



# Full Court Press



Newsletter of the District of Columbia Courts

June 2019

## 2019 Judicial and Bar Conference

On Friday, April 12, 2019, the DC Court of Appeals again partnered with the DC Bar and co-hosted the 2019 Judicial and Bar Conference. Chief Judge Anna Blackburne-Rigsby of the DC Court of Appeals kicked off the conference by thanking and recognizing all who helped to make the conference possible as well as all who attended, including some of the Courts' former judges, present judges, and DC Bar officials and members. The conference began with a presentation of colors from the Coolidge Senior High School Junior ROTC program and then the National An-



*Chief Judge Blackburne-Rigsby delivering remarks at the 2019 Judicial and Bar conference.*

them performed by Kristina Fleming, a young woman about to age out of foster care. Chief Judge Blackburne-Rigsby spoke next underscoring the importance of the strong relationship between the DC Courts and the DC Bar. She mentioned how the collaboration between the two entities in hosting the conference serves a greater purpose to educate judges and lawyers. The theme this year focused on how the legal system can best handle and help children who appear in court.

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## "Here Opportunities Prepare you for Excellence" Court Program Aims to Bring HOPE

"Here Opportunities Prepare you for Excellence," more commonly known as HOPE Court, was launched last year and is DC's version of a type of court program that is starting to be implemented in courts across the country. These programs are designed to recognize and treat juvenile victims of commercial sexual exploitation rather than to prosecute them for underlying offenses. HOPE Court hearings are not typical court hearings, with attorneys on either side debating one another, the defendant sitting quietly at a table, and the judge lis-

tening and ruling. While always being mindful of representing their clients' rights and wishes, in HOPE Court, the participants' attorneys team with the government attorneys, probation officers, mental health providers, the judge and other members of the HOPE Court team to help their clients create a better environment and better future for themselves.

With a background in clinical social work, law and more than 12 years on the bench, Magistrate Judge Mary Grace Rook is committed to working with the

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***Open To All Trusted By All Justice For All***

## Chief Judge Blackburne-Rigsby Hosts Howard University Middle School Students to Learn about the DC Courts

DC Court of Appeals Chief Judge Anna Blackburne-Rigsby was pleased to host 80 students from Howard University Middle School in the Historic Courthouse, to teach them about the DC Courts and the role of the judiciary and of state courts in our democracy. The Chief Judge spoke to the students about how she was once in their shoes and gave them a brief overview of her education and career path that led to her being named Chief Judge. She

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## Zabrina Dempson named Clerk of DC Superior Court



The DC Superior Court is pleased to announce the appointment of Zabrina Dempson as Clerk of the Superior Court. The announcement was recently made by DC Superior Court Chief Judge Robert Morin and DC Courts Acting Executive Officer Dr. Cheryl Bailey. Ms. Dempson joined the Court in 2006 as the Branch Chief of the Small Claims and Conciliation Branch and has served in several capacities with distinction. Her talents and professionalism were recognized early by court leadership as she rose to positions of greater management responsibility and displayed exceptional performance. Ms. Dempson was promoted to Senior Operations Manager in the Clerk of the Superior Court Office in 2009, and became the Deputy Director of the Civil Division in 2012. She was the Director of the Civil Division from 2014 to 2018. Since August 2018

Ms. Dempson has served as the Acting Clerk of the Superior Court where she was responsible for the oversight of nine divisions consisting of approximately 700 employees with an operating budget of \$124 million. In this role, she established mechanisms to create standardization and consistency across the Superior Court to enhance the employee work experience and to provide excellent service to the judiciary and the court community.

Throughout her tenure at the DC Superior Court, Ms. Dempson has instituted innovative processes to streamline court operations and enhance service delivery to the public. Among her numerous accomplishments are the development and implementation of processes for extreme risk protection orders; implementation of the first e-filing batch process for small claims and landlord & tenant cases in collaboration with the IT Division; establishment of a quality management unit and courtroom support branch to improve courtroom operations and data quality; implementation of a courtroom clerk centralization program; and the establishment of a customer service protocol to create a professional and consistent customer experience.

