

May 02, 2012

Twitter Chat with D.C. Judges Ranged from Cameras in Court to Food Trucks

Updated at 4:48 p.m.

An hour-long Twitter chat with the chief judges of Washington's local courts Tuesday afternoon covered the relatively mundane - no, the D.C. courts system can't reserve parking spaces for food trucks - to the substantive, with the judges weighing in on everything from cameras in the courts and services for domestic violence victims to delays in admitting attorneys to the bar.



Using the hashtag #AskTheCJs, District of Columbia Superior Court Judge Lee Satterfield and District of Columbia Court of Appeals Chief Judge Eric Washington celebrated this year's Law Day by fielding questions from reporters, attorneys and residents.

Amy Loudermilk, a senior policy specialist with the D.C. Coalition Against Domestic Violence, asked what improvements the court was hoping to make to better assist domestic violence victims. The judges replied that, "we are working [with] the bar to provide more pro bono services to [domestic violence] parties" and also that the court recently renovated one of two domestic violence intake centers.

Twitter user Emil Ali asked what the appeals court was planning to do about the "backlog" of motions for admission to the bar. The judges replied that the "process takes too long," but said the delays are because of necessary background checks conducted by the National Conference of Bar Examiners. Ali later confirmed in an e-mail that he is a local attorney waiting for a reply on his motion for admission to the bar.

Joe Spurr, the Boston-based director of OpenCourt, asked what the judges thought about putting cameras in courtrooms. The judges replied that while cameras aren't allowed in either court, the appeals court does offer live audio streaming of oral arguments. OpenCourt promotes using technology to make courts more accessible to the public.

Washington Post reporter Mike DeBonis asked several questions about what electronic devices could be brought in and used in the Superior Court building. The judges replied that cell phones equipped with cameras could be brought in, but the cameras can't be used. DeBonis followed up with a question about whether the court's policy is that tweeting isn't allowed unless a judge gives the okay, but that went unanswered.

WTOP reporter Mark Segraves tweeted that he thought reporters should have the same access to technology as attorneys, calling on the court to "Let us Tweet and text." The judges replied that technology access is the same in the "vast majority" of courtrooms in light of a recent administrative order.

Not all of the questions were serious. The chat began with a question posed in a post on local news website DCist, which asked whether designating May 1 as Law Day meant the other 364 days of the year celebrated lawlessness. The judges replied that, "No, just like Mother's Day, Law Day is one day to be thankful that the rule of law is cherished in this country."

The tweets didn't specify if one judge in particular was responding, but court spokeswoman Leah Gurowitz said the two judges collaborated on what to say and dictated their responses to her to type and tweet. In response to a question from the National Center for State Courts on whether the court would hold another chat in the future, the judges replied that they "will definitely" do another Q&A, but haven't planned it yet.

Photo by Tom Feeney. From left, Superior Court Chief Judge Lee Satterfield, Leah Gurowitz and Court of Appeals Chief Judge Eric Washington.

Posted by [Zoe Tillman](#) on May 02, 2012 at 12:38 PM