

## Summit's potential impact starts with combining talent, resources

From STAFF REPORTS

The Civil Access to Justice Summit that will take place in Cary on Oct. 12 has a basic goal.

"We want to educate attendees about the significant poverty issues in North Carolina and their effect on the administration of justice in our state," said Greensboro lawyer Janet Ward Black, the president of the N.C. Bar Association.

Black will join several other figures from the state's legal, legislative, business and academic communities at the summit, which is being organized by the Equal Access to Justice Commission along with support from the NCBA.

The event will mark the first interdisciplinary gathering in state history that addresses the issue of providing civil legal services to the state's growing low-income population — an issue that has served as the focus of Black's 4ALL initiative as the NCBA president.

"I think there are a couple of models that it could follow, and that would be up to the commission and Chief Justice Parker," Black said. "It could heighten awareness, or it could turn into an opportunity where ideas are collected and action planned.

"I think it's going to be amazing to have an historic legal event like this in North Carolina. This is something important."

The event is the most significant move yet by the Equal Access to Justice Commission, which was established by an order of the state's Supreme Court in November 2005.

Chief Justice Parker has served as the commission's chair since its inception. Michelle Cofield, the director of public service and pro bono activities for the NCBA, is the commission's executive director.

"I think having the summit organizes the whole community — not just the legal community — and it pulls everyone together to have a single voice," Cofield said. "You're able to combine all of the resources of those who can provide assistance."

Topics that are likely to come up at the summit are the state's growing low-income population and the need for more funding and volunteer participation.

For instance, more than 2.9 million people could qualify for legal aid assistance in North Carolina; however, the state ranks No. 42 in the country in the total funding it provides per eligible client, \$14.62. Maryland, in contrast, provides \$51.43 per client.

George Hausen, the executive director of Legal Aid of North Carolina, said he hopes the summit clears up misconceptions about typical LANC clients.

"I often hear, 'These people get welfare, free homes — why should they get free lawyers,'" Hausen said. "That's not the case. I'd like to tune people into the fact of how hard these people work and how resilient they are."

Black said she hopes the summit addresses the extent to which unequal access to justice can impact an entire community.

"If you have people in homeless shelters because they didn't have a lawyer to prevent a foreclosure, or a domestic violence victim who can't get a protective order, it affects the health of the community as a whole," she said. "We want good neighborhoods and healthy families that can stay together and succeed."

The event will be held at One Eleven Place, which is located at 111 Realtor's Way in Cary between the N.C. Bar Center and Harrison Avenue. Registration, which is free, begins at 9 a.m. The summit will conclude at 3:30 p.m.

The keynote speaker will be Gene Nichol, former dean of the University of North Carolina law school and current president of The College of William & Mary. While at UNC, Nichol helped to launch the Center on Poverty, Work and Opportunity.

Roger Cook, an attorney in LANC's Durham office, said he is interested in seeing what emerges from the day's discussions.

"Good things always come out of intelligent, good-minded people getting together in such a way," he said.

"It could generate some new insights into how legal aid could be more effective, how the private bar could facilitate legal aid and how the justice system, as a whole, could be more responsive to legal aid and the people it serves."

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## SUMMIT AGENDA

The Summit on Civil Access to Justice in North Carolina is set for Friday, Oct. 12. It will be held at One Eleven Place in Cary, which is one mile away from the N.C. Bar Center. The day's agenda will feature:

9-9:30 a.m.	Registration and continental breakfast
9:30-9:45 a.m.	Welcome and introductory remarks
9:45-10:15 a.m.	"Why is Access to Justice Important?" Thomas W. Lambeth, Senior Associate, Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation
10:15-10:30 a.m.	"Overview of Civil Legal Needs: The Problem of Access to the Civil Justice System"
10:30-10:50 a.m.	Break
10:50-11:25 a.m.	"A Real Look at Client Stories"
11:25-11:55 a.m.	"Plenary Session: Concerns for Special Client Populations" Changing ethnicity of N.C. and its impact on the court system Child poverty and legal solutions Predatory lending and its impact in our state Small group discussion
11:55-12:05 p.m.	Open forum
12:05-12:25 p.m.	Lunch and keynote address by Gene R. Nichol, president, The College of William & Mary (former dean of UNC law school)
12:30-1:30 p.m.	"Panel: Solutions to the Gaps in Access to Justice" Legislative activity Self-serve centers Civil <i>Gideon</i> Role of the business community Pro bono Pro se litigants and the court system
2:30-3:00 p.m.	Solutions and next steps (breakout groups)
3-3:30 p.m.	Reports back and next steps