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## New DC Superior Court Associate Judge

Carmen Guerricagoitia McLean was nominated to be an Associate Judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia by President Obama on September 27, 2016 and by President Trump on October 30, 2017. She was confirmed by the United States Senate on January 2, 2019, and was sworn in at the DC Superior Court on Friday, May 3<sup>rd</sup>.



Judge McLean was born and raised in rural Oregon and attended Oregon public schools. She received her Bachelor of Science degree from George Fox University in 1998 and her Juris Doctor degree from Georgetown University Law Center in 2001. Immediately after law school, Judge McLean became an associate at Jones Day, an international law firm with 44 offices worldwide. She was elevated to partnership in 2011 and served Jones Day's Washington Office in several roles, including Partner In Charge of Pro Bono and Public Service and Diversity Committee Co-Chair.

While at Jones Day, Judge McLean was a corporate litigator and trial attorney. Her diverse practice in both state and federal courts included multi-million dollar cases regarding contract interpretation, alleged copyright infringement, successor liability, and al-

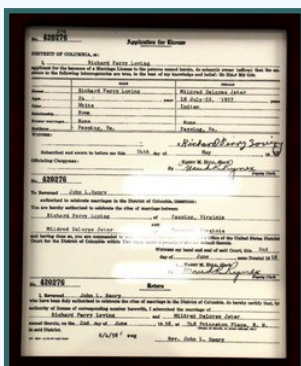
leged civil and criminal antitrust violations. She also counseled clients, wrote articles and white papers, and taught continuing legal education courses on a variety of issues related to electronic discovery and the Federal Rules of Civil

Procedure. As a result of her work at Jones Day, in 2015, the National Law Journal named Judge McLean a District of Columbia Rising Star.

Throughout her time at Jones Day, Judge McLean was active in pro bono work on behalf of at-risk children in the District of Columbia. She acted as counsel in adoption, custody, and guardianship matters to secure safe and permanent homes for more than 50 children. Judge McLean also actively recruited others to this work and served on multiple nonprofit boards with goals of protecting and serving children. As a result of this work, Judge McLean was named a Champion of the Legal Profession by the National Law Journal in 2011 and District of Columbia Bar Pro Bono Attorney of the Year in 2012. In 2018, under Judge McLean's leadership, Jones Day's Washington Office was named Pro Bono Law Firm of the Year by the District of Columbia Bar Association. Judge McLean is married and has two elementary school-aged children.

### 51st anniversary of 'Loving Day'

The US Supreme Court issued its decision in *Loving v. Virginia* on June 12, 1967. The day has since become known as 'Loving Day.' The DC Superior Court's Marriage Bureau has a display of seven historic marriage licenses, including President Grover Cleveland, two presidents' daughters, two former mayors of DC, and Richard and Mildred Loving, related to the Supreme Court Loving decision (*see image*). To see the collection of historic marriage licenses, visit the Marriage Bureau, room JM-690 of the Moultrie Courthouse. To learn more and read the US Supreme Court landmark Loving decision, see: <https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/388/1>





## HOPE Court Program—Continued from front cover.

youth who come into HOPE Court to enable them to develop the skills and identify the resources they need to recognize and avoid exploitation, advocate for themselves and avoid risky and dangerous behavior. The vision is that successful completion of HOPE Court will not only end participants' involvement in the juvenile system, but will also start them on a successful path to adulthood.



*Judge Rook leads the HOPE Court Program.*

Youth are referred to HOPE Court through a screening process in the Family Court. Youth found to be at high risk of being potential victims of human trafficking, or those who are already victims, are referred to HOPE Court. Some young people may be arrested for a minor charge, found responsible for the crime and then be assigned probation before they decide that they would like to participate in HOPE Court. The program works with each young person to establish goals that will lead to graduation from HOPE Court, and dismissal of their case. HOPE Court services include, but are not limited to: mental health treatment for participants and their families; educational advocacy; support through victim survivor organizations; mentoring; prenatal, postnatal and medical care and monitoring; and employment support as needed.

