The phrase “equal justice under law” is literally etched in stone over the entrance to the Supreme Court building in our nation’s capital. Indeed, our entire government depends on the rule of law, which presumes that everyone has equal access to justice. But for many, that fundamental tenet of our society is nothing more than a fanciful myth.

According to a recent report by the Legal Services Corporation, there are 6,415 low-income people in this country per legal aid attorney. That is 15 times as many as the number of other people per private attorney. Despite their best efforts, legal aid organizations are often forced to turn away as many people as they serve.

We all know that unrepresented parties do not fare as well in court as those with lawyers. The reasons are obvious. Attorneys know how to navigate the system and effectively advocate their positions. Pro se litigants do not. As a result, those who can afford attorneys have a significant advantage over those who cannot, even when the court does what it can to level the playing field.

The Supreme Court acknowledged that disparity almost 50 years ago when it held in Gideon v. Wainwright, 372 U.S. 335 (1963), that criminal defendants have a constitutional right to an attorney.

With very limited exceptions, however, no such right has been recognized in civil cases. For example, a single mother has a right to an attorney when facing 30 days probation, but no right to an attorney when facing the loss of her home or loss of her child’s custody.

This is why our Bar has been working to establish a civil version of Gideon, which would provide a right to counsel in adversarial proceedings where basic human needs are at stake.

In 2009, our Civil Gideon Task Force was formed under the leadership of Chancellor Sayde Ladov. After several months of diligent work, its Preliminary Report, Findings and Recommendations were adopted by our Board of Governors. The report endorsed the development of pilot projects in the defense of eviction and mortgage foreclosure proceedings.

The Philadelphia Bar Association’s Commission on Judicial Selection and Retention is independent and non-partisan. It includes 30 non-lawyer members. Can- didates found “Recommended” satisfied qualifications such as legal ability, experience, integrity, temperament, community involvement and judgment. Complete details can be found at www.philadelphia-bar.org.

We invite people to learn about these pilot projects in the defense of eviction and mortgage foreclosure proceedings. We all know that unrepresented parties do not fare as well in court as those with lawyers. The reasons are obvious. Attorneys know how to navigate the system and effectively advocate their positions. Pro se litigants do not. As a result, those who can afford attorneys have a significant advantage over those who cannot, even when the court does what it can to level the playing field.

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Philadelphia Phillies senior Vice President of Administration & Operations Michael Stiles will discuss his job with the team and other facets of the organization at a Thursday, May 12 program presented by the Philadelphia Bar Academy.

Stiles, former U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania as well a judge in the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas, joined the Phillies in April 2001. He became senior vice president in February 2007. Stiles played a key role in the team's move from Veterans Stadium to Citizens Bank Park. He also spent 12 years in the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office.

Learn first-hand about Phillies management’s perspectives on a team that has truly “broken through” to the big leagues, what it means for Philadelphia to win a major championship, legal and public relations issues from today's headline, and more! This unique event will feature a special video presentation and ballpark-inspired treats. All registrants will automatically be entered into a drawing to participate in an private VIP tour of Citizens Bank Park on June 22.

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formed a task force and scheduled public hearings on the unmet need for counsel in civil cases. He then proposed a $100 million increase in state funding for lawyers who represent the poor in civil cases that deal with “the essentials of life,” such as housing (eviction and mortgage foreclosure) and family matters (domestic violence, children, and family stability).

The $100 million increase was to be phased in over four years, starting with $25 million this year. That level of funding is now in doubt because a recent budget agreement slashed $170 million from the court’s funding for 2011. Chief Judge Lippman has still pledged to do his best, saying, “I will do everything I can possibly do to support civil legal services. A similar study in Texas found that for every dollar the state spends for indigent civil legal services, the overall annual gains to the economy are $7.42 in total spending, $3.56 in gross output and $2.20 in personal income. With returns like that, even fiscal conservatives might find Civil Gideon appealing.

If you would like to hear more about Chief Judge Lippman’s perspective on these issues, please join us on June 27 at our next Quarterly Meeting. He has graciously agreed to be our keynote speaker at that event.

And for more information generally, please visit our Civil Gideon Corner at www.philadelphiabar.org/page/CivilGideon.

Joseph J. O’Neill
Kenneth J. Powell Jr.
Fran Shields
Joseph C. Waters Jr.
Edward C. Wright

The following judicial candidates, listed alphabetically, were found “RECOMMENDED” for election to the Court of Common Pleas:

- Drew Aldinger
- Giovanni O. Campbell
- Anne Marie B. Coyle
- Charles Ehrich
- Michael Fanning
- Angelo J. Foglietta
- Vince Giusini
- Roger F. Gordon, Jr.
- Daine Grey Jr.
- Jonathan Q. Irvine
- Vincent L. Johnson
- Sean Kennedy
- Robert M. Kline
- Sayde J. Ladov
- Christopher Mallios Jr.
- Barbara A. McDermott
- Maria McLaughlin
- Carolyn H. Nichols
- J. Scott O’Keefe
- Nycole Watson
- Martin S. Coleman
- Meredith Seigle-DiClaudio
- Anatia Smith
- Nycole Watson

Judicial continued from page 3

Chair Richard S. Seidel. “That is an enormous undertaking involving many hundreds of interviews by the investigative division and careful review, consideration and deliberation by the Commission.”

The following judicial candidates, listed alphabetically, were found “RECOMMENDED” for election to the Court of Common Pleas:

- Judy I. Divergils
- Tom Fitzpatrick
- Beverly Muldrow
- Meredith Seigle-DiClaudio
- Lopez T. Thompson
- Ted J. Vigilante

Bar Leaders Welcome New Citizens

Vice Chancellor Kathleen D. Wilkinson (left photo) addresses new citizens at a March 24 naturalization ceremony presided over by U.S. District Court Judge Joel H. Slomsky, Philadelphia Bar Foundation President Wendy Beetlestone (center) and Young Lawyers Division Treasurer Aneesh A. Mehta (right) spoke at an April 14 ceremony with U.S. District Court Judge Gene E. K. Pratter presiding. Both events were sponsored by the Philadelphia Bar Association.