



Supreme Court of Illinois

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ILLINOIS SUPREME COURT COMMISSION ON PROFESSIONALISM ANNOUNCES MENTORING PROGRAM IN SECOND JUDICIAL DISTRICT FOR NEW ATTORNEYS

WHEATON -- The Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Professionalism is teaming up with the DuPage County Bar Association, Northern Illinois University College of Law and other legal organizations in the Second Judicial District to begin a mentoring program for newly admitted lawyers.

Wednesday's announcement continues a statewide initiative by Chief Justice Thomas L. Kilbride, the Supreme Court and the Commission on Professionalism that was launched in June 2011 to urge attorney groups, law schools and individual lawyers to take an active hand in ensuring that new attorneys get practical professional guidance after law school.

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 them a meaningful start in their legal careers as well as promote principles that guide them toward professionalism.

"Mentoring is one of the best ways we as attorneys can promote the principles of integrity, professionalism, and civility within our community," Illinois Supreme Court Justice Robert R. Thomas said in a statement. "For the highest aspirational goals of our profession to take hold, for them to remain a permanent and vital part of our culture as attorneys, it takes the collaborative effort of the practicing bar working together, across organizations, across practice areas, across communities, and across generations."

Justice Thomas initiated the idea of a professionalism committee in 2001 to help eliminate a "Rambo-style, win-at-all cost attitude by attorneys" and recommended its status as a permanent Supreme Court commission in 2005 when he was Chief Justice.

MORE

Mentoring Program for New Attorneys Add One

NIU College of Law Dean Jennifer Rosato, who received her *juris doctor* degree from the University of Pennsylvania Law School, said she welcomes the opportunity for NIU to become a program administrator for the mentoring initiative. "Northern Illinois University College of Law is proud to participate in this important mentoring program, which helps to bridge the gap of 'real world' knowledge between law school and the first few years of practice.

"We know that mentoring is critical during this time, so that recent graduates can be guided to become more ethical, effective and confident lawyers," Rosato said.

Colleen McLaughlin, president of the DuPage County Bar Association, expressed the importance of mentoring for new attorneys as it relates to how to handle certain situations. "So often new attorneys don't know what it is they don't know, so they might not even know what questions to ask," said Ms. McLaughlin. "By discussing some of these topics....the new attorney will be much better prepared to deal with the situation when he or she is confronted with it. New attorneys won't necessarily have to ask, in hindsight, 'what should I have done?'"

Jayne Reardon, executive director of the Commission, applauded legal organizations and bar groups for embracing the concept of lawyer mentoring and recruiting experienced attorneys to participate. "The ready willingness of the leaders in law schools, bar associations, law firms and other organizations to sign on to a program to support and educate the newer members of our profession as they transition into practice reflects the beginning of a real movement," Ms. Reardon said. "These mentoring collaborations will go a long way toward reversing the tendency of some lawyers to confuse aggression with advocacy and will reinforce the core values of our profession to serve the people of the state of Illinois with creativity, efficiency, and professionalism."

In June 2011, Chief Justice Kilbride, along with Justices Rita B. Garman and Lloyd A. Karmeier appeared in news conferences in Peoria, Springfield, Edwardsville and Carbondale to announce and express support for the voluntary mentoring program. An additional event is planned in Chicago on October 25.

Under Chief Judge Janet Holmgren, the 17th Judicial Circuit, which includes Boone and Winnebago counties in northern Illinois, 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.

Chief Justice Kilbride and the Supreme Court 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.

More than 2,000 law school graduates are admitted to the practice of law each year in Illinois, and there are more than 90,000 licensed attorneys in the state. A class of new attorneys was admitted in May and about 2,500 are expected to be sworn in as attorneys November 10.

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Mentoring Program for New Attorneys Add Two

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 Supreme Court adopted the new mentoring rule in October 2010. Drawing upon the best practices developed in 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 DuPage County 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 Justice Thomas, who is the current Supreme Court liaison to the Commission on Professionalism. Chicago attorney Gordon B. Nash serves as the Commission's chair.

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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