



Full Court Press



Newsletter of the District of Columbia Courts

September 2018

DC Courts Executive Update Access to Justice, Budget, and Values

Access to Justice

As part of the DC Courts' commitment to serving the public and administering justice, an area of increasing focus is Access to Justice. Goal 1 of the DC Courts 2018-2022 Strategic Plan is to provide Access to Justice for All – working to “ensure full access to the justice system and court services.” The Courts have already had a number of initiatives and accomplishments in this area, including the following:

- A Veterans Navigator program to connect veterans who are court users with services that they may need, such as *pro bono* legal services, as well as social services, programs, or benefits to which they might be entitled because of their military service;
- Greater assistance to litigants without lawyers through implementation of new judicial ethics rules based on national standards that include a provision on the judge's role in facilitating self-represented litigants' right to be heard. For example, the judge in a case may consider providing information about the proceedings, asking neutral questions, or explaining the basis for a ruling;
- Live video streaming of arguments before the Court of Appeals on the Internet, leveraging technology to provide the public greater access to the Court;
- Initiatives to enhance electronic court access and provide more information to the public, including a completely restructured and user-friendly website with improved access to information; and a new

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July Bar Exam Sets Record: An Historic Day for the DC Court of Appeals

The month of July marked an historic milestone for the DC Court of Appeals (DCCA), as nearly 1,700 exam takers packed the Walter E. Washington Convention Center to sit for the DC Bar Exam. The DCCA's Office of the Committee on Admissions & Unauthorized Practice of Law (COA/UPL) administered the exam, the largest in DC's history! Under the oversight of Julio Castillo, Clerk of Court, and Shela Shanks, Director of the COA/UPL, and her dedicated staff, the exam was administered with minimal disruptions. The effort was also supported by a host of DC Courts' volunteers – proctors, event staff and other essential personnel (e.g. medical and security teams) – without whom the successful administration of the exam would not have been possible.

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Open To All Trusted By All Justice For All

DC Courts Celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month



The DC Courts' Hispanic Heritage Committee is proud to kick off the 2018 Hispanic Heritage Month Celebration! The theme for this year "Hispanics: One Endless Voice to Enhance our Traditions" invites us to reflect on Hispanic-American tradition, history, and culture.

Please join us at our upcoming celebrations:

The DC Courts' Galleria

Featuring the "Latino Experience"

Friday, October 5, 2018

Moultrie Courthouse, Jurors' Lounge, 12:00-2:00 pm

The CORO Awards Ceremony

Friday, October 19, 2018

Moultrie Courthouse, Jurors' Lounge, 12:00-2:00 pm

Zabrina Dempson Named Acting Clerk of Superior Court



The DC Courts are pleased to announce the appointment of Zabrina Dempson as Acting Clerk of Superior Court. Ms. Dempson was previously the Director of the Court's Civil Division, where she oversaw more than 100 employees and almost 50,000 cases a year. Zabrina began her career with the court in 2006 as the Civil Division's Branch Chief of the Small Claims and Conciliation Branch; she was promoted to Senior Operations Manager for the Clerk of Court in 2009, and became the Deputy Director of the Civil Division in 2012. Ms. Dempson has extensive knowledge of court operations, strong management skills, and is committed to the DC Courts vision, mission, and values.

Zabrina is a native Washingtonian and graduate of Eastern High School. She received her Bachelor's Degree and Juris Doctor Degree from North Carolina Central University. She is a licensed attorney for the District of Columbia and North Carolina.

DC Courts Management Training Program Showcases Class of 2018

The 2018 Management Training Program (MTP) Team Project Presentations were held on Wednesday, September 12. Herb



Rouson, Deputy Clerk of Court for the Court of Appeals, and Chair of the Management Training Committee, welcomed those in attendance who had come to see the presentations and support fellow employees. DC Court of Appeals Chief Judge Anna Blackburne-Rigsby gave opening remarks, thanking team members for their time and dedication to improving the way the Courts serve the public. She stressed the importance of teamwork and the attention to every level and component of access to justice at the DC Courts. "None of it works unless all of it works."

Participants were judged on a number of factors, competing for up to 100 points: their project's value to the DC Courts; alignment with the DC Courts Strategic Plan; evidence of a good team process; efficient and effective use of resources; documentation provided and how effective the team was at presenting their project. They were also evaluated on scope, depth, thoroughness, nature of need and cost. The teams presented to a panel of judges and utilized video and other technology to demonstrate their proposals.

