

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DELAWARE ACCESS TO JUSTICE COMMISSION
GETS UNDERWAY

The Delaware Access to Justice Commission held its kickoff meeting on December 15, 2014 at the Arsh Hall University of Delaware, Wilmington, Delaware. The Commission has been established by the Delaware Supreme Court to undertake the bold and ambitious task of examining the justice system to identify any barriers to access to justice that may exist, and to develop recommendations designed to improve access to justice for the citizens of Delaware. To increase its accountability, the voting membership of the Commission are comprised entirely of private citizens – outstanding community and business leaders, lawyers and other professionals from across the state, who have the flexibility to make whatever policy recommendations they believe will be best for Delaware. The Commission is co-chaired by Gregory Brian Williams, Esquire, past President of the Delaware State Bar Association, and partner at Fox Rothschild, LLP, and Yvonne Takvorian Saville, Esquire, current President of the Delaware State Bar Association and partner at Weiss & Saville, P.A. Chief Justice Leo E. Strine, Jr. and Justice Karen L. Valihura serve as the Commission's Supreme Court Liaisons.

The Commission, working through subcommittees, will initially focus on four important access to justice needs in Delaware – the efficient delivery and adequate funding of legal services to the poor; Judicial Branch coordination in helping self represented litigants; the need to increase the pool of legal advisors to help litigants of limited means by exploring roadblocks confronting those lawyers; and fairness in the adult criminal justice system. Specifically, the Subcommittee on Fairness in the Adult Criminal Justice System will study the causes of the disparity between the percentage of Delawareans who are black and the percentage of those incarcerated in Delaware's prisons who are black, and recommend measures to reduce any inequities not based upon sound criminal justice policy. Chief Justice Strine stated: "Approximately 22% of our citizens are black, but nearly 60% of the male prisoners held in Delaware prisons are black. We have made great strides in ending racial discrimination and promoting equal opportunity for all citizens. But, we owe a moral duty to not ignore the persisting harm caused by

centuries of racial discrimination and oppression and have the opportunity, through the Access to Justice Commission, to identify the causes that result in the current serious racial disparities and to seek solutions.”

At the December 15th kickoff meeting, introductory remarks by Chief Justice Strine, and co-chairs Gregory Williams and Yvonne Takvorian Saville, were followed by presentations by Steve Grumm, American Bar Association Director of the Resource Center for Access to Justice Initiatives, who will provide an overview of the work of Access to Justice Commissions in other states, and Bryan Stevenson, Executive Director of the Equal Justice Initiative and author of *Just Mercy*, who will discuss racial disparity in the criminal justice system and whose organization has agreed to provide staff and technical support to the Subcommittee on Fairness in the Adult Criminal Justice System. The subcommittees then met to review their action plans and begin their work. The Commission has been tasked with completing its initial work in two years, with various subcommittees conducting research, holding public hearings and making recommendations throughout that time period.

The Amended Order establishing the Access to Justice Commission and the Commission and subcommittee membership list can be found at <http://courts.delaware.gov/supreme/access.stm>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
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