

September 4, 2008

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CEREMONY TO MARK JUSTICE FITZGERALD'S INSTALLATION AS CHIEF JUSTICE OF SUPREME COURT OF ILLINOIS

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – The elevation of Justice Thomas R. Fitzgerald as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Illinois will be marked by an installation ceremony on Monday, September 8 at the Supreme Court Building in Springfield.

Justice Fitzgerald was unanimously elected Chief Justice by his colleagues during the Court's May term. He will replace Justice Robert R. Thomas, who concluded his three-year tenure as Chief.

Justice Thomas will administer the oath at the ceremony which is scheduled to begin at 3 p.m. on September 8, the date the Court begins its new term. Speakers will include Retired Illinois Chief Justice Mary Ann G. McMorrow; Justices Rita B. Garman and Lloyd A. Karneier; and Judge James F. Holderman, Chief Judge, Eastern Division, U.S. District Court Northern District of Illinois.

"I am profoundly grateful to my family and to my colleagues for their support in obtaining this office," Justice Fitzgerald said. "I am equally humbled by the responsibilities that will be mine.

"I pledge to do my best."

Justice Fitzgerald is particularly honored that his father-in-law Francis J. Aubry, 89, an honored World War II veteran, will be present at his installation.

Justice Fitzgerald, 67, becomes Chief Justice after a long and distinguished judicial career that has been marked by reform, innovation and an abiding care and respect for the fair administration of justice.

Twice a year, he is among justices who welcome new Illinois lawyers to the profession during a formal swearing-in ceremony, and on those occasions he is fond of telling them that they have gained an asset they could not have gained in any other state or jurisdiction: "You've just become a colleague of Abraham Lincoln, a great Illinois lawyer!" he tells them.

MORE

Justice Fitzgerald Install as Chief Justice Add One

Justice Fitzgerald is a former longtime Cook County Criminal Court judge, and head of the division. He was appointed to head up Traffic Court in Chicago in the wake of the Operation Greylord investigation and has been instrumental in several forward-looking initiatives of the Supreme Court.

He is a native Chicagoan, and attended Loyola University before enlisting in the United States Navy. After his tour of duty, he graduated with honors from The John Marshall Law School, where he was a founder of the school's current law review and served as the law review's associate editor.

The son of a Circuit Court judge, Justice Fitzgerald began his own career in the law as a prosecutor in the Cook County State's Attorney's office. When he was first elected to the Circuit Court bench in 1976, he was the youngest elected Circuit judge in Cook County.

Justice Fitzgerald served as a trial judge in the Cook County Criminal Court from 1976 to 1987, when he was assigned Supervising Judge of Traffic Court and implemented a series of reforms. In 1989, he returned to the Criminal Division as Presiding Judge and also instituted reforms, including establishment of an evening Narcotics Court. He also was appointed to serve as presiding judge of Illinois' first statewide grand jury.

In April 1999 while still sitting as a Circuit Court judge, Justice Fitzgerald was appointed by the Supreme Court to be a member and chairperson of the Court's newly-formed Special Supreme Court Committee on Capital Cases to assess and improve the administration of justice in Illinois death penalty cases. Under Judge Fitzgerald's leadership, the Committee drafted new, innovative rules to improve the quality of justice in the trial of capital cases, including a requirement of Court certification to assure that only trained and experienced attorneys handle capital cases.

Justice Fitzgerald was elected to the Supreme Court in 2000 and the proposed capital case rules were approved by the full Court shortly afterwards. He also served as the Supreme Court liaison to the Special Committee.

Other achievements of Justice Fitzgerald while on the Court include a recommendation to his fellow justices that the Court find a way to improve the delivery of free legal services to veterans in obtaining disability and educational benefits. The Court assigned the task to its Commission on Professionalism; and in September 2007, Justice Fitzgerald joined Director L. Tammy Duckworth of the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, officials of The John Marshall Law School, the Illinois State Bar Association and the Commission in announcing a broad initiative to help Illinois veterans obtain free legal services.

The immediate outgrowth has been a collaborative program to train Illinois lawyers to assist veterans on a pro bono basis, and the response from the legal community has been outstanding.

Justice Fitzgerald also recommended to his colleagues that the Court establish a Special Committee on Child Custody Issues. Along with his colleague, Justice Rita B. Garman, he served as liaison to the Committee which resulted in a new "900 Series" of Supreme Court rules to ensure that the best interests of children is the prime focus of all custody cases, and that all child custody proceedings be scheduled and heard on an expedited basis.

MORE

Justice Fitzgerald Install as Chief Justice Add Two

Justice Fitzgerald has been the recipient of numerous awards.

He will receive the prestigious John Paul Stevens Award during a luncheon on Thursday, September 11 in Chicago. The John Paul Stevens Award, given by the Chicago Bar Association and the Chicago Bar Foundation, celebrates Illinois attorneys and judges who have demonstrated extraordinary integrity and service to the community throughout their careers.

Other numerous awards and accolades Justice Fitzgerald have received include the Outstanding Judicial Performance Award by the Chicago Crime Commission; Celtic Man of the Year by the Celtic Legal Society; the Herman Kogan Media Award for Excellence in Broadcast Journalism by the Chicago Bar Association.

The Lawyers' Assistance Program honored him in 2000 with the Hon. John Powers Crowley Award. He is the 2001 recipient of The John Marshall Law School Freedom Award. In 2003, Justice Fitzgerald was awarded the Joel Flaum Award by the Chicago Inn of Court, and the Chicago-Kent College of Law Professional Achievement Award. In 2005, Justice Fitzgerald was named Catholic Lawyer of the Year by the Catholic Lawyers Guild of Chicago. He is a member of the Leo High School Hall of Fame.

Justice Fitzgerald has taught at The John Marshall Law School and Chicago-Kent College of Law, where he was assistant coordinator of the trial advocacy program from 1986 to 1996. He also has taught at the Einstein Institute for Science, Health and the Courts.

Justice Fitzgerald has served as president of the Illinois Judges Association, member of the Governor's Task Force on Crime and Corrections, chairman of several committees of the Illinois Judicial Conference, member of the Chicago Bar Association's Board of Managers and past chairman of the Chicago Bar Association's committees on constitutional law and long-range planning.

He also is a director of the Advanced Science and Technology Adjudication Resource Center, Inc., which is a Washington D.C. nonprofit corporation involved in recruiting and training judges in science and technology under a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice.

As Chief Justice, Justice Fitzgerald will lead the Court in its administrative duties which include constitutional supervisory authority over the more than 900 judges in the state.

Among other duties, the Chief Justice prepares and schedules the Supreme Court's agenda for consideration in conference by the Court during its five formal terms each year; and serves as chairperson of the Executive Committee of the constitutionally mandated Illinois Judicial Conference. The Conference sets and sponsors much of the judicial education agenda for Illinois judges.

--30--

(FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT: Joseph Tybor, press secretary to the Illinois Supreme Court, at 312.793.2323)