

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
JUNE 13, 2011**

**CHIEF JUSTICE THOMAS L. KILBRIDE, U OF I COLLEGE OF LAW,
STATE BAR AND SUPREME COURT COMMISSION ON
PROFESSIONALISM ANNOUNCE MENTORING PROGRAM FOR NEW
ILLINOIS ATTORNEYS**

SPRINGFIELD -- Chief Justice Thomas L. Kilbride announced Monday that the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Professionalism is teaming up with the University of Illinois College of Law and the Illinois State Bar Association to stimulate a mentoring program for newly admitted attorneys.

The announcement is part of a statewide initiative by the Commission on Professionalism to urge attorney groups, law schools and individual lawyers to take an active hand in ensuring that new attorneys get practical professional guidance after the rigors of law school. Earlier, the Chief Justice appeared at a news conference in Peoria with local bar leaders announcing their cooperation with the Commission in implementing a mentoring program in Peoria County.

The early years of legal practice are among the most challenging for most attorneys. Recent law school graduates generally receive limited practical and clinical experience while in law school, and the months leading up to their admission to the bar are spent in extensive preparation for the two-day bar exam, which consists of essay and multiple choice questions with no gauge of clinical or practical experience.

In such an environment, experienced attorney mentors can prove invaluable in helping recent bar admittees learn the actual practice of law, and get a meaningful start in their legal careers.

“My first years working as a lawyer were spent with Prairie State Legal Services, and while there was no formal legal mentoring program, the practical learning that I received from more experienced attorneys with Prairie State could not have been more valuable,” said Chief Justice Kilbride. “Not only did it help me, but it served justice by helping me help my clients better.

“It can be difficult for a new attorney, no matter in what environment he or she serves, to seek and find the practical help they need. The Supreme Court and the Commission on Professionalism are thankful to the University of Illinois College of Law and the Illinois State Bar Association for bringing their prestige and influence to help bridge the gap between the academic and the practical experience relied on in everyday law practice.”

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New Attorney Mentoring Program Add One

Illinois Supreme Court Justice Rita B. Garman introduced Bruce Smith, Dean of the University of Illinois College of Law, who announced the College of Law planned to collaborate with the Commission to help law students more easily make the transition from the classroom to the legal world.

“I couldn’t be more pleased that an honored institution like the University of Illinois College of Law is taking part in this very worthwhile program,” said Justice Garman. “I anticipate that it will lead the way for other law schools in the state to follow.”

Dean Smith, who earned his *juris doctor* degree from Yale, said he realizes the importance of experienced lawyers to convey their wisdom to a new generation of legal professionals.

“The University of Illinois College of Law is privileged to collaborate with the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Professionalism to help mentor our young lawyers,” Dean Smith said. “The College of Law is dedicated to supporting programs that help our students’ transition from the classroom to the legal world. As a former student, lawyer, law professor and now dean, I know first-hand how critical that transition is and how beneficial an experienced knowledgeable mentor can be in helping navigate that terrain.”

Mark D. Hassakis, a Mt. Vernon lawyer who is president of the Illinois State Bar Association, also pledged the cooperation of his group to support and implement mentoring of new lawyers statewide.

“The Illinois Supreme Court and its Commission on Professionalism are to be commended for recognizing the need for an organized effort to provide mentoring to new lawyers as they enter the profession,” said Mr. Hassakis. “With the crucial backing of the Court this program will go a step beyond by addressing a very real need to help new lawyers start their practices on a sound footing.”

Jayne Reardon, executive director of the Commission, applauded Dean Smith and the Illinois State Bar Association for embracing the concept of lawyer mentoring and recruiting experienced attorneys to participate.

“Lawyer-to-lawyer mentoring is a proven means of passing along the highest aspirations of the legal profession to the next generation of attorneys,” said Ms. Reardon. “Mentoring relationships cultivate a sense of pride and purpose in the practice of law, while conveying non-academic wisdom such as ethical and professional behavior, the skills of civility, integrity and inclusion and effectively finding a balance between one’s work and one’s personal life.”

With Monday’s announcements in Springfield and Peoria, Illinois joins a handful of states with a formalized mentoring program. It is anticipated that lawyers in additional geographical locales also will embrace the project.

Chief Justice Kilbride, Ms. Reardon and leaders of the bar believe that a change in Supreme Court rules covering Continuing Legal Education (CLE) for attorneys in Illinois will stir motivation among experienced attorneys and newly admitted attorneys to take part in a mentoring relationship.

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New Attorney Mentoring Program Add Two

More than 2,000 law school graduates are admitted to the practice of law each year in Illinois. There are about 90,000 licensed attorneys in the state.

Under new Supreme Court Rule 795(d) (12), a mentor and a new lawyer may each receive up to six hours of professional responsibility CLE credit upon successful completion of a pre-approved mentoring program. Ms. Reardon said that the Commission on Professionalism has prepared a CLE credit-qualifying program that will allow attorneys to engage in a structured mentoring relationship benefitting the professional development of both experienced and new attorneys.

“The Commissioners are excited about promoting the mentoring program statewide,” Gordon Nash, Chair of the Commission, said in a statement. “We are optimistic that this program, with structured interactions between experienced and new lawyers, not only will transmit core values to the newest lawyers, but also will energize and elevate the professionalism of the entire bar.”

Under Chief Judge Janet Holmgren, the 17th Judicial Circuit, which includes Winnebago and Boone counties, was the first jurisdiction to implement a mentoring program. Every newly admitted attorney in the Circuit was matched with a more experienced attorney. Participants were surveyed and outcomes were tracked upon completion of the first year of the program, and feedback from the project was used to provide a foundation to move forward with a new rule encouraging mentoring statewide.

The Supreme Court adopted the new mentoring rule in October 2010. Drawing upon the best practices developed in the 17th Circuit and the input of a statewide advisory committee, the Commission on Professionalism developed documents and aids to guide attorneys and organizations across Illinois seeking to undertake a mentoring program qualifying for CLE credit.

The documents include a comprehensive mentoring plan to guide mentoring pairs through activities and discussions throughout their participation in the 12-month program. What makes the program unique and flexible is its reliance upon local administration by organizations such as the Peoria Bar Association, law schools, and law firms rather than top-down direction from a statewide entity.

The Commission on Professionalism was established by the Illinois Supreme Court in September 2005 to help foster increased civility, professionalism and inclusiveness among the lawyers and judges in the state. Formal establishment of the Commission was recommended by a Committee on Civility initiated by Supreme Court Justice Robert R. Thomas, who is the current Supreme Court liaison to the Commission on Professionalism. Justice Thomas was concerned that effective client advocacy had morphed into “Rambo” litigation tactics.

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**New Attorney Mentoring Program
Add Three**

The Commission's duties are defined in Supreme Court Rule 799. The Commission consists of a Chair, law school faculty, judges, lawyers and non-lawyers appointed by the Court to serve volunteer terms of three years.

No taxpayer money or general revenue state funds are used in its administration or operation. It is funded totally by a portion of the annual license fee payable by active Illinois attorneys.

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(FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT: Joseph Tybor, press secretary to the Illinois Supreme Court, at 312.636.0479 (cell); or Jayne Reardon, executive director of the Commission on Professionalism, at 312.363.6210)