

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Court of Common Pleas Chief Judge Alex J. Smalls to Retire in May

Court of Common Pleas Chief Judge Alex J. Smalls has informed Gov. John Carney that he plans to step down from the bench effective May 1, 2021.

“I am honored and humbled to have been given the opportunity to serve the citizens of Delaware as a Judge for twenty-nine (29) years,” wrote Chief Judge Smalls in his letter to the Governor. “My tenure on the Court has been enriched by the staff and Judges with whom I was fortunate to serve.”

After such a long career on the bench, Chief Judge Smalls said he felt it was time for a change.

Chief Judge Smalls was appointed or reappointed by four different governors and has served under five different Delaware Supreme Court Chief Justices and is currently the longest-serving Chief Judge of any Delaware State Court. He has not announced any specific plans after he retires in May.

“Chief Judge Smalls has had a remarkable judicial career,” said Delaware Supreme Court Chief Justice Collins J. Seitz, Jr. “He has led one of the State’s busiest courts with great distinction. Litigants and attorneys who appeared before him, and his judicial colleagues, know the Chief Judge as a humble, caring and compassionate man. We thank him for his service to the citizens of the First State.”

Chief Judge Smalls began his career on the bench in the former Municipal Court for the City of Wilmington in 1991, where he served with Judge Leonard L. Williams. In 1993, he was appointed to the Court of Common Pleas and was elevated to the position of Chief Judge in 1997, making him the first African American to serve as a Chief or President Judge of any Delaware State Court. As Chief Judge, he oversaw Wilmington Municipal Court being merged into the Court of Common Pleas in 1998, a change that made the Court of Common Pleas a truly statewide misdemeanor court.

In addition, Chief Judge Smalls oversaw an increase in both the size and jurisdiction of the court during his tenure. This included an increase in the number of Court of Common Pleas judges from five to nine, expansion of the court’s criminal and civil jurisdiction, and broadening of the court’s role as an appellate court for the Justice of the Peace Court and Alderman’s Courts. He also oversaw and implemented numerous innovations including the creation of drug diversion programs and specialty courts such as the DUI Court. Most recently, he was instrumental in the creation and launch of the Wilmington Community Court program.

Chief Judge Smalls graduated from Morgan State University in Baltimore with a BA in Political Science and went on to earn his law degree from Rutgers University School of Law. He began his public sector career in March 1980 as a Deputy Attorney General for the State of Delaware in the criminal division, and later joined the City of Wilmington as Commissioner of Licenses and Inspections in 1985. He then became the city’s Director of Public Safety from 1985 until joining the bench in 1991.