



Supreme Court of Appeals State of West Virginia

News

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Justice Benjamin to discuss Legal Aid at White House meeting

For immediate release Friday, April 4, 2014

CHARLESTON, W. Va – West Virginia Supreme Court Justice Brent D. Benjamin will meet at the White House with senior officials of the U.S. Department of Justice and leaders from the nation’s legal community at 2 p.m. on Tuesday, April 8, to discuss expanding legal services for those who cannot afford them.

The White House Forum on Increasing Access to Justice will be the third that the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) has co-hosted with the White House. (LSC) was established by the Congress in 1974 to provide equal access to justice and to ensure the delivery of high-quality civil legal assistance to low-income Americans. The Corporation currently provides funding to 134 independent nonprofit legal aid programs in every state, the District of Columbia, and U.S. territories.

Justice Benjamin has been a champion of legal aid programs and the delivery of *pro bono* services in West Virginia.

“Sadly, in our state Legal Aid must turn away roughly two-thirds of those who seek help in our courts, and West Virginia Legal Aid has less than one attorney per county,” Justice Benjamin said. “In our rural communities this poses a daunting challenge just to travel for a consultation.”

Working with members of the West Virginia State Bar, Justice Benjamin has urged lawyers to make a strong commitment to *pro bono* work. “This is especially important since West Virginia funds its Legal Aid program at one of the lowest – perhaps the lowest rate – in the nation,” he said.

Working with the West Virginia Legislature, Justice Benjamin has favored legislation that would direct filing fees for civil appeals to help support Legal Aid services, but the \$50,000 it provided last year, he said, “is a drop in the bucket compared to the need.”

When he was Chief Justice in 2009, Justice Benjamin created the West Virginia Access to Justice Commission to help citizens connect with their courts. The Access to Justice Commission makes court forms and documents available online, provides instruction for navigating the court system, and holds legal clinics.

Access, he says, is especially helpful to domestic violence victims, the disabled, minorities, and veterans. In promoting the removal of barriers to the judiciary, Justice Benjamin has been proud to say that “in our society, while no one is above the law, no one should be below it, either.”

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