

Delaware Bench and Bar Diversity Project

On the 67th anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court's historic *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, Delaware Supreme Court Chief Justice Collins J. Seitz, Jr. is pleased to announced the Delaware Bench and Bar Diversity Project. This project, launched in collaboration with the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) and AccessLex Institute, will be led by a Steering Committee composed of judicial officers, individuals and organizations working to build and sustain a more diverse Delaware bench and bar. The Project is the first of its kind strategic effort to address diversity issues in the legal field. The process and outcomes will serve as a national model that others can adapt to address their own state-specific diversity challenges. The Project will make recommendations that will help attract and retain diverse members to the Delaware Bench and Bar.

“The National Center for State Courts and AccessLex Institute are committing their formidable experience, expertise and resources to support our project. These organizations have been at the forefront of helping state courts and bars study diversity issues and recommend meaningful steps to address the lack of diversity in the legal profession,” Chief Justice Seitz stated.

Founded in 1971 by the Conference of Chief Justices (CCJ), NCSC is the organization that people turn to for authoritative services, knowledge and information regarding the state courts and their operations. “I am excited with the work that NCSC and AccessLex will be doing in partnership with Delaware and congratulate Chief Justice Seitz for his forward-thinking leadership on one of the most important issues facing our nation’s legal profession, increasing its diversity,” said Chief Justice Nathan Hecht, President of CCJ. Working collaboratively with the Conference of Chief Justices, the Conference of State Court Administrators, and other associations of judicial leaders, NCSC has been on the vanguard of helping courts tackle some of their most pressing challenges in the areas of court education, strategic planning, diversity and community engagement, and justice system reform. “Delaware’s engagement with NCSC and AccessLex will produce two outcomes: a strategic plan for the state and a national model for others to follow,” noted Mary McQueen, President of NCSC.

Headquartered in West Chester, Pennsylvania, AccessLex Institute is a nonprofit member organization composed of the nearly 200 American Bar Association-approved nonprofit and state-affiliated law schools. “We are honored to join with the NCSC and are hopeful that this research will help address challenges facing Delaware and other states in empowering tomorrow’s lawyers in an evidence-

based and inclusive manner” said Christopher P. Chapman, AccessLex Institute President and CEO. Dedicated to increasing the access, affordability and value of legal education, AccessLex has in-depth knowledge and understanding of the diversity issues facing law schools and the legal community. AccessLex has been instrumental in helping states and other entities develop pipeline and other initiatives to support aspiring lawyers and law students in their journey to become licensed members of the legal profession.

The Chief Justice continued: “With Supreme Court Justice Tamika Montgomery-Reeves as a co-chair, we are going to study diversity issues in the Delaware legal community from top to bottom. We need to ensure the public is being served by a high-quality legal profession that reflects the diversity of our society. I recognize it will take some time. But we’re excited to get started. I know our effort will make Delaware a national leader in tackling diversity issues and bring us closer to the goal of a diverse and welcoming legal community in the First State.”