

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 16, 2010

**THOMAS L. KILBRIDE ELECTED AS NEXT SUPREME COURT
CHIEF JUSTICE**

SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Supreme Court announced Thursday it has unanimously elected Justice Thomas L. Kilbride as Chief Justice, effective October 26, 2010, to succeed Chief Justice Thomas R. Fitzgerald, who has announced his retirement for health reasons.

Justice Kilbride’s tenure as Chief will run through October 25, 2013.

“I am exceedingly honored and humbled by my colleagues’ selection of me as Chief Justice,” Justice Kilbride said. “I regret deeply that my friend Chief Justice Fitzgerald will not be able to complete his term as Chief, but I have learned much from his example of dignity, grace and leadership. I will miss his continued guidance and friendship.”

“Fortunately, I can continue to draw on the example that my colleagues Charles Freeman and Bob Thomas have set before me as Chief, and I welcome and deeply appreciate the confidence they and each member of the Court has placed in me by this honor.”

Chief Justice Fitzgerald announced earlier this week that he was retiring, effective October 25, for health reasons.

Justice Kilbride, 57, was elected to the Supreme Court from the Third Judicial District in 2000, the same year Chief Justice Fitzgerald and Justice Thomas were elected to the Supreme Court.

Justice Kilbride is known as a common man in an uncommon position who took an unusual path to reach the top of his profession. As the only member of the seven justices who had not served as a judge before, he brings a rare perspective to the Court.

He had been a practitioner for nearly 20 years, first as a legal services attorney for the poor, then for a mid-sized law firm and as a solo practitioner in a storefront office. Throughout all of those years, he was continuously involved in volunteer service in the Rock Island area.

“Justice Kilbride is a good and decent man, and will make a wonderful Chief Justice,” said retiring Chief Justice Fitzgerald. “He’s hard-working, thoughtful and highly capable.”

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Justice Kilbride Named Chief Justice Add One

In another Order filed on Thursday, the Supreme Court named Justice Rita B. Garman as a member of the Illinois Courts Commission to replace Justice Kilbride when he becomes Chief.

Justice Kilbride grew up in Kankakee, received his B.A. degree magna cum laude from Saint Mary's College in 1978; and his law degree from Antioch School of Law in Washington D.C. in 1981. While in law school, Justice Kilbride completed judicial internships for the administrative assistant to the Chief Justice (Warren Burger) of the United States Supreme Court and for U.S. District Court Judge Joyce Hens Green.

As a member of the Court, he was the moving voice behind the formation of a special committee to study and make recommendations on how to encourage every practicing attorney in the state to give some form of free legal work to those who cannot afford it.

Specifically, Justice Kilbride recommended the creation of a Special Supreme Court Committee on Pro Bono Publico Legal Service. The Committee formulated rules, adopted by the Supreme Court, designed to encourage all Illinois lawyers to improve the delivery of legal services to the poor and to persons of limited means.

The rules require all licensed Illinois attorneys to state annually whether they have provided pro bono legal services in the prior 12 months, and the approximate number of hours provided without charge or expectation of a fee; and the amount of any monetary contribution to a legal services organization which helps persons of limited means.

The rules were designed to give attorneys some flexibility in how they volunteer—whether by directly providing legal services, by making financial contributions to those organizations that provide services, by training other volunteer lawyers or by some combination.

In 2007, Justice Kilbride met former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor at a conference in Chicago and heard her decry the lack of civics education in the nation's schools. Since then, he has sought to take steps in a personal way to reverse that trend.

He has gone to schools within his Third District, attempting to explain the judicial system in Illinois to pupils and students at the elementary, high school and college levels. He has spoken to service groups about the need of improving civics education in schools, and invited their members to speak to their local school officials about the concern.

“It's important,” he said. “Explaining our constitutional structure and the separation of the branches of government ties in directly to having a fair and impartial judiciary—an independent judiciary--that has the confidence of the public.”

In that regard, he recently requested that the Illinois Appellate Court for the Third District hold oral arguments at four educational campus locations. The first series will be held Friday, September 17, at Kankakee Community College. Others are scheduled in the coming weeks at

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Justice Kilbride Named Chief Justice Add Two

Lewis University in Romeoville, Augustana College in Rock Island and at Bradley University in Peoria.

Justice Kilbride is an advocate of bringing more transparency to the judicial process. At his urging, the Supreme Court this week approved the timely posting of all Illinois Appellate Court opinions on the Supreme Court's website. Currently, the Appellate Court do not post opinions and orders under Supreme Court Rule 23, and it often takes several days after issuance before posting regularly published opinions. The new practice will go into effect January 1, 2011.

Justice Kilbride also has been lauded by editorial writers and others for the way he has chosen to make recommendations for approval by the full Supreme Court to fill judicial vacancies. He urges public participation and gives local communities a voice by utilizing an independent evaluation committee composed of community representatives, lawyers and non-lawyers.

He has received numerous awards while serving on the Supreme Court.

They include:

--The 2010 Award of Excellence in the Judiciary from the Illinois State Crime Commission "for his years of professionalism, integrity and superior performance in the court system in Illinois;"

--The Rock Island County NAACP, Justice 2010 Image Award;

--The 2009 Judge of the Year Award from the Illinois Chapter of the American Board of Trial Advocates. The group is a 50-year-old national organization of civil trial lawyers comprised of an equal number of well-respected, highly talented plaintiff and defense attorneys, whose primary focus is to preserve the right of a trial by jury in civil cases and the independence of the judiciary.

Other awards have included and been bestowed by Lewis University, an honorary doctorate degree; St. Mary's University of Minnesota; the Lawyers Trust Fund of Illinois; the Freedom Award from The John Marshall Law School Alumni Association; the Harriet Beecher Stowe "Voices of Freedom Award."; the Illinois Township Attorneys Association; Northern Illinois University; Southern Illinois University School of Law; the Illinois Bar Foundation; and the Illinois Institute for Local Government Law and the Community Caring Conference.

Justice Kilbride has served as the Supreme Court Liaison to several important Supreme Court committees and as chair of the Illinois Courts Commission. He is a member of the Illinois State Bar Association; past president of the Illinois Township Attorneys Association and a past board member of the Illinois Pro Bono Center. For nearly two decades, he was a volunteer legal advisor to the Community Caring Conference. He also assisted the Quad-City Harvest, Inc; the Children's Disability Project; and in organizing an interfaith coalition of church and community organizations in the Quad Cities area.

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Add Three**

The Third Judicial District is comprised of 21 Illinois counties straddling Interstate 80 from Indiana to Iowa. Those counties are: Bureau, Fulton, Grundy, Hancock, Henderson, Henry, Iroquois, Kankakee, Knox, LaSalle, Marshall, McDonough, Mercer, Peoria, Putnam, Rock Island, Stark, Tazewell, Warren, Whiteside and Will.

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