Judge Rook has already made an impact on the lives of those who have participated in the program. When asked what the most challenging part of being a judge of HOPE Court was, she said that one must have a lot of patience. HOPE Court has no set timeline, and no end point for when a youth has to graduate or leave. The young people set their own goals and go at their own pace. About one quarter of the youth abscond at various points in the program.

Having a youth in abscondance is a very challenging and worrisome time for the team. Team members are there to help the youth make decisions in their best interest, to have the best life they can, but funda-

mentally the young person makes their own decisions, and needs to learn to make good decisions on their own after their participation in the program concludes.

Judge Rook said that the most rewarding moment for her is when one of the young people graduates. Once deemed to have achieved their HOPE Court goals, youth have their last “graduation” hearing with the judge and their team. Graduates receive a framed certificate of completion, a gift from the Court Social Services Division, a congratulatory letter from DC Attorney General Karl Racine, and gifts from Judge Rook. Additionally, they hear all of the positive comments about their journeys and successes. Finally, they sign HOPE Court’s golden door in the courtroom. (For more information about the Golden Door project, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t2jDUKIGT0o> ).

The most recent graduate of HOPE Court is a wonderful example of someone who went into the program with goals in mind of how she wanted to change her life. The entire HOPE Court team described her as an inspiration and she was asked to come back and speak to others who are currently going through the program. A unique aspect of Judge Rook’s courtroom is that there are multiple large stuffed animals to comfort the participants and help ease the anxiety of being in a courtroom. At some point, the judge started handing out little stuffed animals because the

youngsters wanted to take home the big ones. The Court has long anticipated the addition of a “real” assistance dog, which recently happened (**see sidebar: Meet the Newest Member of the HOPE Court Program**).

The one lesson that Judge Rook would like people to take away from HOPE Court is that the young people she sees before her each day are no different from other youngsters. Rather, they have just had some unfortunate circumstances in their lives and need the support and assistance that HOPE Court offers. Tragically, any young person can become a victim of sex-trafficking. HOPE Court provides the guidance young people need to make choices that will lead them towards a safe, happy and productive life. Even though the program has been around for only a year, five of its participants have already graduated, and many other participants are well on their way.

## Meet the Newest Member of the HOPE Court Program!



Pepper will help young survivors of commercial sexual exploitation during hearings in the HOPE Court program. Pepper and her handler Abby Stavitsky started work Wednesday, June 5th in Magis-

trate Judge Mary Grace Rook's courtroom. They will be in court Mondays and Wednesdays, the days that Judge Rook hears HOPE Court cases. For more information about dogs in courthouses, see: <https://courthousedogs.org>.



## ZHOPE for HOPE Court

Service is a cornerstone principle of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Incorporated. In recognizing the importance of the HOPE Court's mission of helping juvenile survivors of commercial sexual exploitation rather than prosecuting them for underlying offenses, the members of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Incorporated in the District of Columbia sponsored a toiletry drive to support the survivors. Connie Day McClinton, DC State Coordinator stated, "When Judge Tanya Jones Bosier told us about this program, our members really embraced it and recognized that it aligns with our sorority's Z-HOPE Youth initiatives. Our DC Z-HOPE Coordinator, Monique Rolle, co-

ordinated our efforts, and we raised over \$400 and collected and/or purchased over 800 toiletry items to address basic necessities for HOPE Court participants so they are not dependent upon their exploiter for these items. We really want to make it easier for targeted youth to complete the program and improve outcomes." On April 29, 2019, the HOPE Court team received 60 care bags for participating youth and 5 care bags for babies of expectant mothers.

Ms. Rolle added, "Zetas Helping Other People Excel (Z- HOPE) was approved at the 2008 National Boule as the National Service Program of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. Z- HOPE provides Zetas of the District of Columbia with the opportunity to engage in community service , become active members of their community and have a lasting, positive impact on society at large. Community service enables our members to provide a service to those who need it most. Z-HOPE's uniqueness is that Zetas take the programs/activities to the community to existing groups rather than rely on people to come to us! The goal is to develop strong and engaged relationships with members of the local community as well as with governmental, advocacy, and service organizations. Z-HOPE promises to provide culturally appropriate activities in the communities we live to empower and promote HOPE."