DC Courts Executive Officer Anne Wicks announced the winning team and the team that was runner-up, and congratulated all the participants on their hard work. She mentioned that she would love

to see every idea that was presented come to fruition. DC Superior Chief Judge Robert Morin delivered the closing remarks, speaking

directly to the participants: "Congratulations to everyone involved, it's been great to see how far all of you have come. All five projects are going to help improve the Courts and the people that we serve."

The presentations were all excellent, but one winner had to be chosen and it was Team 5. The group called their project 'DC Courts: We'll Speak Your Language.' It aims to enhance and increase language access for those coming to the Courts who have limited English proficiency. The members of Team Five were Bradley Edge of the Probate Division, Patrick Garrity from the Court of Appeals, Angela Lee from the Criminal Division and Stacey Raikes from the Court Reporting Division. The team was mentored by Herbert Rouson, Deputy Clerk of the DC Court of Appeals.

MTP facilitator Keith Robinson provided context for attendees, pointing out that although leadership development is a 14 billion dollar industry, research reveals that many courts tend to fail in this area. "The DC Courts are successful in leadership development because of their own great leadership, discipline, and structure, funding and momentum."

Congratulations to TEAM 5 and ALL of this year's participants in the Management Training Program!

A Candid Conversation with DC Court of Appeals Judge Vanessa Ruiz, New President of the International Association of Women Judges

By Jasmine Turner

DC Court of Appeals Senior Judge Vanessa Ruiz could be perceived by an onlooker as somewhat of a quiet storm. This year alone, she has traveled to Israel, the Palestinian Territories, Argentina, Austria, Brazil, and Spain, with trips to Mexico and Morocco planned for the Fall. Wearing many hats and balancing an abundance of responsibility, she is most certainly a modern day woman on the move.

“Well, I am a senior judge, so I do have a little more flexibility” she laughed.

So much flexibility that I had to schedule our sit-down interview over a month in advance to discuss her extensive list of accolades, the most recent being her appointment as President of the International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ).

Founded in 1991, IAWJ is a non-profit, non-governmental organization that brings together over 6000 judges in more than 100 countries from all corners of the globe, at all levels of the judiciary, creating a powerful network of influential leaders united by their commitment to equal justice and the rule of law. A great deal of IAWJ’s mission is rooted in leadership development and education. IAWJ is committed to bringing a gender perspective to the interpretation and application of the law. The organization is also dedicated to eliminating gender discrimination and creating access to justice for women and girls, as well as encouraging the national and regional formation of IAWJ chapters.

“This organization is not a social club or a union; these are committed women judges who truly believe in the rule of law, human rights, equal rights for women and girls and the role of judges in promoting those values. This organization is about judicial leadership,” Judge Ruiz emphasized.



The judge informed me of the passion and dedication that judges from all over the world have to further the mission of IAWJ. The US chapter, the National Association of Women Judges (NAWJ), is one of the largest chapters but, Argentina, which is a much smaller country, has almost as many women in their association. Countries like Canada, Australia, Mexico and Tanzania also have large and active associations, while some smaller countries, like Nepal, have only eight members. The women of IAWJ gather biennially at an international conference to discuss pertinent issues, the most recent conference was held in Buenos Aires, Argentina and the next will be in Auckland, New Zealand.

Just two years ago, the organization celebrated its 25th anniversary right here in the Nation’s Capital. Regional conferences are held in the off years.

“Although we are comprised of women from all over the world, as judges, we struggle with similar issues,” Judge Ruiz explained. “Challenges such as marginalization within the court system, breaking into senior roles and access to continued professional education are just a few concerns of the judges in IAWJ.”

But, it’s not just about the judges; IAWJ’s larger vision of supporting access to justice includes the formation of programs that combat gender-based violence, corruption, “sextortion” (a form of abuse of power that targets women and girls primarily) and human trafficking. In November, Judge Ruiz and DC Court of Appeals Chief Judge Anna Blackburne-Rigsby, who is on the Board of Managerial Trustees for IAWJ, traveled alongside dozens of other female judges and prosecutors from around the world to Vatican City for a summit on human trafficking and organized crime which was held by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences. There, judges and prosecutors participating in the summit were gathered to share their experiences, propose new models and assess existing ones. IAWJ also works

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Executive Update: Access to Justice, Budget and Values

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DC Superior Court online case information system that gives access to case dockets.

