

SUPREME COURT



CHIEF JUSTICE COLLINS J. SEITZ, JR.



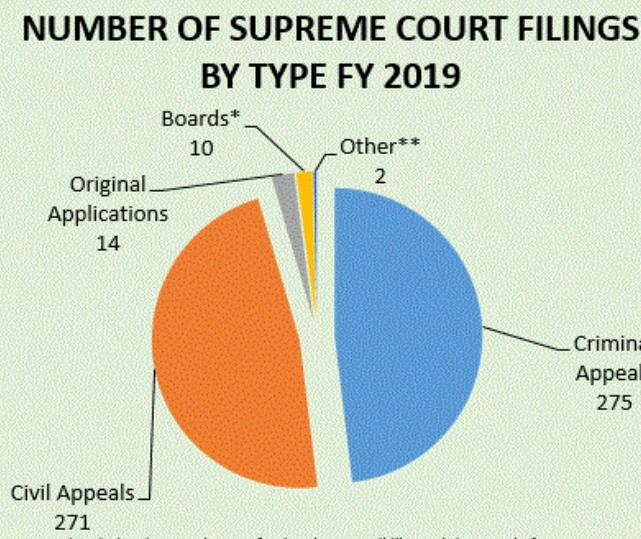
The year 2019 will be remembered as another year of change for the Supreme Court of Delaware as Chief Justice Leo E. Strine, Jr. and Supreme Court Administrator William S. Montgomery retired in the latter half of the year. Chief Justice Strine served as a judicial officer for twenty-one years, first as Vice Chancellor and then Chancellor of the Court of Chancery, followed by six years as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Mr. Montgomery served the citizens of Delaware for forty years,

with five of those years as Supreme Court Administrator. In recognition of Mr. Montgomery's exemplary state service, Governor John Carney awarded him the Order of the First State, the highest honor for meritorious service bestowed by the Governor. Then-Governor Thomas Carper awarded Chief Justice Strine the same award in 2000. We thank former Chief Justice Leo Strine and Court Administrator Bill Montgomery for their service to the Court and to the State, and wish them the best in the next chapters of their lives.

While the Court bid these public servants farewell, the work of the Court continued and others were welcomed, including a new Chief Justice and Justice. On October 24, 2019, Governor Carney nominated Justice Collins J. Seitz, Jr. as the Court's next Chief Justice. The Delaware State Senate unanimously confirmed Justice Seitz's nomination on November 7, 2019. Justice Seitz's nomination and subsequent confirmation as Chief Justice

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created a derivative vacancy on the Court allowing Governor Carney to nominate Vice Chancellor Tamika R. Montgomery-Reeves of the Court of Chancery to fill that vacancy. The Delaware State Senate then unanimously confirmed Justice Montgomery-Reeves on November 7, 2019 as the Court's newest Justice.

Justice Montgomery-Reeves was already a trailblazer in that she was the second woman to serve on Delaware's Court of Chancery and the first African-American to hold the position of Vice Chancellor. With her confirmation by the Delaware Senate, Justice Montgomery-Reeves is now the first African-American to join the Delaware Supreme Court. She is the third woman to serve on the Court.

Justice Montgomery-Reeves served as a Vice Chancellor of the Court of Chancery from November 2015 to November 2019.

Before her appointment to the bench, Justice Montgomery-Reeves was a partner in the Wilmington, Delaware office of Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati, focusing on corporate governance, fiduciary duties, stockholder class action litigation, derivative litigation, and complex commercial litigation. Before that, she practiced in the securities and corpo-

rate governance department of Weil, Gotshal & Manges LLP in New York. Prior to joining Weil, Justice Montgomery-Reeves served as a law clerk for Chancellor William B. Chandler III.

Justice Montgomery-Reeves received her law degree from the University of Georgia School of Law in 2006, and a B.A. from the University of Mississippi in 2003. She received recognition for her pro bono contribution to the Prisoners' Rights Project and previously served as a sub-committee member to the Delaware Access to Justice Commission.

Despite the significant changes, the Court's commitment to the timely disposition of the cases continued in Fiscal Year 2019. Litigants filed 572 new appeals and the Court resolved 643 cases by opinion, order, or dismissal. The Court decided appeals on average 32 days from the date of submission to the



Chief Justice Collins J. Seitz, Jr. administers the Oath of Office to Justice Tamika R. Montgomery-Reeves, as her husband Jeffrey A. Reeves holds the Bible, and their son looks on at Howard High School of Technology in Wilmington on Jan. 3, 2020.

date of final decision. In 99% of the appeals decided in FY 2019, the Court met the Delaware Judiciary standard for deciding cases within 90 days of the date of submission. The Court resolved 85% of all cases within 290 days of the filing of a notice of appeal, and 96% of all cases within a one-year timeframe.

