



Full Court Press



Newsletter of the District of Columbia Courts

December 2018

DC Courts Access to Justice Initiatives

New initiatives enhance access to justice for DC residents.

Court Navigator Program – Starting in the Landlord-Tenant and Small Claims Branches in the Superior Court’s Civil Division, and with the aim to expand throughout the courts, this program will assist those individuals who are unrepresented by attorneys with navigating the court system, not just geographically, but also in terms of figuring out which office or division can best assist them, and which forms to fill out. It builds on the Veteran’s Navigator Program, which started last year.

Forms Help Online (FHO) – This program will start in the Family Court, Domestic Violence Division and DC Court of Appeals. The Courts plan to expand from there to other Superior Court Divisions. FHO is an online program that asks users questions and uses the answers to fill out all the forms necessary for whatever they want to request the court to do, akin to programs that assist people with filing their taxes.

*The Court Navigator Office is currently located on the first floor of Court Building B. **See the flyer on the back cover.***

Forms Help Online can be found at www.dccourts.gov/FHO.

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Strategy Learning Sessions Highlight DC Courts Strategic Plan for Court Employees

As part of the DC Courts Strategic Plan rollout, a number of strategy learning sessions were held between August and October 2018. Close to 800 DC Court employees participated in these sessions, which were designed to be interactive events that invited division team members to engage with one another in exploring, discussing, and learning about the Courts’ strategic goals. Overall, division directors hosted 42 sessions. The Strategic Management Division had three objectives for these strategy learning sessions:



- Increase awareness and understanding of the Courts’ 2018 – 2022 Strategic Plan
- Share information about the division’s contribution toward strategy execution
- Engage employees to share their views on how to be most successful in strategy execution

Each 90-minute session engaged a maximum of 30 participants. Several divisions held multiple sessions

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Open To All Trusted By All Justice For All

New Pro Bono Appellate Mediation Program



On Thursday, November 1, the DC Court of Appeals kicked off its new Pro Bono Appellate Mediation program, with Chief Judge Blackburne-Rigsby (*pictured center*), Clerk of Court Julio Castillo and Deputy Clerk of Court Herb Rouson joined by DC Bar President Esther Lim (*pictured left*) and several dozen attorneys interested in the new program.

Chief Judge Blackburne-Rigsby welcomed the attendees and thanked them for joining the Court for the launch of this new initiative. An appellate mediation program has

been in place for several years, but the new initiative establishes a panel of pro bono counsel to assist people in mediation.

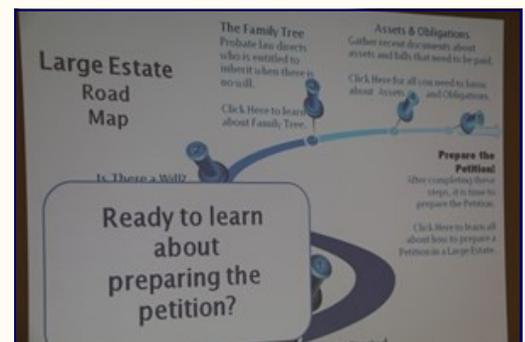
DC Bar President Esther Lim spoke about this need and about the importance of pro bono service by all members of the DC Bar. She pointed out that regardless of an attorney's area of expertise, there were opportunities to assist those who cannot afford counsel. Former Program Director Scottie Reid (*pictured right*) explained more about how the program will work - the training the Court and the Bar will provide, the ability for attorneys to do 'limited scope' representation [to handle just the mediation and if it does not yield an agreement/settlement, then they can but do not have to represent the party for the appeal] and the advantages both for clients and for attorneys offering their services.

New Probate Self-Help Center

The DC Superior Court Probate Division recently opened its new Self Help Center. The Center has an eLobby check-in, and numerous kiosks that allow users to indicate what tasks they wish to complete -for instance: file a will, seek guardianship status for a loved one, etc -and proceed with the appropriate forms.

The Probate Self Help Center is located in Court Building A (515 5th Street, NW) in room 316. It's currently open from 8:30 to 3:30 Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday (The DC Bar operates a pro bono resource center in the space Tuesday afternoons from 12:30 to 5pm).

In addition, the Center will offer free seminars for the public: *Guardianship Orientation* seminars will be held 12:00-1:00pm. on the second and fourth Thursday of each month; and *Inventory Preparation When Handling Someone Else's Money* seminars will be held on the third Thursday of each month, also from 12:00 to 1:00pm.



Investiture of DC Superior Court Judge Kelly Higashi

Judge Kelly Higashi's investiture took place in the Moultrie Courthouse Atrium on Friday, October 26. DC Superior Court Chief Judge Robert Morin opened the event by mentioning how pleased he was to welcome a new judge to the Court.

Former US Attorney Channing Phillips then took the podium and shared fond memories of his time with Judge Higashi when both served as Assistant US Attorneys, having started on the same day 24 years ago. He spoke not just of her integrity, intellect and dedication, but her caring nature with colleagues and friends. He also shared with the audience the experience the judge's parents had during World War II with the Japanese internment, and how proud they must be to see their daughter become a presidentially-appointed judge.

