

legal beat

By Julie Reynolds and Kathryn Alfisi

News and Notes on the D.C. Bar Legal Community

Board of Governors Calls Special Membership Meeting

The D.C. Bar Board of Governors has called a special membership meeting during the 2007 Bar Conference to authorize the board to make public statements in support of funding for proposals made by the Access to Justice Commission.

The board approved the meeting by resolution on January 9. The meeting is scheduled for 5:15 p.m. on March 26.

The Access to Justice Commission was created by the District of Columbia Court of Appeals in 2005 to increase the availability of civil legal services for the underserved and to reduce barriers to the civil justice system. The Council of the District of Columbia has approved an appropriation of at least \$3.2 million for fiscal year 2007 to support access-to-justice initiatives in the District.

Approval of the membership is required for the Board of Governors to speak on behalf of the Bar on legislative matters. Such permission, once granted, is subject to annual renewal by the Board of Governors within that time period. The proposal to be considered on March 26 would provide that permission for five years.

The resolution is as follows:

"Whereas, on February 28, 2005, the District of Columbia Court of Appeals created the Access to Justice Commission to establish a coordinated planning process to develop strategies to improve access and reduce barriers to access to civil justice, to improve coordination and support of civil legal services programs, to work with courts, administrative agencies, and lawmaking bodies to promote systemic changes to open greater access to the civil justice system, and to promote strategies to generate adequate levels of public and other sources of funding for civil justice and specifically 'the access to justice initiatives identified by the Commission'; and

"Whereas, after extensive fact-finding, on December 28, 2005, the Access to Justice Commission submitted a pro-



LEGAL AID SOCIETY CELEBRATES 75 YEARS

Former and current staff and board members of the Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia gathered at Arnold & Porter LLP on February 1 to celebrate the organization's 75th anniversary. They included (from left) Loretta Polk, vice president and associate general counsel of the National Cable and Telecommunications Association; President Anthony Pierce, a partner at Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP; Philip Horton, a partner at Arnold & Porter; and Executive Director Jonathan Smith.

Jonathan Cole

posal seeking an appropriation from the District of Columbia for Fiscal Year 2007 for legal services in three areas: to hire additional legal services lawyers to work in underserved areas of the city; to improve housing assistance; and to fund the creation of an interpreter bank to facilitate access to the justice system for residents with limited English proficiency; and

"Whereas, in June 2006, the Council of the District of Columbia approved an appropriation of not less than \$3.2 million in funding for Fiscal Year 2007 to be provided through the Office of the Attorney General in the form of a grant or grants to the D.C. Bar Foundation to support projects designed to facilitate access to the civil justice system in the District of Columbia through increased presence of legal services in underserved

areas of the city, in housing-related matters, a loan repayment assistance program for legal services lawyers, and creation and operation of an interpreter bank; and

"Whereas, the Board of Governors considers that continued annual public funding of initiatives of the Access to Justice Commission, designed to improve and equalize access to the civil justice system in the District of Columbia, closely and directly affects the administration of the courts and the Bar's ability to assist in the improvement of the administration of justice;

"Now therefore, it is by the membership of the District of Columbia Bar, at a duly constituted meeting of the District of Columbia Bar membership, hereby

"Resolved that, effective immediately, the governors and officers of the District of Columbia Bar and their designees are

authorized to make public statements and recommendations on behalf of the Bar to support appropriations of general revenues in the District of Columbia annual budget to fund proposals recommended by the Access to Justice Commission to improve access to civil legal services in the District of Columbia. The Bar's position on appropriations for Access to Justice Commission proposals will be approved at least annually by the Board of Governors of the District of Columbia Bar. This authorization is effective for five years."

All active members of the D.C. Bar are eligible to participate in the meeting, which is expected to convene in the atrium ballroom of the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center, 1300 Pennsylvania Avenue NW.

For more information about the 2007 Bar Conference, visit www.dcbbar.org/conference. —J.R.

Superior Court Launches Resource Center, Family Education Program

The Superior Court of the District of Columbia has recently expanded court services to the community by opening a resource center to assist unrepresented litigants in small claims court and

launching a pilot family education program for parents and children involved in contested-custody cases.

The Small Claims Resource Center, which got under way in January, is located at 510 4th Street NW, room 105, and open from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Similar to the Landlord Tenant Resource Center, the Small Claims Resource Center helps pro se litigants understand court proceedings, assists them with preparing court documents, provides information on how to obtain continuances and retain counsel, advises them on how best to present their cases in court, and makes referrals to legal services providers.

The center is coordinated by the D.C. Bar Pro Bono Program. Attorneys from the Neighborhood Legal Services Program staff the center on Tuesdays. On Thursdays it is staffed by students (accompanied by supervising attorneys) from the George Washington University Law School and the Catholic University of America Columbus School of Law.

"This is the latest in a series of initiatives at the Superior Court to enhance access to the justice system for litigants without lawyers," said Chief Judge Rufus

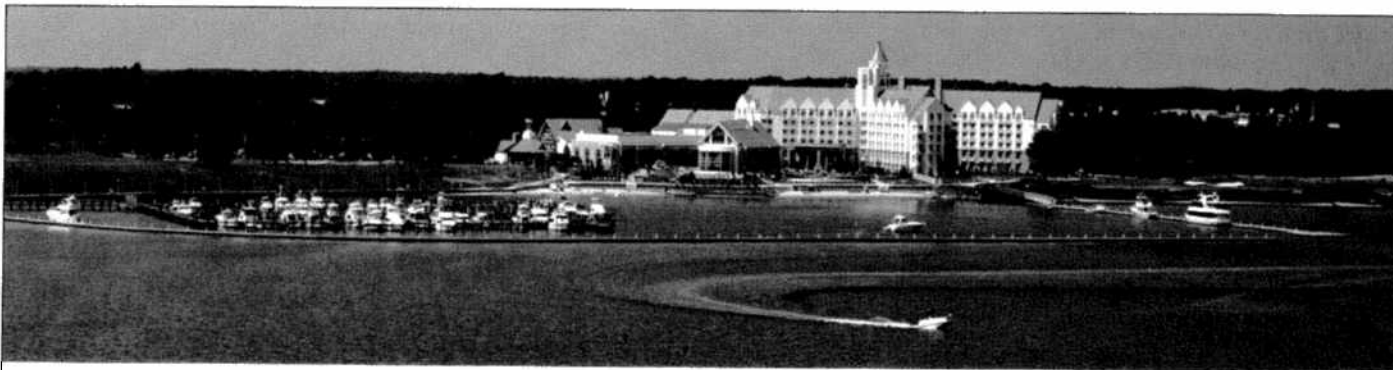
G. King III.

The family court's family education program, which began in February, is intended to help limit the emotional strain on children aged 7 to 14 during custody litigation by teaching them how to cope with domestic conflict and negative emotions, and teaching their parents the skills necessary to mediate future disagreements.

"All too often the children, though not the target of their parents' anger, are affected by their parents' hostility, and there is a profound emotional toll," said family court presiding judge Anita Josey-Herring. "This program was created to assist parents with developing skills to improve their interactions with each other, and also help children to develop skills to better manage the negative effects of parents in conflict."

All children and parents involved in a contested-custody issue are required to take part in the program, which involves three- to four-hour seminars on the weekends.

Judge Odessa F. Vincent presides over the education program cases, and Darrell Hale, chief of the family alternative dispute resolution branch, is the program's director. —K.A.



MEETING AT THE HYATT REGENCY CHESAPEAKE BAY GOLF RESORT, SPA AND MARINA IS AN OPEN-AND-SHUT CASE!

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