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Justice Kathleen O’Leary Receives Benjamin Aranda Access to Justice Award

Orange County Jurist Heads Statewide Panels on Self-Represented Litigants and Court Interpreters

Anaheim—Justice Kathleen E. O’Leary, of the Court of Appeal, Fourth Appellate District, Division Three (Santa Ana), today was presented with the 2007 Benjamin Aranda III Access to Justice Award for her contributions to improving access to justice for Californians.

The award was presented by Chief Justice Ronald M. George and Administrative Director of the Courts William C. Vickrey during the California Bench Bar Biannual Conference.

The California Commission on Access to Justice cosponsors the Aranda Award with the Judicial Council, the State Bar, and the California Judges Association. The award is named for the founding chair of the Judicial Council’s Access and Fairness Advisory Committee, and it honors a trial judge or an appellate justice whose activities demonstrate a long-term commitment to improving access to justice.

Justice O’Leary began her judicial career at the West Orange County Municipal Court in 1981, where she also served as presiding judge and assistant presiding judge. She was appointed to the Superior Court of Orange County in 1986 and was elected presiding judge in 1998. She was the first woman to hold that position in Orange County and was one of the few female presiding judges in the state.

Because of Justice O’Leary’s leadership and vision, the Superior Court of Orange County significantly increased efforts to improve access to justice. Working with her team of court and justice system leaders, she helped to create programs that allowed court users of limited means to have expanded access to court services.

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Justice O'Leary was in her third term as presiding judge when she was elevated to the Court of Appeal in 1999. When Chief Justice George created the Task Force on Self-Represented Litigants in 2000, he appointed Justice O'Leary as chair. Through her efforts, a diverse group of stakeholders developed an action plan for assisting self-represented litigants through the court process. The task force also has contributed to the development of self-help centers in state trial courts.

Chief Justice George also appointed Justice O'Leary to chair the Court Interpreters Advisory Panel in 2005. California's courts have dramatically increased the number of proceedings in which interpreters are made available to litigants, an important step in improving public access to and understanding of court proceedings. Her leadership skills have been dedicated to addressing the challenges presented by the language needs of California's litigants.

As a past member and past chair of the Governing Committee of the Center for Judicial Education and Research, Justice O'Leary has consistently worked to improve the administration of justice through comprehensive and quality education and training for judicial officers and other judicial branch personnel.

Justice O'Leary also has served as a member of the Judicial Council and on a number of other advisory committees and task forces. Her contributions to judicial administration were recognized by the Judicial Council when she was named Jurist of the Year in 1999.

A biography of Justice O'Leary is available on the California Courts Web site at www.courtinfo.ca.gov/courts/courtsofappeal/4thDistrictDiv3/justices/oleary.htm .

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The Judicial Council is the policymaking body of the California courts, the largest court system in the nation. Under the leadership of the Chief Justice and in accordance with the California Constitution, the council is responsible for ensuring the consistent, independent, impartial, and accessible administration of justice. The Administrative Office of the Courts carries out the official actions of the council and promotes leadership and excellence in court administration.