



Supreme Court of Tennessee

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Supreme Court, Access to Justice Commission Honored for Work To Improve Justice

Nashville, Tenn. – The National Judicial College presented Advancement of Justice Awards to several individuals and entities Monday in Nashville for their efforts to improve access to justice in the state of Tennessee.

Among the award recipients are the Tennessee Supreme Court, its Access to Justice Commission and Senior Judge Don R. Ash. The Advancement of Justice Award is bestowed upon a distinguished person or entity that has demonstrated dedication to improving justice in the judiciary. Justice Janice M. Holder and Justice Cornelia A. Clark accepted the award on behalf of the Court. George T. “Buck” Lewis, Chair of the Access to Justice Commission, represented the Commission.

The award presentation followed a panel discussion on access to justice efforts in Tennessee. Justices Holder and Clark highlighted the many rule changes the Court has enacted to make it easier for attorneys to do pro bono work in Tennessee. They also shared information on the Court’s Pro Bono Recognition Program.

Lewis discussed the goals of the Commission’s recently adopted strategic plan, including having a regular pro bono legal clinic in every judicial district, and 20 new faith-based pro bono projects in the next two years. Lewis also shared that Tennessee attorneys reporting pro bono work show the number of hours to be well above the national average. More details will be released soon in the 2013 Pro Bono Report.

The panel discussion focused on how to tear down some of the barriers blocking access to justice for many Americans. The panelists looked at the issues from various perspectives. In addition to justices Clark and Holder, Judge Ash, and Lewis, the panel included Hon. Chad Schmucker, President, The National Judicial College; and from Davidson County: Chancellor Claudia Bonnyman, Circuit Court Judge Philip E. Smith, and General Session Judge Daniel Eisenstein.

The Tennessee Supreme Court announced its Access to Justice campaign in 2008 and subsequently created the Access to Justice Commission. The commission is a response to a growing legal-needs gap in Tennessee as indigent and working-poor families face more civil legal problems caused by unemployment, predatory loans, uninsured medical bills, domestic violence, evictions and foreclosures.

The commission is tasked with developing and implementing strategic plans for improving access to justice in Tennessee to include educating the public on the need for legal representation to meet the ideal of equal justice under the law, identifying the priorities to meet the need of improved access to justice, and making recommendations to the Supreme Court of projects and programs necessary for enhancing access to justice.

The National Judicial College also presented Advancement of Justice Awards to The Frist Foundation and Professor Penny White of the University of Tennessee College of Law. Baker Donelson hosted the program.

The National Judicial College serves as a place where judges from across the nation and around the world can meet to improve the delivery of justice and advance the rule of law through a disciplined process of professional study and collegial dialogue. They offer about 90 courses annually with more than 4,000 judges attending from all 50 states, U.S. territories and more than 150 countries.

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