

Court Information Release



United States District Court
Northern District of Illinois, Eastern Division
219 South Dearborn Street, Chicago, Illinois 60604

Release Date:
April 21, 2016

Contact: Julie Hodek, Public Information Officer
United States District Court for
the Northern District of Illinois
219 S. Dearborn St., #2548
Chicago, IL 60604
312-613-5204

District Court Hosts Historic “Women Lawyers in the Courtroom” Symposium

Federal judges, law partners, in-house counsel lead discussion on supporting leadership roles for women attorneys

Chicago, Ill. – Today the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois hosted the “Women Lawyers in the Courtroom” Symposium featuring five panels, which addressed strategies and best practices to empower women as lead counsel and trial counsel in litigation.

“The Northern District of Illinois is proud to host this historic symposium on a very serious issue in the legal profession. As our court strives to make diversity part of its mission, we felt it was important to take the lead in facilitating this discussion and to take real action to eliminate the gender gap in the courtroom,” said Chief Judge Rubén Castillo.

In 2015, attorneys Stephanie Scharf and Roberta Liebenberg released a report “First Chairs at Trial: More Women Need Seats at the Table, A Research Report on the Participation of Women Lawyers as Lead Counsel and Trial Counsel in Litigation,” based on a random sample of all cases filed in 2013 in the Northern District of Illinois. The study revealed that women are consistently under-represented in lead counsel positions and in the role of lead trial attorney in all but a few types of cases. Both Scharf and Liebenberg addressed their findings and recommendations during one of the panels.

“The under-representation of women as trial leads is obviously troubling, which is what motivated us to organize this symposium. Today we had a vibrant discussion about what actions judges, law firms, clients, organizations, and lawyers can take to create active and leadership roles for women lawyers,” said District Judge Amy St. Eve and chair of the symposium’s planning committee.

Panelists also included Chief District Judge Rubén Castillo and District Judges Sharon Johnson Coleman, Virginia Kendall, John Z. Lee, Rebecca Pallmeyer, and Amy St. Eve. Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals Judge

Diane Sykes; Cook County Circuit Court Chief Judge Timothy Evans; U.S. Attorney Zachary Fardon; Sharon Barner, Vice President & General Counsel, Cummins, Inc.; Darryl Bradford, Executive Vice President & General Counsel, Exelon Corporation; Doug Lankler, Executive Vice President, General Counsel, Pfizer; Susie Lees, Executive Vice President & General Counsel, Allstate Insurance Company; Sandra Phillips, Group Vice President, Chief Legal Officer & General Counsel, Toyota Motor North America; Juliette Pryor, Executive Vice President, General Counsel & Chief Compliance Officer, US Foods; Laura J. Schumacher, Executive Vice President, Business Development, External Affairs & General Counsel, Abbvie; and law partners from Foley & Lardner LLP; Kirkland & Ellis; Mossing & Navarre, LLC; Riley Safer Holmes & Cancila also addressed the symposium.

More than 450 attorneys participated in the symposium at the Dirksen U.S. Courthouse in Chicago and more joined via livestream at the Roszkowski U.S. Courthouse in Rockford.

The symposium was co-sponsored by the District Court for the Northern District of Illinois and the Chicago Bar Association in conjunction with the Black Women Lawyers' Association and the Women's Bar Association of Illinois.

With twenty-two authorized district judgeships, the U.S. District for the Northern District of Illinois is the third largest district court in the U.S. The Northern District of Illinois stretches across 18 counties, covering an area of nearly 10,100 square miles, with a population of 9.3 million people.

###



Chief Judge Rubén Castillo welcomes the more than 450 participating attorneys to the court's first "Women Lawyers in the Courtroom" Symposium.



Attorneys Stephanie Scharf and Roberta Liebenberg discuss the findings of their study, "First Chairs at Trial: More Women Need Seats at the Table."



District Judge Rebecca R. Pallmeyer speaks on panel, "A View from the Bench." Also pictured: Judge LeRoy K. Martin, Presiding Judge, Criminal Division, Circuit Court of Cook County; District Judge Sharon Johnson Coleman; Judge Charles P. Burns, Criminal Division, Circuit Court of Cook County.