Next the new judge's best friend from childhood, Tiffany Bluemle, took the podium and shared many fond memories, including when the judge, then in high school, announced boldly "I am going to be a judge."



Judge Weisberg (left) administers the oath of office, while Judge Higashi places her hand on the US Constitution, held by her partner.

She closed by presenting the judge with a collar for her judicial robe, with an Osh Kosh B'Gosh label and a small square of fabric from their matching overalls from grade school hidden on the underneath side.

After the judicial commission was read by Acting Clerk of Court Zabrina Dempson, Judge Frederick Weisberg came to the podium to swear

in his former law clerk. He first spoke of their friendship of 25 years and said that not much would give him more happiness than to swear her in to the Superior Court bench. The judge then took the oath of office as her partner John Marsh held the US Constitution. Her stepchildren and nephew then helped robe her, and Judge Jonathan Pittman escorted her to her seat amongst the judges of the Superior Court.

See more information about Judge Higashi on her bio: https://www.dccourts.gov/sites/default/files/2018-10/DCSC_Bio_Higashi_0.pdf



Former Chief Judge Washington's Official Portrait Unveiled

The official portrait of former DC Court of Appeals Chief Judge Eric T. Washington was recently unveiled at a ceremony in the Historic Courthouse. The portrait will now take its place on the wall outside the Ceremonial Courtroom, along with all the other Court of Appeals' chief judges.

Watch the ceremony here:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OII-zlvwEcl>

Adoption Day Celebration



The DC Superior Court and the DC Child and Family Services Agency hosted the 32nd Annual Adoption Day ceremony on Saturday, November 17, 2018. The event highlighted the finalization of over 170 adoptions in 2018, and 32 children ages one to 19 years were adopted at the celebration. District of Columbia Mayor Muriel Bowser spoke about her own journey through the adoption process with her beautiful baby girl Miranda, and encouraged others to seek more information about adoption.

NBC4 anchor Barbara Harrison (*pictured right*) spoke about her involvement of 37 years with Adoption Day and why she originally started the Wednesday's Child segment on TV to encourage adoption in the nation's capitol. DC Superior Court Magistrate Judge Tara Fentress ended the program with a song selection that paid tribute to the Honorable Carol Dalton, who led her last Adoption Day as the Presiding Judge of the DC Superior Court Family Court.

DC Courts Celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month

From September 15 to October 15, the DC Courts celebrated Hispanic Heritage Month, concluding with the annual Coro Awards ceremony on October 19. This year's awards were presented to the following recipients:

- The Esperanza Education Fund received the Community Agency Award. The award is presented to a community agency demonstrating commitment to providing services to the Latino community.
- Jackie Reyes, who serves as the Director of the DC Mayor's Office on Latino Affairs, received the Allan Klein Award. The award is presented to an individual or agency in recognition of exemplary and sustained commitment to serving the people of DC.
- Rita Blandino (Acting Director of the Domestic Violence Division, *pictured second from left to right*), received the Community Outreach Award. The award is presented to a court employee or division demonstrating commitment to providing services to the Latino community and the people of DC.
- Raquel Trabal (Attorney Negotiator at the Domestic Violence Division, *pictured far right*), received the Legal Community Award, presented to an individual who has demonstrated excellence providing legal services to the Latino community.



to ensure every team member had an opportunity to participate. Division team members served as ‘table facilitators’ to lead eight to ten division employees in conversation about the Courts’ strategy and the division’s role in accomplishing these goals. A session consisted of three to four tables of team members gathered around a graphic map that displayed each strategic goal.

Using each goal as the foundation for the discussion, division leaders drafted questions designed to help session participants listen and hear the different perspectives and experiences of their co-workers. Participants shared ideas, proposed solutions, and explored opportunities to help achieve strategic goals. In terms of outcomes:

- 91% of employees agreed that the sessions helped them to better understand the Courts’ Strategic Plan and goals.
- 88% of employees were more aware of how their division contributed to the strategy.
- 89% of employees indicated the sessions helped them understand how their role might be impacted by the Strategic Plan.

The strategy learning sessions were just the beginning of continuous opportunities to engage the Courts in accomplishing our strategic goals. The Strategic Management Division is partnering with court and division leadership to build reporting tools and processes that will keep everyone informed of our progress. Look for our first report in early 2019.

Goals in the DC Courts 2018-2022 Strategic Plan

Goal 1: Access to justice for all –we must eliminate barriers to using the Courts’ services

Goal 2: Fair and timely case resolution – focuses on improving public trust in the Courts

Goal 3: A professional and engaged workforce – continues the Courts’ commitment to employees

Goal 4: Resilient and responsive technology – promotes the use of state-of-the-art technology to provide broader access to information and ensure its security

Goal 5: Effective court management and administration – to build the Courts’ as a hub for the community with expanded access to information and services.

What Employees Said about the Strategy Learning Sessions

“This session let employees feel involved and invested in the Courts’ future.”

