



Supreme Court of Illinois

Joseph R. Tybor
Director of Communications

222 North LaSalle Street, 13th Floor
Chicago, Illinois 60601
Telephone (312) 793-2323
Mobile (312) 636-0479
Fax (312) 793-0871
jtybor@illinoiscourts.gov

October 22, 2013

ACCESS TO JUSTICE COMMISSION TO HOLD SECOND ANNUAL CONFERENCE

On Wednesday, October 23, the Illinois Supreme Court Access to Justice Commission will host its second annual Conference that will bring together more than 300 people from the legal and judicial fields to discuss the impact of pro bono work and evolving pro bono projects on the courts.

Illinois Supreme Court Chief Justice Thomas L. Kilbride will open the Conference and give an overview of the Commission's work and accomplishments in the past year. The Conference will be held in the State of Illinois Thompson Center on Wednesday from 1:30-5 p.m.

Bryan Stevenson, executive director at the Equal Justice Initiative based out of Alabama, will serve as the Conference's keynote speaker. A graduate of Harvard Law School and the Harvard School of Government, he has represented capital defendants and death row prisoners in the Deep South since 1985 when he was a staff attorney with the Southern Center for Human Rights in Atlanta, Georgia. He has been recognized by several national publications and organizations as one of the nation's top public interest lawyers.

Following Mr. Stevenson's address, there will be three additional presentations about pro bono programs in Illinois and discussions on how to increase and improve on them.

Mr. Stevenson's work on behalf of condemned prisoners has won him national acclaim. In 1995 he was awarded the prestigious MacArthur Fellowship Award Prize. He is a 1989 recipient of the Reebok Human Rights Award, the 1991 ACLU National Medal of Liberty, and the 1993 Thurgood Marshall Medal of Justice; and in 1996 the National Association of Public Interest Lawyers named him the Public Interest Lawyer of the Year. Mr. Stevenson has served as a visiting professor of law at the University of Michigan School of Law and New York University School of Law, published several widely disseminated manuals on capital litigation, and written exclusively on criminal justice, capital punishment, and civil rights issues.

The Equal Justice Initiative is a private, nonprofit organization that provides legal representation to indigent defendants and prisoners to help assure fair and just treatment in the legal system.

MORE

ATJ Commission to Hold Second Annual Conference Add One

This time last year, the Commission held its first conference that brought almost 150 participants from different arenas of the legal profession. Issues raised during the conference became a focal point of the Commission's efforts and recommendations during the ensuing months.

Six months later, the Commission held listening conferences in one city in each of the five Judicial Districts. At the conferences, panels addressed specific problems relating to access to justice and potential and innovative solutions.

Other measures adopted by the Court based on the Commission's recommendations include: an amendment to the Judicial Canon of Ethics permitting judges to make reasonable efforts to facilitate the ability of the increasing numbers of self-represented persons to be fairly heard; the creation of a model language access plan (LAP) for all courts statewide to enhance the integrity of judicial proceedings; easing attorney licensing requirements for lawyers' spouses and civil union partners of active military personnel serving in Illinois; and an amended Supreme Court rule increasing the ability of law students to practice law on behalf of indigent clients under the supervision of licensed attorneys.

Last year, the Supreme Court also adopted Rule 10-101 that authorizes the Commission to establish a process to create standardized and legally sufficient forms using "plain language" for areas of law where the Commission determines that there is a high volume of *pro se* litigants.

The Commission announced earlier this month that it is seeking public comment during a 45-day period on simplified name-change forms intended to aid in increasing access to justice for litigants involved in civil cases throughout Illinois. The draft forms are posted on the Court's website. Once the final forms are approved, the forms will be available for use by litigants either in an interactive electronic or paper format that must be accepted in all judicial circuits in Illinois. Drafts of other simplified forms in the areas of divorce, expungement, sealing, procedural forms and orders of protection will be posted to the website for public comment in the coming weeks.

Based on the recommendation of Chief Justice Kilbride, the Supreme Court announced the formation of the Commission in June 2012 with the goal of removing barriers and increasing the ease of interacting with courts by those persons who can't afford lawyers to represent their interests and needs.

The Commission is comprised of 11 persons, seven of whom are appointed by the Supreme Court. The Illinois Bar Foundation, the Chicago Bar Foundation, the Lawyers Trust Fund of Illinois and the Illinois Equal Justice Foundation appoint one member each. Jeffrey D. Colman, partner at the Chicago firm of Jenner & Block, serves as the Commission's chair.

Similar commissions have been established in 28 other states as well as Washington, D.C. Its mission in Illinois has been supported by the Illinois State Bar Association, the Chicago Bar Association and the Illinois Judges Association.

Commission members also serve as volunteers. Danielle Hirsch serves as executive director of the Commission.