

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SUPREME COURT APPROVES DIRECTOR OF CONTINUING LEGAL EDUCATION BOARD

The Illinois Supreme Court approved Tuesday the appointment of Karen L. Johnson as the first Director of the Minimum Continuing Legal Education (MCLE) Board. In that role, Ms. Johnson will serve as the principal executive officer of the Illinois MCLE program established by the Court.

Ms. Johnson, formerly a practicing attorney, law firm educational director and active in bar association leadership, will interpret and implement directives of the nine-member board, direct the office operations supporting the activities of the board, and represent the board and office in liaison with other offices of the Illinois Supreme Court. During her 18 years as a lawyer, she has established herself as a thoughtful and skilled leader who enjoys working with various constituencies and overcoming organizational challenges.

“The Board is excited to have Karen as its first executive director and to get on with the important work of implementing the goals of the Supreme Court,” said Patrick M. Kinnally, an Aurora attorney and Board vice chairman who headed the Board’s search committee. “She brings a level of expertise, energy and enthusiasm which all of the Board members recognize as important to our mission.

“Karen has practiced law, undertaken large-scale organizational planning with all the attendant challenges, worked with MCLE issues in various states and planned quality educational programs for attorneys. We are pleased to find a lawyer with her breadth of relevant knowledge and experience for the position.”

Ms. Johnson will begin work in her new position on April 19.

For six years, Ms. Johnson led nationwide attorney development at DLA Piper Rudnick Gray Cary US LLP in Chicago. As the National Director of Professional Development, she was the lead administrator in charge of firm-wide training and development of attorneys, including planning hundreds of educational programs, creating curricula for various practice areas and overseeing the associate review process. She built an educational department and developed an educational system during six national and international mergers as the firm expanded from 350 U.S. attorneys to more than 1,400 lawyers. With lawyers licensed in a number of jurisdictions, she became familiar with MCLE issues in various states.

Most recently, she has been a director at Mestel & Company, a leading national legal recruiting firm with offices in Chicago, New York, Boston, Washington, Miami, Houston and Los Angeles. In that role, she has worked with attorneys at small, mid-sized and large law firms, as well as in-house counsel and government attorneys.

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New MCLE Director Add One

Ms. Johnson's leadership of major projects focusing on the needs of lawyers began when she joined the leadership of the Chicago Bar Association Young Lawyers Section (YLS). She served as YLS chair during the 1998-99 bar year, overseeing the activities of 35 committees which hosted about 300 seminars and educational programs.

In her eight years with the YLS, she spearheaded dozens of projects, including planning a broad range of seminars, organizing the *Pro Bono* and Government Service Career Fair, and serving as co-editor-in-chief of the *Chicago Lawyers Court Handbook*. At the conclusion of her year as chair, the American Bar Association recognized the YLS as the nation's most outstanding young lawyers organization among larger cities.

Ms. Johnson also has extensive experience working with volunteer boards. She has served on the governing boards of the Chicago Bar Association, the Chicago Bar Foundation and the Center for Conflict Resolution, a not-for-profit provider of mediation services and conflict management training. She was also appointed to the joint Chicago Bar Association-Illinois State Bar Association Committee on MCLE in 1997-98.

"I am truly gratified by the opportunity to help lead the MCLE program in Illinois and establish it as an efficient and responsive organization. My philosophy of working as an administrator is to aim for excellence in the information provided to the Board and in the service provided to the attorneys licensed in Illinois," Ms. Johnson said.

"With my experience practicing law, working in law firm administration and recruiting, and being involved in bar association leadership, this is a tremendous opportunity to combine all of my skills and interests to serve the Illinois Supreme Court, the MCLE Board and all of the attorneys who are licensed in Illinois."

After graduating from Cornell Law School, Ms. Johnson began her legal career at Much Shelist Freed Denenberg Ament & Rubenstein, P.C., a mid-sized firm in Chicago. She practiced there for more than 10 years, representing clients in litigation, employment and environmental matters. Ms. Johnson obtained extensive trial experience, joining the Trial Bar of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois as a fourth year associate, and was later promoted to partner. As much as she enjoyed practicing law, she welcomed the challenges of working on issues relating to attorneys' career development on a full-time basis.

"I have known Karen as a former colleague who was a talented litigator, as well as a bar leader and friend," said Michael Hyman, Chicago Bar Association president and partner at Much Shelist Freed Deneneberg Ament & Rubenstein, P.C. "She is exceptionally well-qualified for this position, a detail-oriented, organized and energetic person who will see to it that Illinois' continuing legal education program is among the best administered programs in the country. I am especially pleased to see her leading this effort."

Ms. Johnson is familiar with life in rural areas and smaller cities. After growing up on a farm in south central Wisconsin, she received her undergraduate degree in journalism from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and was elected to membership in *Phi Beta Kappa*. Before attending law school in Ithaca, New York, she worked as a radio reporter and anchor in Madison, covering the state legislature and Supreme Court, circuit courts and local school boards. Ms. Johnson is a 10-year resident of Evanston.

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