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For more information, contact:
Leah Gurowitz 202/879-1700

Chief Judge Eric Washington Convened Law School Deans to Discuss Ways to Improve Access to Justice

*Deans and Access to Justice Leaders to Work Collaboratively to Enhance Services to Low
Income DC Residents While Providing Opportunities for Law Student Service*

Washington, D.C. – On September 26, 2013, DC Court of Appeals Chief Judge Eric Washington convened the deans and clinical directors of the District’s six law schools¹ for a roundtable discussion on the role of law schools in addressing the District’s persistent justice gap. The meeting was also attended by Jim Sandman, President of the Legal Services Corporation and Chair of the D.C. Bar’s Pro Bono Committee; Andrea Ferster, President of the District of Columbia Bar; and Peter Edelman, Chair of the D.C. Access to Justice Commission; as well as other leaders in the access to justice, legal services, and pro bono communities.

“District law schools are already doing important and effective work through clinics, externship programs and pro bono activities to address the urgent legal needs of indigent District residents. However, in the face of the alarming justice gap that exists in our community, all segments of the Bar must do more,” said Chief Judge Washington at the opening of the discussion. The deans responded enthusiastically to the Chief Judge’s charge that more can and should be done by the law schools to enhance access to justice and educate law students about the unmet legal needs of communities living in poverty. During the three hour discussion, law school leaders reviewed current initiatives and also discussed concrete potential collaborations that could help fill current gaps in service provision. “I am deeply gratified by the commitment all of the deans expressed today to augment the role of law students in this critical work,” commented Peter Edelman. “It is crucial that we educate law students at the beginning of their legal careers about the tremendous disparity in access to counsel that exists across our country and the responsibility of all attorneys to ensure equal access to the courts.”

The Chief Judge charged the deans with appointing members to a newly formed working group that is tasked with quickly identifying concrete collaborations and initiatives. The working group will be convened by the DC Access to Justice Commission.

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¹ American University Washington College of Law, Catholic University Columbus School of Law, George Washington University Law School, Georgetown University Law Center, Howard University School of Law, and U.D.C. David A. Clarke School of Law