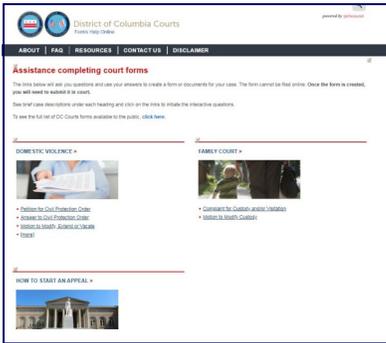
“This exercise gave a vision for what expectations are to be implemented to enhance access and service to the general public as well as improving employee performance.”

“There was openness to all voices allowing everyone to be heard.”

“This was a very informative meeting. I’d love to have more of them to keep the momentum and consistency of accomplishing the goals set forth.”

“It was a great way to hear from the entire Division and all have the same information about our strategic goals and direction.”

“It is helpful [for] me to better understand how others view this information. It allows me to have a greater appreciation for the different branches.”



“The DC Courts are ensuring access to justice for all who use our court system. To that end, we have launched two new initiatives for those without attorneys to help them navigate the

court campus and the legal system more easily,” said DC Court of Appeals Chief Judge Anna Blackburne-Rigsby. “This is in addition to new technologies we launched last year, as well as no-cost dispute mediation in both appellate and trial level cases, legal service resource centers, interpretation services, and working with the DC Access to Justice Commission to encourage attorneys in DC to volunteer their services for those with cases before the courts who lack legal representation,” she added.

“I am pleased that these two new initiatives will make the court campus and process more easy to navigate and help those without attorneys to fill out forms more easily. Our foremost goal – as outlined in our 2018-2022 Strategic Plan - is a system in which self-represented parties can easily find where they need to be and what they need to do,” said Chief Judge Morin. “More information is now available online, more services, and we have navigators to assist in ensuring that people can fill out forms, understand the legal process and get the assistance they need,” he concluded.

These two new programs come after several improvements made just last year, such as:

- A **completely restructured and user-friendly website** that is service-oriented site, allows users to search for and find information more easily and includes a section for self-represented litigants.
- A **new electronic court schedule information board** in the lobby of the Moultrie Courthouse that lists all cases to be heard that day, by party name, indicating the judge, courtroom and time of hearing; and
- A **new online case information system for DC Superior Court** that allows online access to criminal, probate, and civil case dockets, as well as images of documents in all civil cases and lower level criminal cases. The Court anticipates adding more cases and case documents over the next few years.

Access to Justice is the first goal in the DC Courts 2018-2022 Strategic Plan. Goal 1 of the Strategic Plan reads: “The Courts have a responsibility to eliminate barriers to meaningful participation in the judicial process and to accessing court services. Such barriers may include a lack of legal representation, limited literacy or limited English language skills, limited financial resources, and physical or mental disability. In collaboration with justice and community partners, the Courts will work to ensure full access to the justice system and court services.”

Sign up for the DC Courts Alert System

The DC Courts Alert system automatically sends notifications by e-mail, cellular phone, text message, and/or land line to all registered users.

Make sure you stay tuned and receive emergency alerts on building closures, weather conditions, and network and power outages by signing up or updating your information using the link below.

<https://dccourts.onthealert.com>



End of the Year Payroll Key Points and Reminders for DC Courts Employees

- In the 2019 tax year, the DC Courts will return to the usual 26 Pay Periods instead of the 27 Pay Periods that took place in 2018.
- The 2018 taxable earnings year is from December 10, 2017, through December 22, 2018. The 2019 taxable earnings year is from December 23, 2018, through December 21, 2019.
- **The 2018 leave year ends January 5, 2019. Therefore, employees are reminded that annual leave in excess of the maximum carryover of 240 hours must be used prior to the Pay Period ending January 5, 2019 or it may be lost.** Employees who cannot or do not wish to use their excess annual leave may donate this leave to the Leave Transfer Program (Donation), by completing the Leave Transfer Program Donor Application Form which can be found on the intranet. Donations to the Program must be made prior to December 7, 2018. For more information on the Leave Transfer Program or to request a form, please contact Ms. Rachel Jenkins, Employee Relations Manager on 1-2855.
- Employees in the six hour leave category will get their extra four hours the last full Pay Period of the calendar year.
- The 2019 leave year is from January 6, 2019, through January 4, 2020.
- The Social Security Administration increased the maximum earnings to \$132,900; there is no wage base limit for Medicare tax.
- The target date for access to view and print Form W-2, Wage and Tax Statement, in Employee Express (EEX) is January 15, 2019. If you have not already elected to view and access your W-2 electronically, please elect to **Turn Off** the Hard Copy W-2s feature in EEX prior to December 27, 2018.
- For all employees who did not elect to turn off the mailed Form W-2, a printed Form W-2 will be mailed to the address of record no later than January 31, 2019.

Have you checked your eOPF lately? The eOPF is an electronic version of employee's Official Personnel Folder and contains all the official records required to document your government career. See the link: <https://eopf.opm.gov/dccourts/>



NEED HELP? ASK US!

MON - FRI (8:30 AM - 5:00 PM)
BUILDING B, ROOM #115

A COURT NAVIGATOR CAN :

- Explain the court process and what to expect in court.
- Describe your options for completing your court business.
- Help you understand court forms.
- Give you information about legal service organizations.
- Refer you to other helpful services.