

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**March 1, 2006**

## **SUPREME COURT NAMES CHERYL NIRO EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF COMMISSION ON PROFESSIONALISM**

The Illinois Supreme Court announced Wednesday the appointment of Cheryl Niro to be executive director of its new Commission on Professionalism which was established to improve civility among lawyers, their clients and judges in Illinois.

Ms. Niro, a former president of the Illinois State Bar Association and delegate to the American Bar Association, is a giant in the legal profession, well known within the state as well as in national legal circles. During her 26 years as a lawyer, she has proven herself to be dedicated to the finer points and betterment of the profession, and the Court and the Commission are gratified that she tendered her services to help ground the Commission in its formative years.

“No one is more qualified for this position than Cheryl Niro,” said Chief Justice Robert R. Thomas, who initiated the concept of the Commission to improve professionalism among lawyers and judges. “Cheryl’s commitment to serving the legal profession is unsurpassed, and we are truly lucky to have her on board.

“She brings to the position a unique combination of proven leadership and real world experience. She is a former ISBA president, a committed advocate and a talented mediator. I am certain that her skills will go a long way toward ensuring the program’s success.”

Chief Justice Thomas’ enthusiasm for Ms. Niro was echoed by David F. Rolewick, chairman of the Commission, which has been spearheading the professionalism project since a special Supreme Court Committee was established in November 2001.

“The members of the Commission are extremely pleased to have someone with Cheryl Niro’s vast experience throughout the state of Illinois and, with her involvement in the American Bar Association, the nation,” said Mr. Rolewick, a Wheaton attorney. “We are gratified she has chosen to dedicate the next several years of her life to this important initiative to improve the quality of the legal profession and the delivery of legal services to the people of the State of Illinois.”

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## **Executive Director of Commission Named Add One**

Ms. Niro, currently a litigator with the Chicago firm of Quinlan & Carroll, will begin her duties as full-time executive director on April 3. She is charged with hiring a full-time office staff, and implementing the goals of the Commission.

The purpose behind the Supreme Court Commission on Professionalism is “to promote among the lawyers and judges of Illinois principles of integrity, professionalism and civility; to foster commitment to the elimination of bias and divisiveness within the legal and judicial systems; and to ensure that those systems provide equitable, effective and efficient resolution of problems and disputes for the people of Illinois.”

When Justice Thomas persuaded his colleagues on the Court to establish the Committee, which was a precursor to the Commission, he spoke about the changing nature of the practice of law different than in days past “when a lawyer’s handshake meant something and a lawyer’s word was his bond.

“In this day and age,” Justice Thomas said, “with competition in the profession for dollars and clients, activities sometimes degenerate into a Rambo-style, win-at-all-cost attitude by attorneys.”

Ms. Niro, who was president of the Illinois State Bar Association from 1999 to 2000, a member of its Board of Governors from 1994 to 2000 and active in the governance of the American Bar Association since 1994, was instrumental in the early groundwork of the Committee, precursor to the Commission.

As the Committee sought its way, it held a series of Town Hall Meetings across the state that brought in the views of attorneys and judges on issues of professionalism, diversity and equality within the profession. Ms. Niro volunteered her services and served as a facilitator at 14 of those Town Hall meetings, and became keenly aware of the need and the opportunity for the Commission’s work.

“I am proud to be an Illinois lawyer, and am grateful for this opportunity to serve my profession and my colleagues at the bar,” Ms. Niro said of her appointment. “It has been said that the business of America is business, but the spirit of American has always been the Rule of Law. We are charged with the duty to preserve and protect the Rule of Law and must never let that mission become lost in the business of practicing law.

“In creating the Commission, the Court has given us a tool to reshape our workplace into one that more closely represents the core values of our profession. I am honored to be a part of this innovative program.”

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Add Two**

Ms. Niro will work with the Commission's 14 members and a full-time, paid staff. The Commission is funded entirely by lawyers, through a \$10 increase in the annual registration fee paid by attorneys.

In addition to developing and approving professionalism and related courses certified under the Minimum Continuing Legal Education program, the Commission is charged generally with "creating an promoting an awareness of professionalism by all members of the Illinois bar and bench."

It will serve as a resource for information on professionalism, develop statements on principles of ethical and professional responsibility to encourage, guide and assist lawyers on the ethical and professional tenets of the profession; collaborate with law schools in the development and presentation of professionalism programs for law students; and recommend to the Court means and methods of improving the profession.

"Our initial work will focus on results oriented, proactive projects that address priority issues such as civility; the role of the judiciary in setting and maintaining the highest standards of conduct; expanding outreach to law students and playing a greater role in their transition from the academy to practice," said Ms. Niro. "We will work to create a profession that is more representative of the citizens it serves, and encourage scholarship and study of that which makes ours a profession rather than a business."

Illinois is believed to be one of only 13 states with a permanent commission to promote an awareness of professionalism by all members of the bar and bench.

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**(FOR MORE INFORMATION: Please contact Joseph Tybor, press secretary to the Illinois Supreme Court, at 312-793-2323)**