

Chief Justice Waller to address Warren County Bar Association Feb. 23

February 20, 2015

Mississippi Supreme Court Chief Justice Bill Waller Jr. will speak to the Warren County Bar Association at 12:30 p.m. Feb. 23 at the Vicksburg Convention Center.

Chief Justice Waller is expected to give an update on the judiciary and talk about priorities in requests to the Legislature.

The judiciary has requested a salary increase for official court reporters. The judiciary's appropriation request seeks an increase in general funds to move the appellate court Information Technology section, open the front entrance of the Supreme Court building that faces the Capitol, provide a salary realignment for the Supreme Court Central Legal staff and pay dues to the National Center for State Courts.

Chief Justice Waller is seeking legislative authority to officially create a Reentry Council. An ad hoc Reentry Council was formed more than a year ago and is working to address transition of state inmates back into society. The Reentry Council addresses basic needs such as housing, employment, education, transportation and health care. The Reentry Council works to reduce recidivism, protect public safety and help former inmates become productive citizens.

Chief Justice Waller supports legislation which would reauthorize the Public Defender Task Force. The Task Force ceased to exist on July 1, 2014, the date of the sunset provision in the statute which had created it.

Chief Justice Waller also is expected to give an update on drug courts and electronic filing. The Warren County Chancery, Circuit and County Courts were part of the pilot project that developed the electronic filing system known as Mississippi Electronic Courts. Twenty-six trial courts in 15 counties currently utilize electronic filing.

Warren County has operated a Drug Court for almost 10 years. The Ninth Circuit District of Warren, Sharkey and Issaquena counties currently enrolls about 126 people in Drug Court. Eighteen people graduated from the Ninth Circuit Drug Court in 2014, and participants paid more than \$49,000 in fines. Five drug-free babies were born to participants last year.

More than 3,400 people are enrolled in 40 drug courts statewide. The drug courts are estimated to produce \$46 million in annual savings by avoiding incarceration costs of those drug court participants.

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