

ACCESS TO JUSTICE COMMISSION
April 3, 2009

Remarks by Chief Justice Janice M. Holder
Supreme Court of Tennessee

On behalf of the Supreme Court, welcome and thank you for joining us today. Almost four months ago, on December 5, 2008, I announced that the Supreme Court had designated access to justice as its number one strategic priority and that we intended to focus greater attention on the crisis in unmet civil legal needs in Tennessee.

Since December, the Supreme Court has held public meetings across the state in Memphis, Jackson, Nashville, Knoxville, and Bristol to learn more about the crisis in delivery of civil legal services. In these meetings, we have shared the experiences and benefitted from the insights of judges, lawyers, service providers, legislators, and citizens who are familiar with the challenges we face. These meetings have confirmed what we suspected – that the crisis in unmet civil legal needs is becoming more dire everyday, particularly as economic conditions remain uncertain. These public meetings also have confirmed the need for continued public education to provide Tennesseans with the knowledge they will need to join us in developing solutions for this growing problem.

Each of the justices who participated in these events remains convinced, as we were in December, that the creation of an Access to Justice Commission is a necessary component of the Supreme Court's Access to Justice initiative. We invited you here today to announce the creation of the Access to Justice Commission and to announce the appointment of its Commissioners. We are excited that our new Commissioners have agreed to give their valuable time to this effort. We will support their work by providing

staffing through the Administrative Office of the Courts and by designating a justice of the Supreme Court as liaison to the Commission.

It is now my pleasure to announce the first members of the Tennessee Access to Justice Commission. The chairperson of the Commission is Margaret Behm. Ms. Behm is a partner in the Nashville law firm of Dodson Parker Behm & Capparella. Ms. Behm is no stranger to access to justice issues and began her legal career at the Legal Aid Society. She also served as the first chair and long-time member of the Tennessee Judicial Selection Commission.

Kathryn Reed Edge is a member of the Nashville office of Miller & Martin. She is a former President of the Tennessee Bar Association and the Tennessee Lawyers' Association for Women and has served as a board member for the Tennessee Legal Community Foundation and the Tennessee Bar Foundation. Ms. Edge has worked with the Legal Aid Society of Middle Tennessee and the Cumberlands.

Francis S. Guess serves as executive vice president of the Danner Company, a Nashville-based investment and management firm with interests worldwide. Mr. Guess served as both Commissioner of Labor and Commissioner of General Services in the Alexander administration. He also served for thirty years as a member of the Tennessee Commission on Human Rights and for six years as a member of the United States Commission on Civil Rights.

George T. (Buck) Lewis, is a shareholder in the Memphis office of Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz. He currently serves as President of the Tennessee Bar Association and has made Justice 4 All the theme of his presidency. Mr. Lewis also has served on the Board of Directors of Memphis Area Legal

Services and has been active in the Tennessee and Memphis Bar Foundations.

Gregg Ramos is a member of the Nashville law firm of North, Pursell, Ramos & Jameson. Mr. Ramos has served on the Tennessee Workers' Compensation Advisory Council, this Court's Committee on Public Trust and Confidence in the Courts, and the Tennessee Education Lottery's Advisory Council on Minority Business Participation. He is a past President of the Nashville Bar Association and of Catholic Charities of Tennessee, Inc.

D. Billye Sanders is a partner in the Nashville law firm of Waller Lansden Dortch & Davis. Prior to joining the law firm, Ms. Sanders served as Deputy General Counsel of the Tennessee Public Service Commission. She currently serves on the Board of Directors of the Nashville Bar Foundation.

I will also introduce the remaining Commissioners who are unable to attend today.

Douglas Blaze of Knoxville, Tennessee, is the Dean of the University of Tennessee College of Law where he served as Director of Clinical Programs for 15 years before becoming Dean in 2008. He is a member and former chair of the Board of Directors of the Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services and is active in the Tennessee Bar Association Access to Justice Committee and the Knoxville Bar Association Access to Justice Initiative.

Maura Abeln Smith is senior vice president, general counsel, and corporate secretary for one of Tennessee's largest corporations, International Paper, headquartered in Memphis. As the company's chief legal officer, she has continued the legal department's great tradition of supporting pro bono work and access to justice organizations through the Tennessee Bar Association's Corporate

Counsel Pro Bono Initiative. She also serves on the General Counsel Committee of the National Center for State Courts.

Dr. Frank Anthony Thomas is the Senior Servant of Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church in Memphis and is a renowned national and international speaker. Dr. Thomas has served as a visiting lecturer at the University of South Africa and as an Adjunct Faculty member at both McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago, Illinois, and the Memphis Theological Seminary. He has been inducted into the Martin Luther King, Jr. Board of Preachers.

Bill Young is the senior vice president of risk management and general counsel for BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee in Chattanooga. In 2006, Mr. Young helped launch the Tennessee Bar Association's Corporate Counsel Pro Bono Initiative. In its first two years, the project has raised over \$120,000 for grants to fund corporate counsel pro bono projects across the state.

Please join me in welcoming all of our new Commissioners.

I would now like to call on our new Chairperson, Margaret Behm, to say a few words. Margaret, thank you for your leadership and dedication to the access to justice initiative.

While the Access to Justice Commission will chart its own course, we hope that the Commission will build upon the information we gathered at the public meetings and will continue the collaboration this Court has begun with access to justice organizations, bar associations, and legal professionals. The forty-plus events planned today and tomorrow by the Tennessee Bar Association for Statewide Public Service Day illustrate the success that is possible when we in the legal profession — judges and lawyers alike — combine our efforts in pursuit of a noble goal, to address the unmet civil legal needs in Tennessee. Many of the

groups and individuals participating in Statewide Public Service Day have pledged to support and assist the Access to Justice Commission.

Again, I thank the Access to Justice Commission for their commitment and you for joining us today.