

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
OCTOBER 26, 2016**

**Criminal Justice System partners unite at Criminal Justice Forum to
improve how the system operates in Delaware**

Delaware Supreme Court Chief Justice Leo E. Strine, Jr., joined by Delaware Attorney General Matt Denn, Delaware Office of Defense Services Chief Defender Brendan O'Neill, and other Delaware criminal justice leaders, welcomed a group of over 500 participants who work in the criminal justice system across the state on Wednesday, Oct. 26, 2016 at Dover Downs to discuss ways to improve the overall fairness and efficiency of our criminal justice system. Over 10 organizations were represented including Judicial Officers, the Delaware Attorney General's Office, the Office of Defense Services, the Division of Youth Rehabilitative Services, the Delaware Department of Correction and law enforcement officials from the Delaware Police Chiefs' Council, the Delaware State Police, the Delaware Capitol Police, the New Castle County Police Department, the Wilmington Police Department and the Fraternal Order of Police.

The Criminal Justice Forum was developed as a response to key recommendations for statewide implicit bias training issued by criminal justice experts from the Equal Justice Institute and the University of Pennsylvania's Quattrone Center for the Fair Administration of Justice during a series of public hearings on criminal justice reform held last fall by the Delaware Access to Justice Commission's Committee on Fairness in the Criminal Justice System. The implicit bias training targets unconscious bias and stereotypes that could negatively impact the administration of justice. (For more information on the hearings and the expert reports visit the Access to Justice website at <http://courts.delaware.gov/supreme/access.aspx>.) The Fairness Committee, comprised of a cross-section of the Delaware Bar, community and business leaders, academia and members of the public, is charged with examining the causes of racial disparities in our state's system of criminal justice, and with trying to find ways to make our criminal justice system more equitable and improve public safety. Discussions over the past year have brought stakeholders in the Delaware criminal justice system together and resulted in broad agreement that joint training sessions would be beneficial so that all system partners would be operating from the same guidelines and have a shared understanding.

"I believe the Criminal Justice Forum is headed in the proper direction for positive change and fairness in our Criminal Justice System," said New Castle County Police Chief Col. Elmer Setting.

Professor Rachel Godsil of Seton Hall University School of Law, an author and nationally recognized expert on implicit bias, started Wednesday's Criminal Justice Forum with a presentation of the social science research that shows how implicit bias and stereotyping can affect both evaluative judgment and behavioral dynamics. Implicit bias is not racism as it is commonly understood, but an unconscious attitude or association with stereotypes linked with particular groups. Professor Godsil not only discussed the phenomena and how it functions but also the practices that have been shown to reduce and override that bias and replace it with objective decision-making. At Wednesday's presentation, Professor Godsil said that neither she nor her colleagues had ever heard of an entire criminal justice system anywhere else in the nation coming together as one to learn about implicit bias the way Delaware had done at the Criminal Justice Forum.

Delaware Department of Correction Commissioner Robert Coupe said he was grateful to have the opportunity to have his department participate in the training and said while the presentation was just an introduction to implicit bias, he viewed it as an important opportunity to continue the conversation here in Delaware. "In order to prevent implicit bias from affecting our decision making, behavior, and policies, we must raise awareness and

develop the skills necessary to recognize and manage it. We look forward to continuing to work with our criminal justice partners in order to build momentum and develop additional training for our State.”

Division of Youth Rehabilitative Services (DYRS) Director Nancy S. Dietz agreed. “Implicit bias is something that we take seriously as a criminal justice agency,” she said. “We believe it is important to raise awareness among our staff and understand how it can affect decision-making throughout the process.”

The second half of the Criminal Justice Forum focused on courtroom procedures. Prosecutors, defense attorneys and members of the bench met together to hold panel discussions and mock demonstrations on opening statements, closing arguments and evidence presentation. The sessions also provided opportunities for participants to ask questions of criminal justice experts and veteran members of the Delaware Bar who sat on the panels.

“Prosecutors, defense attorneys and judges in criminal cases have a special responsibility,” said Chief Justice Strine. “It is essential that criminal trials be conducted fairly and professionally. This joint training will help us all live up to the high standards the people of Delaware rightly expect of us in these critical cases.”

Chief Defender O’Neill praised the day-long forum as an innovative way to keep Delaware’s Criminal Justice System operating smoothly and fairly. “It benefits our clients when our lawyers can improve their skills. This training will help our lawyers achieve their goal of providing our clients with the best representation possible. It’s a very positive step,” he said.

Going forward, the Delaware Judiciary hopes to continue to explore opportunities to work together with our partners to develop high-quality training and provide opportunities for all elements of the system to work together to improve criminal justice for the citizens of Delaware.

“It is heartening to see all the key elements of our criminal justice system come together with the common goal of improving the fairness of the system for all Delawareans. We hope to build on this strong start, and to work together so that all of us – judges, court staff, public defenders, correctional officers, prosecutors, and police – who work in the criminal justice system will receive high-quality, helpful training to improve our self-awareness about implicit bias and to identify ways to reduce its effect on our decision making,” said Chief Justice Strine.

**For more information contact:
Sean O’Sullivan, Chief of Community Relations
302-255-0093 or Sean.O’Sullivan@state.de.us**