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In other important developments, the Delaware Supreme Court adopted Supreme Court Rule 55.4 to permit military spouses to apply for a Certificate of Limited Practice in Delaware. In adopting this rule, the Delaware Judiciary joined thirty-four other States and the U.S. Virgin Islands by allowing the spouse of a service member to continue with their legal career in the state where their spouse is posted. Normally an attorney from outside of a state would have to pass the bar exam in that state to practice, or be eligible for admission by meeting other state specific practice requirements. This new rule allows the spouse of a service member, who is admitted as an attorney in good standing in at least one other state in the United States and whose spouse is posted in the state, the limited ability to practice law without taking the bar exam in Delaware if they meet certain requirements. Through this new rule,

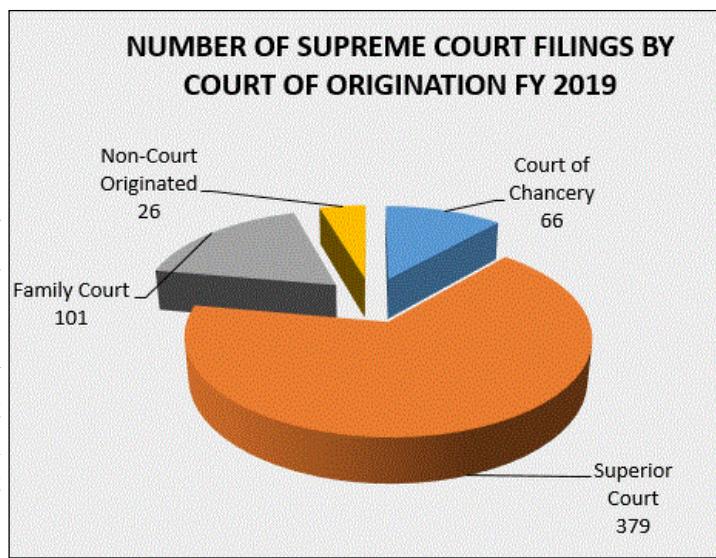
the Court recognizes the sacrifices military families make in the interest of our national security, and hopes that it will ease the burden when Delaware becomes the place of service.

The Court has also continued with its commitment to Access to Justice in 2019, most notably with Justice Karen L. Valihura and Family Court Chief Judge Michael K. Newell participating in a February 2019 meeting of the American Bar Association in Wilmington to encourage the legal community to embrace efforts to provide free legal representation to underserved individuals. Justice Valihura and Chief Judge Newell were both featured panelists in a discussion entitled, "Fearless Lawyering: How to Grow Pro Bono to Ensure Access to Jus-

tice." The event was part of the ABA's Children's Rights Litigation Committee's 2019 Listening and Appreciation Tour. The panel discussion followed opening remarks by ABA President Bob Carlson and Chair of the ABA Section of Litigation Gene Vance. Justice Valihura discussed how pro bono representation helps the community at large and explained the ongoing efforts – and the recent progress – by Delaware's Access to Justice Commission, particularly in the areas focusing on increasing *pro bono* representation and increasing funding for community legal aid groups. "There are a lot of children that need help who aren't getting it," she told the crowd of attorneys.

Finally, in 2019, the Court welcomed Luke W. Mette as the new Chief Disciplinary Counsel for the Office of Disciplinary Counsel, an Arm of the Supreme Court. Mr. Mette joins the Arms of the Court after working as Wilmington's City Soli-

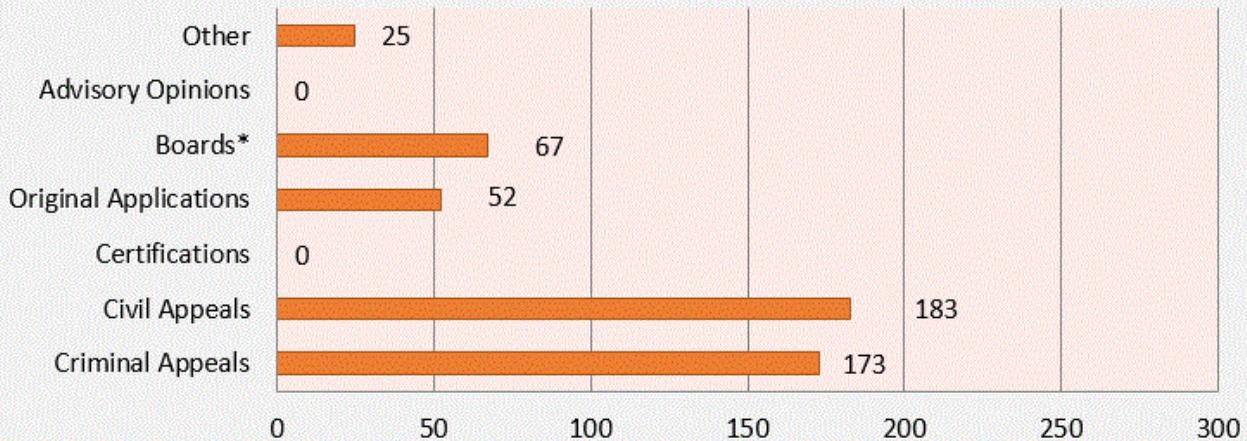
litor. He is also an adjunct professor at Delaware Law School. Prior to working for the City, he was a partner at McCarter & English in the Business Litigation Practice Group. Before that, he worked for twenty-one years at AstraZeneca where he rose to the position of Deputy General Counsel. Mette has served on the Delaware Supreme Court's Access to Justice Commission's *Pro Bono* Subcommittee, the Delaware State Bar Association's Executive Committee, and is a former president of the Carpenter-Walsh Delaware *Pro Bono* Inn of Court. Mette received his law degree from George Washington University and his undergraduate degree from Haverford College. ♦



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SUPREME COURT FY2019 AVERAGE NUMBER OF DAYS FROM FILING TO DISPOSITION BY CASE TYPE



*Includes the Board on Professional Responsibility and the Board of Bar Examiners.

SUPREME COURT FILINGS & DISPOSITIONS BY FISCAL YEAR



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Supreme Court Justices

Standing left to right:

Justice Gary F. Traynor
Justice Karen L. Valihura
Chief Justice Collins J. Seitz, Jr.
Justice James T. Vaughn, Jr.
Justice Tamika R. Montgomery-Reeves