraged them to 'stay strong' in this new chapter of their lives. He urged them to remember take their journey day by day and never give up.

The DC Metropolitan Police cadets also attended the graduation to show their support. As graduates received their certificates of completion, many of them informed the crowd of how thankful they were for the program in both the good times and the bad.

Presiding Drug Court Judge Wendell Gardner delivered the closing remarks, bringing smiles to everyone in the room as he spoke of how important it was for not just the graduates and participants to be involved in the program, but everyone.

"This is not just a court effort, or a Pretrial Services Agency effort, it's a community effort. We do this for the community." Judge Gardner continued on, speaking of the joy it brings him when he runs into past program participants in the city who are sober and doing well. To the current graduates, he said, "Hang in there, and remember the things you were told during the drug court process. Don't give up before you have the chance to succeed."

## Superior Court Raises Limits for Small Claims Cases

*Many more people can now file using the lower cost and more expeditious process.*

On January 3, 2017, the DC Superior Court raised the dollar amount limit for cases that may be filed in the Small Claims Branch from \$5,000 to \$10,000. This change allows hundreds more civil cases to be resolved in the faster, inexpensive and informal Small Claims court setting. The Court estimates that the change will provide improved access to justice by approximately 1,000 more cases to be filed in the Small Claims Branch each year.

"I am pleased that we can allow more DC area residents to take advantage of the expedient and cost-effective solution of filing in the Small Claims Branch. This change will help expedite cases seeking between \$5,000 and \$10,000 and thereby improve access to justice for those with limited means," said Chief Judge Robert E. Morin.

Previously the limit for cases to be filed as a Small Claim was \$5000 and all suits seeking higher dollar amounts had to be filed in the Civil Division, where filing fees are higher, rules and procedures are more complex, and attorneys are often required. The Court's increase in the limit will save parties time and money. Small claims cases tend to be resolved far more quickly than civil actions and have more streamlined processes, with less complex rules.

To learn more about the Small Claims Branch, and/or to chat with a court employee see [http://www.dccourts.gov/internet/public/aud\\_civil/smallclaims.jsf](http://www.dccourts.gov/internet/public/aud_civil/smallclaims.jsf) (there is a link to Live Chat in the lower right).

To learn more about the Court's Small Claims Resource Center, see <http://www.dccourts.gov/internet/documents/SmallClaimsResourceCenterFlier.pdf>



## DC Superior Court Magistrate Judge Tara Fentress Receives Award



Congratulations to Magistrate Judge Tara Fentress (pictured), winner of the Charlotte E. Ray Award, presented by the GWAC Foundation and the Greater Washington Area Chapter of the Women Lawyers Division of the National Bar Association - her achievements are many and the strength of her family and community strong.

In accepting the award, Judge Fentress spoke of the four fundamental values taught to her by her parents: faith, family, hard work and community service. She spoke of the honor she felt in being selected for an award named for such a significant trailblazer, and how she saw the obstacles she overcame, as with so many of us, as having made her stronger. "There have been many obstacles, but all have molded me."

She closed her remarks with a poem she wrote years ago, about the importance of being thankful for what you have now, not to wait until it's gone to appreciate it. She ended with "Be thankful, NOW."

Congratulations Magistrate Judge Fentress!



## ASIAN AMERICAN PACIFIC ISLANDER HERITAGE MONTH

FRIDAY, MAY 12  
11:00 AM - 1:00 PM  
JURORS' LOUNGE



MARTIAL ARTS  
FINE ARTS  
NATIONAL ORIGIN ATTIRE  
LIGHT REFRESHMENTS

*From front cover—*

*Judge Anna Blackburne-Rigsby Sworn in as Chief Judge of the DC Court of Appeals*

DC Access to Justice Commission Chair Peter Edelman spoke next, calling the day a wonderful day for our city. He spoke of the profound needs of average working people across DC and their need for legal representation. He said he was confident that as Chief, Judge Blackburne-Rigsby would lead us on the issue, saying she was already a leader. He closed with "We will keep on...and you will keep us keeping on."

Next the judge's pastor spoke, Rev. Wallace Charles Smith, D.Min. He spoke of her many good traits, including timeliness for church "other than those times that Robert [Judge Rigsby] comes with her!" After that laugh, he got serious, telling the audience "The Anna you see is the same as the person I see on Sundays." He described her as courageous and dignified.

