

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**May 16, 2024**

### **Portrait of the Hon. Leonard L. Williams unveiled at court facility that bears his name**

Putting a finishing touch on the renaming of the state courthouse in Wilmington for the Hon. Leonard L. Williams, the Delaware Judiciary on Thursday May 16, 2024 unveiled a portrait of Judge Williams that will greet visitors to the facility.

The 40” by 50” portrait, the original architect’s model of the court building, and a plaque detailing the pioneering jurist’s life and achievements, are now on display in an alcove along the main hallway of the Leonard L. Williams Justice Center. It is located just past the security entrance and information desk where it will be seen by the more than 1 million visitors to the facility every year.

Judge Williams (1934-2013) was a Wilmington native, graduate of Howard High School and the University of Delaware – where he became the first African American to play football for the Blue Hens. He went on to earn his law degree from Georgetown University School of Law and returned to Delaware in 1959 to become the fifth African American to be admitted to the Delaware Bar. As an attorney, he worked with the state’s first African American attorney, Louis Redding, on landmark civil rights cases. Judge Williams also served as an Assistant City Solicitor in Wilmington and the chief prosecuting attorney for the Wilmington Municipal Court before joining the bench in 1966 as a judge on the Municipal Court. Upon taking office, Judge Williams became the second African American to serve as a judge in Delaware. He served on the bench for 32 years before retiring in 1998, the same year that the Municipal Court was merged into the state Court of Common Pleas.

Members of the Williams family attended Thursday’s unveiling ceremony, that featured remarks by Delaware Supreme Court Chief Justice Collins J. Seitz, Jr. and Wilmington Mayor Mike Purzycki. Other speakers included former Wilmington City Councilman Sam Guy, former Superior Court Judge Charles H. Toliver IV, Judge Williams’ daughter Dena Williams, Superior Court Judge Kathleen M. Miller and Family Court Judge Arlene Minus Coppadge.

The effort to get a portrait of Williams placed in the court facility that now bears his name, was led by Judge Miller, before she joined the bench, along with Judge Coppadge. Miller said she was serving on the Steering Committee of the Chief Justice’s Bench and Bar Diversity Initiative in 2022 when it was called to her attention that while the building was renamed for Williams in 2016, visitors to the Justice Center may have no idea who Judge Williams was or why the building was named in his honor. She then joined forces with Judge Coppadge and the Delaware State Bar Association’s Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee to change that by seeking support for placing a portrait of the judge in the courthouse “to inform and educate visitors of Judge Williams’ role as a civil rights pioneer, retired municipal court judge and esteemed public servant.”

The city of Wilmington soon joined the effort, funding the portrait, that was painted by David Larned, a Philadelphia artist known for his portraiture of judges including Vice Chancellor Stephen Lamb and Family Court Judge Battle Robinson and elected officials, including President George H.W. Bush and Delaware Governors Pierre S. du Pont IV, Ruth Ann Minner and Jack Markell.

“While I did not have the privilege of meeting Judge Williams, it is an honor to be connected in this small way to such a beloved public servant and civil rights pioneer,” said Larned. “I hope the painting serves to remind those that pass through the Justice Center of his monumental legacy and inspire others to carry his life's work forward.”

Judge Miller said it was also important, to her and members of the Delaware State Bar's Diversity Equity and Inclusion Committee, that the portrait was placed in a prominent place “so when you come in you see him and learn why the building was named in his honor,” she said.

Judge Coppadge agreed and said for her it was also personal. “Judge Williams hired me for my first job out of law school. I was hired as an associate in his office when I graduated. I got to see firsthand and learn under his tutelage, how to practice law. He was a giant, hardworking, always willing to teach. He was the godfather for the legal community in helping to shape and mold young lawyers.”

“It was my pleasure to work with Judge Miller to move this forward,” said Judge Coppadge, adding she also wanted to thank Mayor Purzycki and his chief of staff Tanya Washington for securing funding for the portrait.

Finally, Judge Coppadge said that getting this portrait placed in the Justice Center – noting it is significant that the facility was re-named “Justice Center” not courthouse – “is one of the high honors of my life and legal career. I started my legal career in the law office of Leonard L. Williams and I will end my legal career in the Leonard L. Williams Justice Center.”