Bell, Wilner, Murphy Among Maryland Judiciary Promotions


After serving on the Maryland Court of Appeals since May 1991, Bell was appointed its 23rd Chief Judge by Governor Glendenning. Now the highest judge in Maryland, Bell has also served on the School of Law’s Board of Visitors since 1994. A graduate of Harvard Law School, Morgan State University, and Dunbar High School in Baltimore, Bell has served at each level of the Maryland judicial system, from the District Court up to the Court of Appeals.

Bell is the first African-American to hold the position of Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals, and his new position is the culmination of a historic journey. Bell was arrested, while still a high school student, for his participation in lunch counter sit-down demonstrations in Baltimore in 1960. The case of Bell v. Maryland eventually was decided by the United States Supreme Court. While a law student at Harvard, Bell and his classmates studied the opinions in Bell v. Maryland as a part of their Constitutional Law class.

Bell is committed to keeping the Maryland judiciary the best in the country. “I want to ensure that we have the best court system we can possibly have,” Bell explains, adding he wants to maintain a court system that seeks to provide “absolute justice, or as close to it as we can get.” He is excited about each of the recent promotions, including the appointment of Chief Judge Martha F. Rasin as the first woman to head the District Court system.

A 1962 alumnus of the University of Maryland School of Law, Wilner was promoted to Maryland’s highest court after serving 19 years on the Court of Special Appeals, the last six as its Chief Judge. Wilner, an adjunct faculty member who teaches Alternative Methods of Dispute Resolution, says he looks forward to continuing his work on the Court of Appeals. “It’s a great opportunity to participate in the court,” he says. “It is rewarding to work with a group of comrades—people I’ve known and admired over the years.”

For newly-appointed Court of Special Appeals Chief Judge Murphy Jr., his promotion is a tremendous challenge. “I hope I can maintain the record of excellence that the four prior chief judges of the court have established since the court began 30 years ago.” Murphy said the Court of Special Appeals is the most efficient intermediate court in the United States, thanks to the judges that comprise it. “There isn’t a more congenial or hard-working group of judges in the country than those serving on the Court of Special Appeals of Maryland.”

A 1969 alumnus, Murphy has served on the Court of Special Appeals since 1993, after nine years as an Associate Judge on the Baltimore Circuit Court. A long-time adjunct professor of Trial Practice and a Moot Court Judge at the School of Law, Murphy said he also looks forward to continuing teaching law students as long as he is able.

These three newly elevated judges are all deeply dedicated to the School of Law. Their inspiring qualities of leadership and commitment to not only the school, but also to the state and legal system, enhance the University of Maryland’s reputation and provide students and faculty with professional role models to emulate.

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