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DC COURTS RANK #1 IN NATIONWIDE ACCESS TO JUSTICE SURVEY

Washington, DC – The National Center for Access to Justice (NCAJ) recently released the 2016 Justice Index, a survey of state-level courts; the DC Courts ranked #1. The survey evaluated courts on four factors: legal representation in civil matters, providing information to and assisting litigants who represent themselves, language access, and removing barriers for court users who have physical or mental disabilities.

“We are gratified that our efforts have been shown to have had a real, meaningful impact on access to justice in the District of Columbia,” said DC Court of Appeals Chief Judge Eric T. Washington. “Justice for all is a hallmark of the American constitutional system and a fundamental value. While we were especially commended for our efforts to appoint counsel, we recognize that there are still a large number of litigants who appear in our courtrooms without representation. For that reason, we continue to work to provide access to everyone who seeks justice in the DC Courts, through resource centers, pro bono programs, interpreters and the elimination of physical barriers.”

NCAJ began compiling the Justice Index in 2014 “to make access to justice a reality for all.” In NCAJ’s words, “With clear, concise and public findings, the Justice Index allows [j]udges, [court] administrators and advocates to see where their efforts do the most good at the lowest cost [and] the public to learn about justice system performance and demand accountability.”

The DC Courts have long been committed to enhancing access to justice. The Courts created a Standing Committee on Fairness and Access in 1997 and the DC Court of Appeals established the DC Access to Justice Commission in 2005. “The DC Courts’ Vision Statement was unveiled in 2003, as part of its first strategic plan: Open to All, Trusted by All, With Justice for All. That is a vision we strive for every single day. And while we are pleased to be ranked first, that does not mean that our work is done. Ensuring Access to Justice for All is a goal we constantly work towards,” explained Chief Judge Washington.

Overall, DC Courts had the top score in the 2016 Justice Index, followed by Massachusetts, Hawaii and Maryland. The survey results are presented on line in an interactive format:

<http://justiceindex.org/2016-findings/findings/>.

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