Moving forward, we will have an increased focus on Access to Justice. In cooperation with various stakeholders in the legal community, the Courts have taken a multi-pronged approach to addressing the needs of self-represented litigants, leveraging the legal community, but additional resources are needed to meet the public's need for assistance.

Although thousands of persons have been served by the efforts we currently have in place, the needs of those who cannot afford a lawyer significantly outweigh the existing services. You will soon hear about two new initiatives to assist litigants in navigating the Courts and our processes and in filling out forms.

Equal access under the law is the foundation of our country's legal system and is a principle the DC Courts strive to achieve. Central to ensuring that all persons we serve have meaningful participation in the judicial process and can access court services is the elimination of barriers to provide access to the justice system.

Budget

The Courts' budget is comprised of two separate components – an operating budget and a capital budget. The operating budget funds personnel costs (salaries and benefits) and non-personnel costs such as contractual services (security, housekeeping), supplies, rent and utilities.

The capital budget is used to maintain the infrastructure (electrical upgrades, restroom improvements, general repairs) and to fund renovation/improvement projects such as the Moultrie Courthouse Addition and the new roof on the Historic Courthouse. The two budgets are separate from each other, and we can't simply use funds from one account to pay for expenses in the other.

By FY 2019, the Courts' budget will have been reduced by \$33 million over two years. Operating budget cuts have had a significant negative impact on personnel levels and personnel funding. Nearly three-quarters of the Courts' operating budget pays our salaries and benefits, so, with lower

funding the next couple of years, staff adjustments are necessary to stay on budget.

Despite the challenges that place additional pressure on each of us to do more with less, please know that we recognize your commitment and efforts. The Courts' leadership appreciates employees' flexibility and perseverance as we strive to cover the gaps, maintain operations, and provide the highest level of service to our community, with fewer staff. Especially in these difficult circumstances, the public is counting on us to fulfill our mission of administering justice and to live up to our vision: Open to All, Trusted by All, Justice for All.

Living Our Values



Improving and changing how we live our values is not easy work. It involves reflecting on our habits of how we interact with each other and the public, then constantly striving to improve. Our recent Values

Pulse Check highlights that we continue to make progress. The vast majority of our divisions saw improvement in their results. The values of accountability, integrity, fairness and transparency had the greatest percent improvements.

Over the past year Values Pulse Check results saw:

- 72% of division improved in accountability
- 44% of divisions improved in excellence
- 78% of divisions improved in integrity
- 61% of divisions improved in fairness
- 50% of divisions improved in respect
- 72% of divisions improved in transparency

In addition, 60% of employees indicated they are seeing progress made in how the values are lived at DC Courts. This is a 10% increase versus last year, and marks the first time we have seen an increase and seen the majority of employees sensing progress.

While we have made progress, we do have further to go. We currently average a score of 3.7 out of 5 (*the courts*

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Conversation with Judge Ruiz

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with various branches of the United Nations, the World Bank, and NGOs such as Transparency International on issues that align with IAWJ's mission.

Seated comfortably in the DC Court of Appeals Board of Judges Conference Room, Judge Ruiz spoke with great fervor about what seemed to be an endless list of disparities that impact women around the world. I asked how she was able to keep herself sane and grounded as she witnessed first-hand injustice all over the globe, injustices that are inconceivable to many of us in the United States. To that, she responded with countless stories of brave and innovative women judges she'd encountered before and during her term as IAWJ President that had inspired her to work harder. These judges are trying to address injustice based on gender: women in Nepal who are banished to inhumane huts during their menstrual cycle or India's law that allows rapists to escape criminal responsibility if the rape victims are made to marry their rapist. Child brides in Africa and the Middle East. In Ramallah she met a judge who, by dint of her perseverance, scholarship and courage, became the first woman in the Arab world to have been named to shariah court, where family issues of divorce, child custody and support, and inheritance are adjudicated. "I see the strength in these women and it moves me. The day to day work in the Court of Appeals is what keeps me grounded. Doing my part to build the edifice that I believe law and justice should be."

