

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 30, 2021

Delaware Judiciary bids farewell to Chief Judge Alex J. Smalls

In a small, largely virtual ceremony on Thursday, Chief Justice Collins J. Seitz, Jr. other members of the Delaware Judiciary, court staff and members of the Delaware Bar gathered to bid farewell to Court of Common Pleas Chief Judge Alex J. Smalls as he concluded his 29-year career on the bench.

In January, Chief Judge Smalls informed Gov. John Carney that he would be stepping down on May 1, 2021.

While Chief Judge Smalls, along with a handful of court staff and judicial officers gathered in Courtroom 7E at the Leonard L. Williams Justice Center, more than 100 others participated remotely. The ceremony also marked the unveiling of Chief Judge Smalls' official portrait, which will be placed in a position of prominence in the Justice Center at a future date.

"I will miss you Chief Judge Smalls in our monthly presiding judges meetings," said Chief Justice Seitz. "I'll miss that sly smile, that calmness, that confidence, that inner peace. On behalf of the Delaware Judiciary, thank you for your service to the citizens of the First State. To paraphrase the Prophet Micah, you have 'done justice, loved kindness, and walked humbly with your God.' Thank you."

Other speakers at the ceremony included Superior Court President Judge Jan. R. Jurden, attorney John Deckers, Court of Common Pleas Court Administrator Stephanie Fitzgerald and Court of Common Pleas Judge Carl C. Danberg who will be succeeding Chief Judge Smalls on Monday as Chief Judge. In addition to the speakers, Chief Judge Smalls also received a recorded tribute from U.S. Sen. Chris Coons, a written proclamation from Gov. Carney, and a plaque from the Director of Highway Safety Kimberly Chesser that recognized the Chief Judge for his pioneering work in creating a specialty court that focuses on defendants charged with Driving Under the Influence (DUI).

Chief Judge Smalls was appointed or reappointed by four different governors and served under five different Delaware Supreme Court Chief Justices. At his retirement he holds the distinction of being the longest-serving Chief Judge of any Delaware State Court.

In his remarks Thursday, Chief Judge Smalls thanked the judicial officers and court staff he has worked with over the years. "I've been very fortunate. Because while everyone says, 'You know you have been a great Chief Judge,' if you are surrounded by good, talented people, then the job is easy... It is not the heights you reach. It is the depths from which you came. And what you do on the road getting there," he said.

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.

During his tenure, Chief Judge Smalls also oversaw an increase in both the size and jurisdiction of the court, with the court growing from five to nine judges and broadening its 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 in 1985, where he served until joining the bench in 1991.