Council for Court Excellence
Improving Justice for the Community

May 2020 Newsletter

"Meet the Next Chief Judge" Public Forum on June 9



As part of our mission to educate the public and increase civic engagement, CCE is proud to host "**Meet the Next Chief Judge**" the evening of June 9. Current D.C. Superior Court Chief Judge Robert E. Morin plans to retire this fall, and three judges have applied for the position. This forum will be an important opportunity for members of the bar and community at large to learn about the applicants' vision, priorities, and leadership styles prior to the June 19 deadline for submitting public comments to the D.C. Judicial Nomination Commission. The event is free, and you can join CCE and our distinguished co-sponsoring organizations by registering here.



CCE Successfully Advocates for Good Time & Compassionate Release Legislation

Recognizing that prisons and jails are particularly dangerous places during this pandemic, CCE recently presented a proposal to the D.C. Council to establish new good time and compassionate release laws. These provisions were included in the District's second COVID-19 emergency response bill, which passed on April 10.

Before the current crisis, CCE had already been developing "Fair Practices After Sentencing: A Proposal for Reforming Good Time, Earned Time, and Compassionate Release in the District of Columbia." The proposal equalizes the treatment of similarly-situated people sentenced under the D.C. Code and aligns District law with the bipartisan federal First Step Act. CCE is very proud to have contributed our policy and legislative drafting support in this difficult time. These provisions are already having an impact and eligible individuals are receiving the appropriate credits and judicial consideration for release. All of this will ultimately help minimize the risk of D.C. residents' exposure to COVID-19 in jails and prisons, and ensure equitable treatment in the long term.

Special thanks to the **George Washington University Law School's Prisoner & Reentry Clinic**, Covington & Burling pro bono attorneys **Joan Kutcher** and **Pooja Shah Kothari**, and the **Public Defender Service** for their generous support in preparing the proposal.

Recruiting New Judges for our School Jury Education Project

For nearly 30 years, CCE has been facilitating the School Jury Education Project (SJEP) – a unique program that brings together D.C. high school students and judges to engage in a hands-on learning

experience through which students learn about the importance of jury service. Working with the Georgetown Street Law Program (Street Law), CCE hosted a virtual introduction to SJEP on April 28 for D.C. Superior Court judges. Twelve judges and several court professionals participated in the training. Attendees learned about the role SJEP plays in educating local students on the importance of jury duty in democracy and about Street Law's learner-centered approach, in which students are empowered to control their own learning experience. We hope to hold classroom visits in the fall; however, with the uncertainty surrounding COVID-19, our Justice Education Committee is also exploring virtual sessions. *If you are a judge interested in participating in the SJEP, please contact casey.anderson@courtexcellence.org.*

Join us in building better justice in the District

State Justice Institute Grant Awarded for Estate Administration Project

Earlier this month, CCE was awarded a grant from the State Justice Institute for our Civil Justice Committee's Estate Administration project. Co-Chaired by CCE Director David Cox, this Working Group – in partnership with the D.C. Access to Justice Commission – is focused on identifying innovative solutions to help D.C. families navigate probate. Over the next year, the Working Group will identify barriers faced by unrepresented parties seeking to handle a loved one's estate, examine best practices from other jurisdictions, and develop legislative or court rule recommendations that could improve the estate administration process in the District. *If you have experience as a lawyer in a D.C. probate matter or have been a party in a D.C. probate case and would be willing to share your experiences with the Working Group, please contact tracy.nutall@courtexcellence.org.*

Remembering Dr. Ed Burger



Longtime CCE Board Member **Dr. Edward J. Burger** passed away on April 4. Dr. Burger served as a civic member of CCE's Board for over 35 years and was involved in several significant justice initiatives in the District. Dr. Burger chaired the committee that developed our 2012 report, *Protecting Pedestrians: Watching Out for Washington, DC Walkers*. In addition to his work with CCE, Dr. Burger had a distinguished career and fascinating life. His many accomplishments include founding the Institute for Health Policy Analysis at the Georgetown University Medical Center, being inducted as a Fellow into the prestigious Royal College of Physicians in London, serving on the staff of the President's Science Advisers, and preserving the Mattoon Farm in Chelsea, VT. Dr. Burger is survived by his wife **Sarah Greene Burger** (pictured at right with Dr. Burger at our 2019 Justice Potter Stewart Dinner), who has also been a beloved fixture at CCE events over the years. CCE sends our condolences to his family as well as thanks for their long-standing support of CCE.

Updates & Reminders

June Board of Directors Meeting on June 16

CCE's Board of Directors will meet on June 16, 2020 via Zoom for its bi-annual meeting. At the meeting, the Board will consider a slate of nominees for the Board and Executive Committee and will review CCE's current programmatic work and finances. Additionally, Board Directors will hear a special presentation from **Chief Judge Robert Morin** of the D.C. Superior Court and **Judge Trevor McFadden** of the U.S.

District Court, moderated by CCE Director **Victor Long**, regarding their courts' current and expected adaptations during the pandemic.

CCE in the News

On May 1, the DC Line published CCE Executive Director **Misty Thomas**'s op-ed entitled, *"COVID-19 is exposing chronic problems with DC's criminal justice system but also pathways to permanent reforms."* In the article, Ms. Thomas notes the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on incarcerated people and posits that this pandemic may offer an unexpected but valuable opportunity to re-evaluate previously held assumptions about criminal justice policy, and make lasting, positive change.

Justice Potter Stewart Dinner Cancelled

After carefully considering the uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 public health crisis, CCE has cancelled our Justice Potter Stewart Award Dinner until 2021. Although we are saddened by this decision, we know that it is necessary to ensure the health and safety of our staff, honorees, Board Members, sponsors, and supporters. Please click here to learn more about our distinguished honorees, **Wade Henderson**, **Patty Mullahy Fugere**, and **Kojo Nnamdi**.

Donate today!