During her term, Judge Ruiz plans on doing everything in her power to further the IAWJ mission and the values that the organization was built upon. She shared with me that she believes that organizations such as IAWJ can't push anti-corruption and other moral issues without holding themselves to the highest possible ethical standard. "In recent years, I believe, very basic rules of law are being questioned globally and as IAWJ president, that is one of the things I want to focus on. I think we as judges need to pull back a little bit, look at the bigger picture and stand up for those foundational values of the rule of law and judicial independence because, without that, we won't be able to do many other important things. You need broad societal acceptance of basic principles, and they are under attack." Judge Ruiz further elaborated on issues that she found to be imperative; noting that even capitalizing on movements like #MeToo could help the organization to promote many things they've been doing all along, for example, in the area of femicide, domestic violence and sexual harassment. She

also stated that despite major differences among countries' legal systems, the U.S. has plenty that we can learn from other countries, and how the friendships and interactions she's cultivated through both IAWJ and NAWJ have reminded her of the importance of having a worldly perspective.

"We are not the sole keepers of the truth or necessarily know the best way to approach an issue. Your own court can be somewhat of a bubble, and when you're in constant contact with people from all over the world it broadens your mind. I think, it makes you a better judge and a better person, and I believe that those things benefit those who come before you in court."

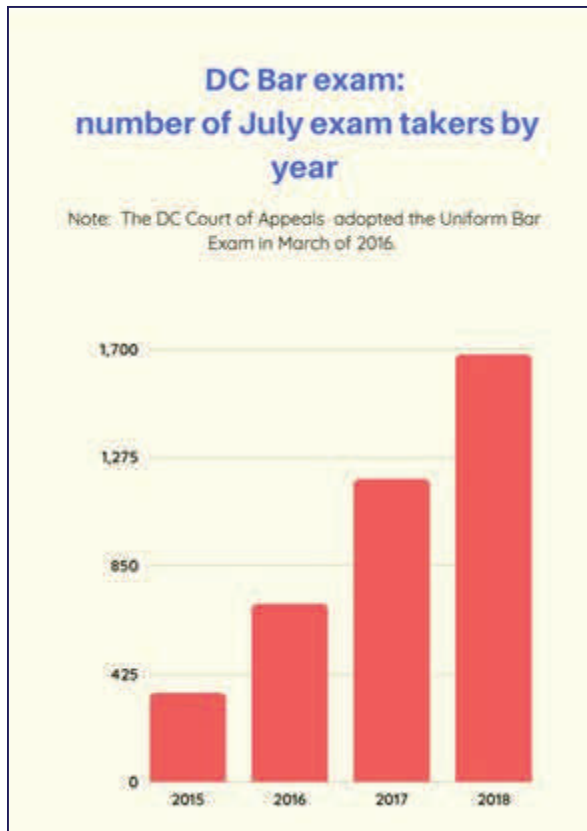
A graduate of Wellesley College and the Georgetown University Law Center, Judge Ruiz has built an extensive résumé over time. She is a long-time judicial member of the DC Access to Justice Commission. She is active in a number of organizations, including the U.S. National Association of Women Judges, of which she was President, and DC's Council for Court Excellence. She is also a member of the American Law Institute and a trustee of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. She often speaks on issues of judicial independence, ethics and judicial diversity, meeting with judges from other countries who visit the DC courts. A member of the Hispanic Bar Association of the District of Columbia and its Judicial Council, Judge Ruiz serves as a mentor for Latino law students. Over her long career, she has participated in programs to educate the Hispanic and immigrant communities about the law and the courts and has developed a judicial education program to alert judges about the obstacles immigrants face in the courts.

As we concluded our interview, Judge Ruiz mentioned how she's always surprised at the positive impact even the small things she's done or said have had on those she's encountered in the past and the importance of truly paying attention to people and remembering where you came from. As we transitioned into the subject of core values, I asked her which values have carried her through her highs and lows, her successes and failures. "Honesty, the courage to speak and stand for what you believe in and remembering why I do what I do. It's about justice and it's about people."

Congratulations to Judge Ruiz on her appointment and best of luck to her during her term.

Bar Exam Sets Record

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“I applaud the hard work of the Committee on Admissions under the leadership of Director Shela Shanks and the Clerk and Deputy Clerk of the Court of Appeals, Julio Castillo and Herb Rouson. They successfully administered the largest bar exam in the District of Columbia’s history,” said DCCA Chief Judge Anna Blackburne-Rigsby. “With the adoption of the Uniform Bar Exam, the number of bar exam takers in the District of Columbia has increased four-fold. The DC Court of Appeals oversees the largest unified Bar in the country. The integrity of the DC Bar is critical to ensuring access to justice both here in Washington, DC and across the country where our members reside. The DC Court of Appeals, in conjunction with the DC Bar, will continue to find new ways to offer value to DC Bar members, while ensuring the quality of the Bar.”