## 2019 Judicial and Bar Conference—*continued from front cover.*

She also thanked court staff for their hard work and dedication during the government shutdown at the beginning of the year: “I want to pause here and take a moment to share with you all how particularly proud I am of our court staff. They worked throughout the shutdown to ensure courtroom operations and other essential functions continued and the public was served.” Later into her speech, she mentioned the

4<sup>th</sup> Strategic Plan for the year of 2018-2022 and the goals in the plan. “Our Courts’ leadership is confident and optimistic that through our commitment to strategic management and our hard working and dedicated judges, managers and staff, we can meet our strategic goals and ensure that the DC Courts remain open to all, trusted by all and with our continued hard work, we will provide justice for all.”

DC Superior Court Chief Judge Robert Morin spoke next, highlighting how far the DC Superior Court has come and also laying out steps for the future. “Two years ago we had six vacancies and since then we’ve had ten additional retirements or expected retirements and we’ve only added three judges, so that’s daunting arithmetic for our court.” In line with the judge vacancies, Chief Judge Morin talked about the amount of work and cases that the DC Superior Court heard even with a lack of judges. “Last year we decided about 88,000 cases, that’s a big number but let me break it down for you. We decided 18,000 criminal cases, 9,000 civil actions, over 30,000 landlord tenant cases, 9,000 small claim actions, over 11,000 family court matters, including 1,500 juvenile matters, 4,000 probate and tax matters, and 7,000 domestic violence matters. Now let me remind you, these are not class action lawsuits. These are individual cases that we had to decide.” He ended his speech on a hopeful note, stating what he and Chief Judge Blackburne-Rigby as chief judges would like to accomplish by the



*Chief Judge Morin delivering remarks at the 2019 Judicial and Bar Conference.*

next conference: “Hopefully in two years as Chief Judges, we will be able to come before this conference and congratulate the DC Bar legal community, the city council and the mayor’s office for effectuating the first Civil Gideon Program in the nation, in the District of Columbia so that people whose lives, housing and family are affected do not stand before the court without a lawyer.”

DC Bar President Esther Lim was the final speaker of the introductory session and spoke about the work the courts and attorneys are doing to improve access to justice. “We all know that the Courts and the Bar do a tremendous amount of work in the legal community to support both our lawyers and our citizens. The Bar has always enjoyed a special relationship with the judiciary that allows us to collaborate to elevate the legal community and to present programs like the one today.”

The conference covered a range of cutting-edge topics related to this year’s theme, “Children and the Law: Protecting the Future.” There were sessions on topics such as: *Educational Exclusion, Child Welfare, Family First Prevention Services Act, the Psychological Toll of Racism in the Era of Social Media, Artificial Intelligence, Restorative Justice, Best Practices for Supporting LGBTQ Youth, Accessing Mental Health Services for Children, Cyber Law and the Role of Government in Protecting Children, DC’s Approach to Child Victims and Witnesses, and immigrant children.* The sessions and panels throughout the day focused on legal questions related to children, considering how the law might and should evolve in this area. The 2019 Judicial and Bar Conference left attendees better informed and with a greater sense of purpose that will hopefully inspire their legal practice.



## Chief Judge Blackburne-Rigsby Hosts Howard University Middle School Students —*continued from page 2.*

spoke to the students about the different career opportunities at the courts in addition to the traditional roles of being a lawyer or a judge. She introduced members of the court staff who were at the event and they spoke about where they went to school, what they majored in, and where they went for law school or graduate school. All this was aimed to demonstrate to the students that there are a variety of paths to take, and education opens many opportunities for young people.

