

legal beat

By Connie C. Wu and Richard J. Blaustein

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

Bar Wraps Up Conference on Billable Hours

The D.C. Bar wrapped up its 2005 Bar Conference on March 3 at the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center with programs on billable hours, award presentations, and a judicial reception.

The conference commenced with a luncheon featuring a keynote address by Judge David S. Tatel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit and the presentation of the Beatrice Rosenberg Award for Excellence in Government Service to Kathryn Ann Ellis, agency dispute resolution specialist and senior counsel to the deputy general counsel for program service at the U.S. Department of Education.

D.C. Bar President John C. Keeney Jr. also gave special acknowledgments to Chief Judge Annice M. Wagner of the District of Columbia Court of Appeals, who will be stepping down from active service, and Joyce Peters, who retired as bar counsel on March 4.

In his address Tatel focused on the legal needs of the underrepresented in the District of Columbia and the changes required to make legal services more accessible to all. He praised local law firms for their efforts in providing pro bono hours and the large number of firms that signed on to the D.C. Bar pro bono pledge, but stressed that success should be measured "not in hours, but in accomplishments."

Citing a recent report by the D.C. Bar Foundation, Tatel said, "[E]ven in areas where locally funded legal services can help, 'the number of clients receiving extended service is extremely small relative to the need.'"

Calling on the D.C. Bar to assume responsibility for ensuring full access to the legal system, Tatel said, "Why is this our responsibility? Because unlike those who run airlines, sell iPods, deliver packages, or operate any other business, lawyers cannot measure their success by merely how well they serve those who can pay their bills. Whether teaching or practic-



Attendees at the first of two plenary programs at the 2005 Bar Conference heard prominent practitioners and corporate counsel discuss the impact of the billable hour on the legal profession.

ing, whether working for law firms, government agencies, or corporations, as officers of the court, lawyers have an obligation to do their part to ensure that the legal system works for all of society."

Following the luncheon, two plenary programs addressed the use of the billable hour and its impact on client relationships and practice management. The first program, titled "Billable Hours: A Look Through the Prism," focused on the profound effect of the billable hour in the law profession. Panelists discussed the consequences of billable hours on both lawyers and clients. In the second program, "Billable Hours: Focus on the Future," panelists looked at alternatives to billable hours that have worked in smaller firms and in other countries.

The Bar Conference ended with a judicial reception cohosted by the National Association of Women Judges (NAWJ). Judges John Steadman of the District of Columbia Court of Appeals, who has taken senior status, and Steffen W. Graae of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia, who has retired, were honored for their services.

Vanessa Ruiz, president-elect of the NAWJ and a judge on the D.C. Court of Appeals, presented the first Women of Achievement Award to Maxine Singer, former president of the Carnegie Institution of Washington. The award recognizes outstanding women in other pro-

fessions who have made distinguished contributions in their fields of endeavor, their impact on the society at large, and their efforts in improving the standing of women within their professions.

D.C. Bar Foundation President Robert Weiner presented the 2005 Jerrald Scoutt Prize to Jeannine Sanford, deputy director of Bread for the City, for her longstanding commitment to the representation of low-income, disadvantaged residents of the District of Columbia.

D.C. Appeals Court Establishes Access to Justice Commission

The District of Columbia Court of Appeals has announced the appointment of 17 individuals to lead a commission to address the increasing unmet legal needs of residents of the District of Columbia.

In announcing the appointment of the Access to Justice Commission, D.C. Court of Appeals Chief Judge Annice M. Wagner said, "Equal access to justice is a fundamental principle in America. In spite of continuing efforts of many in our legal community, we still have to work to make that principle a full reality in the District. The denial of equal justice adversely impacts individuals and our society as a whole and erodes confidence in our system of justice. We have to do more—and the commission will lay out a path to get us there."

The commission was formed after de-

tailed discussions led by the Court of Appeals with the D.C. Bar, D.C. Bar Foundation, and D.C. Consortium of Legal Services Providers.

Peter Edelman, a professor at the Georgetown University Law Center, will head the commission for two years as chair.

Edelman has been highly involved in community and national organizations, such as the Public Welfare Foundation, the National Center for Youth Law, the Juvenile Law Center, and the Center for Law and Social Policy. He clerked for Judge Henry Friendly of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit and Justice Arthur Goldberg of the U.S. Supreme Court, and served as legislative assistant to Senator Robert Kennedy.

Other members appointed to the commission are Jane Golden Belford, Gloria Wilder Brathwaite, Marisa Demeo, Stephanie Duncan-Peters, Patricia Mulahy Fugere, Andrew Marks, Shirley Massey, Jayne Parks, Stephen Pollak, Hiram Puig-Lugo, Inez Smith Reid, Paula Scott, Jonathan Smith, Joan Strand, Eric Washington, and Robert Wilkins.

Established for an initial term of three years, the Access to Justice Commission will set up a coordinated plan-

ning process that involves all members of the community who are affected by the crisis in equal access to justice in an effort to develop strategies to improve access and reduce barriers; facilitate efforts to create improved coordination and support of civil legal service programs; work with the courts, administrative agencies, and lawmaking bodies to propose and promote rules and systemic changes that will open greater access to the justice system; and propose and promote strategies to generate adequate levels of public, private, and volunteer resources and funding for the District's civil justice network and the access-to-justice initiatives by the commission.

The commission will also consult District residents who are living in poverty, who are language minorities, and who have disabilities to seek proposed solutions.

"This is not a body that is going to write a report that is going to sit on a shelf," said Edelman. "It is intended to be an action body, and it will move to get things done as we identify ideas to meet the needs."

The commission will file an annual report with the D.C. Court of Appeals outlining its work during the prior 12-

month period.

Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP and Steptoe & Johnson LLP have already provided funding to the D.C. Bar Foundation for the purpose of supporting the commission. Each firm has donated \$25,000 and has pledged to raise additional funding.

D.C. Court of Appeals Amends Rule 49 on Bar Admission

Future applicants for admission to the District of Columbia Bar will be facing new procedures following recent changes to the rule on admission by the D.C. Court of Appeals. Amendments to Rule 49 of the Rules of the District of Columbia Court of Appeals took effect on February 4.

Among the changes, under Rule 46(b)(1) applicants with appropriate accommodation requests, "upon good cause," may have more time than the set two successive days in February and July to complete the Bar examination.

Accordingly, Rule 46(b)(8)(iv) has been amended to allow applicants more time than the six hours allotted each day of the examination to complete the test, "pursuant to a request for testing accommodations."



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