In 2018, a total of 2,393 law school graduates took the DC bar exam; representing a 49.8% increase over the 1,597 applicants who sat for the February and July 2017 bar exams combined. Through July 2018, there have been 2,110 new attorneys sworn-in to the DC Bar; representing a 25.2% increase over the 1,685 attorneys sworn-in between January and July of 2017. “In these challenging fiscal times for our DC Court system, and against the backdrop of stagnant and/or shrinking resources, I’m extremely proud of the growing commitment of our

COA/UPL staff and their stakeholders,” said Herb Rouson, DCCA’s Chief Deputy Clerk of Court. “Their ongoing commitment to COA/UPL’s mission is also a strong indication that the DC Courts’ goals, particularly those of having a *Professional and Engaged Workforce*...through *Effective Court Management and Administration* are appropriately guiding our day-to-day operations,” Rouson added.

In response to the tremendous increase in the demand for membership into the DC Bar, the DCCA has taken a number of steps to streamline and/or revise its business processes. For example, through **Administrative Order 03-18** (issued in April 2018), the DCCA implemented a new process that allows attorneys, upon certification for admission, to be sworn-in to the DC Bar in absentia.

Executive Update

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sometimes or often live the values) versus our goal to be in the 4 to 5 range (*often to almost always live the values*). We want to acknowledge the work of our many division Values Teams and the Values Leadership Council. The employees on these teams have contributed significant time, thought and energy within the divisions to support us all to improve how we model the values. It will take the continued effort of these teams and each of us individually to think about how we can live the values more fully to ultimately reach our goal.

We wish to thank all of the DC Courts employees for their efforts and commitment to serving the public.

Anne B. Wicks – Executive Officer

Cheryl R. Bailey – Deputy Executive Officer

Julio A. Castillo – Clerk of the Court of Appeals

Zabrina W. Dempson – Acting Clerk of the Superior Court

The 37th Annual Employee Awards Ceremony



On September 13th, DC Courts' employees from every division gathered in the third floor atrium of the Moultrie Courthouse for the 37th Annual Employee Awards Ceremony. Every year the ceremony is an

opportunity to recognize court employees for their commitment and dedication to the efficient and effective operations of the DC Courts. Special recognition awards are bestowed on employees and teams for public service, management achievement, technical expertise and being an "unsung hero." The ceremony is also an opportunity to recognize employees for their length of service to the DC Courts as well as the public. Names were called out for those with 10, 20, 30 and for one employee, 40 years of service!

This year's ceremony included a presentation of colors by the Woodrow Wilson High School Junior ROTC Color Guard while the Eastern Senior High School Choir sang both the National Anthem and the billboard hit, 'Rise Up.' Anne Wicks, DC Courts Executive Officer, gave opening remarks, followed by DC Court of Appeals Chief Judge Anna Blackburne-Rigsby and Superior Court Chief Judge Robert Morin, who both participated in the presentation of Special Achievement Awards. After an excellent musical performance by the Courts' very own 'Just Us', the Length of Service Awards were presented by Cheryl Bailey, Deputy Executive Officer; Julio Castillo, DC Court of Appeals Clerk of the Court; and Zabrina Dempson, Acting Clerk of the Court for DC Superior Court.

Congratulations to all the 2018 Special Achievement Award winners:

Veronica 'Marie' Robertson of the Executive Office - Management Achievement Award

Ron Berry, Marcus McCall and José Idler, of the IT Division and Executive Office for the Website Redesign Project Team - Public Service Award Group

Antoinette Reese of the Probate Division - Unsung Hero Award

Dwayne Jenkins of the Criminal Division - Public Service Individual Award

Mulumbet 'Mulu' Bekele of the IT Division - Technical Specialist Award

DC Courts Annual Thanksgiving Food Drive

The DC Courts will be conducting the 2018 Thanksgiving Food Drive between:
Monday, September 24, 2018 and Monday, November 19, 2018

Please see the intranet at: <http://intranet/content/74655>, for contact and donation details.