Lastly, a cousin, Dr. Richard Jones spoke for the family. He said that March 17 was an appropriate date: during women's history month and right after Black History Month. "We give you praise for your remarkable achievement. Our children's children will have something to share during these months." He closed with lyrics from Lift Every Voice and Sing: "Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us, Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us..."

At the conclusion of the remarks, DC Judicial Nomination Commission Chair, US District Court Judge Emmet Sullivan presented the official commission and then Chief Judge Eric T. Washington performed his last official act, administering the oath of office to Judge Blackburne-Rigsby as her husband held the Bible. The judge's son then helped her on with her robe, the first time she wore it as chief judge.

Judge Washington then escorted Chief Judge Blackburne-Rigsby to her rightful place on the bench (the center seat) and she made brief remarks. She started by honoring former Chief Judge Washington, the longest serving DC Court of Appeals chief judge. The crowd responded with a standing ovation.

Chief Judge Blackburne-Rigsby then thanked everyone who was there, especially the officials who took time out of their busy schedule, the speakers who gave remarks, her husband of 25 years, Judge Robert Rigsby, saying he was the most noble and courageous man she knows, and her son, saying "you and your generation will be ready to take on the mantle of leadership very soon!" She thanked her parents for the values they taught her sisters and herself: the importance of faith, service, education, and hard work in service to others.

The Chief Judge said that her sisters and her family members were her rock and her support. She then thanked her staff, including her long-time judicial administrative assistant, LaVerne Atiba.

The new Chief Judge then directed her remarks to the audience, saying that it was essential to remember that while each case is one of hundreds or even thousands we deal with, to the parties, it's their one case, it's their world. She said that for those who work at the courts, our treatment of parties is what the court is to them, and we need to keep that at the forefront of our minds. She closed with "The role of our three branches of government is more important than ever. The judicial branch is the foundation, not subject to whim, but yet we cannot be so set in stone as to never change."

## Superior Court Welcomes Students for Youth Law Fair

The 2017 Youth Law Fair took place Saturday, March 18 at the Moultrie Courthouse. Nearly 200 students gathered to discuss and debate issues surrounding this year's theme is "OMG, I thought I deleted this!" where they focused on social media profiles, pictures, information permanence and the ever increasing digital footprint on social media.



Attorneys coached students through mock trial exercises as they played the roles of defense and prosecuting attorneys, jurors and witnesses. One student spoke of how excited she was to play the role of the prosecutor, stating 'it was really cool to feel like you were bringing justice to someone's life.'

Chief Judge Robert Morin gave opening remarks about importance of events like Youth Law fair because of the pertinent exposure they provide for young people. DC Bar president, Annamaria Steward greeted students with excitement, speaking on the importance of staying on top of social media knowledge given the many ways it's being used today.

## Security Awareness Month



April is the DC Courts' Security Awareness Month. The Information Technology (IT) Division would like to remind everyone that information security awareness is critical for safeguarding the Courts' information. Securing information cannot be done with technology alone. Every individual who accesses the Courts' computer resources needs to follow information security best practices at all

times. It only takes one individual with one lapsed moment for a potential information breach to occur that can lead to catastrophic results. Making every single individual at the Courts aware of best practices is the best way to keep us safe.



## Values Pulse Check survey will be administered Court-Wide in April and May

### Your perspective about Values progress matters – share it today!

In 2016, every DC Courts employee was invited to participate in a brief online survey to share their perspective about the extent to which the Courts were collectively living the values. Part of the intent, at that time, was to establish a baseline measure of how DC Courts' employees felt the values were being lived.

Since that time, we've been working throughout the Courts to address the values. And now, it's time to check-in on our efforts to see what's working and where there's still room to improve. Your input is essential to the Courts' success in living the values. The data will provide us with understanding as to where we've moved the needle and where we need to focus our efforts.

You will receive a link to the Values Pulse Check survey from a point of contact within your division in the month of April or May. **Please take 5 minutes to complete the survey and share your candid views.** Because our partners at ChangeFusion administer the survey no one at DC Courts will have access to individual responses. Results will be themed and shared at the division and branch level to protect the anonymity of respondents.



### ACCOUNTABILITY

We take responsibility for our conduct and are answerable for our performance.

### EXCELLENCE

We provide the highest quality of service in everything we do.

### FAIRNESS

We are impartial in our actions, decisions and treatment of others.

### INTEGRITY

We demonstrate the highest standards of ethical behavior.

### RESPECT

We treat everyone with dignity, courtesy and understanding.

### TRANSPARENCY

We are open in our processes and communicate our actions and decisions clearly.