After introductions, the students watched a short video about the role of state courts, how they help ensure people's rights, and the different types of courts that exist in the US. Then the students, who had formed eight teams, with team names chosen by the students, like "Innocent Until Proven Guilty," and "Plead the Fifth," began to play a game of 'DC Courts Jeopardy' with questions about the DC Courts and the role that the courts plays in our local government. All the teams were asked a series

of questions and each team had to write down their answers. The teams battled fiercely and displayed a solid knowledge of civic education and the judicial system. Three teams were tied for first place and chose a representative to participate in the bonus round. In the end, Team Jaguar won, and each team member of Team Jaguar took home a gift card. At the end of the session, all the students received a certificate, some candy, and the promise of a pizza party back at school provided by the women of the Washington, DC Chapter of the LINKS, Inc., a non-profit organization dedicated to enriching the lives of African Americans.

The visit by the Howard University Middle School children is a part of Chief Judge's Civic Education and Community Engagement Initiative, which seeks to educate and connect with citizens of the District of Columbia on the important role of the DC Courts, which represents the third co-equal branch of the District's government.

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## Zabrina Dempson named Clerk of the DC Superior Court —*continued from page 2.*

Ms. Dempson's passion for leadership, public service and access to justice has been evident throughout her court career. As a member of the Strategic Planning Leadership Council, she plays a key role in the development, roll-out and implementation of the DC Courts' 2018-2022 Strategic Plan. Ms. Dempson provides coaching to court staff and instills accountability in ways that support the Courts' leadership principles and values, and inspires excellence, professionalism and employee engagement.

Prior to joining the Court, Ms. Dempson was a sole proprietor of the law office of Zabrina White Dempson for approximately 10 years. She is a member of the District of Columbia Bar and the North Carolina Bar. Ms. Dempson has proven to be a valued member of the Executive Leadership Team. She is committed to the DC Courts' vision, mission and values, and in making the Courts a great place to work. Please join us in congratulating Ms. Dempson on her well-deserved promotion.

## **In Absentia Swearing-In Ceremony for Tamira Roberson—*continued from back cover.***

We applaud the efforts of all of our employees who seek to pursue their goals while meeting the demands of serving our community at the DC Courts. We welcome all to share your achievements, or share those of a colleague, so that we can continue to encourage and highlight these moments of individual success and growth. Congratulations to Tamira Roberson, Esq., for her achievement!

## DC Courts Celebrate Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month

The DC Courts were excited to celebrate Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month with the court community. The AAPI Committee hosted two special diversity and inclusion events. First, was the screening of *The Legacy of Heart Mountain* followed by a special guest, Shirley Higuchi. The second AAPI event, *DestinAsian* was held on June 7th at the Court of Appeals Historic Courthouse. The event focused on four beautiful islands of the Asian Pacific region. Taiwan, Philippines, Hawaii and Singapore, taking the participants on a tour to learn about and taste food from the region.



## *In Absentia* Swearing in Ceremony for Tamira Roberson, Esquire Domestic Violence Division



On Wednesday, April 3, 2019, Tamira Roberson, Branch Supervisor in the DC Superior Court Domestic Violence Division was sworn into the District of Columbia Bar by The Honorable Judge Henry F. Greene in Courtroom 415. Ms. Roberson's formal swearing-in ceremony scheduled for January 25<sup>th</sup> was unfortunately canceled as a result of the government shutdown. This cancellation afforded Ms. Roberson the opportunity to take advantage of the new *in absentia* swearing in process which enabled her to invite her court family to witness this momentous occasion. Ms. Roberson's ability to accomplish this milestone while working in the demanding environment of the Domestic Violence Division is admirable.

Ms. Roberson began her tenure with DC Superior Court in May 2009 as a WAE Assistant Deputy Clerk in the Leaders of Today in Solidarity (LOTS) Unit of the Court Social Services Division. From there, she was hired as an Assistant Courtroom Clerk in the Office of Judge in Chambers. She was then promoted to Calendar Coordinator in the Civil Division in July 2011, at which time Ms. Roberson began her law school journey in the part-time evening program at George Mason University School of Law. Ms. Roberson graduated in May 2015 and shortly thereafter, was admitted into the Maryland State Bar. She accepted the opportunity to work as an Acting Senior Operations Manager in the Office of the Clerk of the Superior Court for four months. After returning from this detail, Ms. Roberson was later promoted to Branch Supervisor of the Domestic Violence Division.

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