

**Remarks by Chief Justice Frank J. Williams  
Annual Bar Meeting  
June 11, 2004**

**Over the past year, the persistent, driving drumbeat of justice has infused this Judiciary with a new energy, a revived commitment to public service, and an enduring vision of equal justice.**

**When I consider our accomplishments, despite what at times seemed overwhelming obstacles, I am reminded of the Scot, William Wallace portrayed in the movie Braveheart. William Wallace and his rag tag army, although greatly out-armed and outnumbered, found the strength to risk it all for the causes of freedom and independence.**

**Granted, Hollywood has not come knocking and our cause may not be as glamorous. And, granted I am no Mel Gibson...**

**But, what we fight for is equally noble and our resolve equally unyielding.**

**As members of our legal system, we are the last refuge of democracy. With your help, our Judiciary continues to insist on the administration of justice with uncompromising honor and unquestioned judicial independence.**

**It was only a year ago that I issued my “Call to Arms” and you responded in force.**

**I challenged you to increase representation to the indigent members of our community. And you responded. Eighteen major law firms are now committing an additional 421 attorneys to this cause. This is no small offering, and I applaud their commitment.**

**But the need continues to grow and the citizens of our state now look to the rest of you. John Roney, his successor Jametta**

**Alston, and I will continue our efforts to ensure that all of our lawyers participate in this representation.**

**The Station Fire inspired me to challenge you to conduct yourselves with integrity, to harness resources, intellect, and expertise in order to bring this case to justice with civility. You responded, all of you.**

**Finally, I challenged you to participate in our Justice Rules initiative and your response has been remarkable. This year, 342 attorneys and judges served on legal teaching teams; we reached almost 37,000 students in 13 communities throughout the state. You answered the “Call” in full force. Now that deserves a round of applause.**

**Your help and support have also proved invaluable in restoring funding for our judicial initiatives. Thanks to the understanding of the Governor and the vision of the General Assembly, I have a quiet confidence that all will yet be well.**

**Throughout this year's budgetary process, key judicial programs were threatened -**

- Juvenile Drug Court**
- Truancy Court**
- Certified court interpreters**
- Justice Link**
- Frontline jobs that directly benefit the citizens we serve.**

**These services protect the state's smallest, enable us to update our technology, and guarantee that every member of society had an equal opportunity to be heard and understood in our courts.**

**We did not give up in this budgetary battle and I believe all of these services will be spared.**

**But even as we celebrate our successes, the beat of the drum still calls us to do more. Challenges still lie ahead. The war is not yet won. Now is the time to be brave of heart.**

**We may finally be reaching a successful conclusion in our fight for a true separation of powers. Our judicial budget pass through initiative stands an excellent chance of passage this year by the General Assembly. This measure allows the judicial budget to be determined by the one branch of government empowered under the Constitution to appropriate funds.**

**In all these battles, we fight to uphold the legacy of justice initiated by our forefathers and safeguarded over the generations. We are fighting for the three words in our Rhode Island Constitution that define the heart of our mission – right to justice.**

**A right to justice – for the child who turns to our Judiciary for protection and a secure environment.**

**A right to justice – for the immigrant who is confident that despite language barriers her concerns will be heard and fairly adjudicated.**

**A right to justice – for a young entrepreneur who finds himself the victim of cutthroat capitalism.**

**A right to justice – for all Rhode Islanders.**

**The drumbeat of justice is an ever-present companion. At times, its beat is consistent and almost deafening. At other times, it is barely discernible. Despite the decibel level, the entire Judiciary, including a hardworking staff and my own Cabinet, are always mindful of the beat.**

**There is not enough time for me to list the myriad accomplishments of all our courts. But as I highlight just a few, it will confirm in your minds that THIS is a Judiciary of which we can all be proud.**

**In 2003, we disposed of over 230,000 cases – a jump of 9% from the previous year.**

- 80% of criminal felonies were disposed of within 180 days;**
- 88% of misdemeanors were disposed of within 60 days;**
- Civil cases were disposed of at a rate four times faster than a year ago;**

- **Every single one of the 8,775 injured workers who came before our Workers' Compensation Court saw a judge within 21 days.**
- **All while generating over \$22 million in costs and fees for the state's general fund.**

**The Rhode Island Judiciary's award winning website is getting even better! We are making new advancements in computer and internet technology to allow for easier navigation and up-to-date information.**

**This fall, we will unveil a new feature especially designed to empower victims of crimes. The Victim's Assistance Portal will allow thousands of victims to log on and look at a personal view of their case.**

**Expanded use of video conferencing at the Licht and Garrahy Courthouses has increased efficiency, reduced unnecessary prisoner transportation and proven cost effective. A separate secure video line allows private attorney – client conferences between the courthouse and the ACI. I encourage you to take advantage of this new technology.**

**The stressed infrastructure of our courthouses continues to motivate the overhaul of our bricks and mortar so that they will accurately reflect our commitment to justice.**

**The Kent County parking garage has been completed and construction of the new courthouse itself is now underway. We hope to move in by the summer of 2006.**

**In an effort to relieve congestion at the Garrahy Judicial Complex, we have opened the staircases to the public and I am aggressively supporting the construction of a new parking garage.**

**We are moving forward with plans to build a new Northern Rhode Island Courthouse. Once again, we did not give up and I am hopeful we will prevail with restoration of \$300,000 in seed money for this project.**

**Finally, we are working with the Department of Administration on final design plans for a new Traffic Tribunal facility that will maximize efficiency and treat the public we serve with respect. Construction is expected to begin this year at a new and better location at the entrance to the Pastore Government Complex on Route 2 and New London Avenue.**

**As we improve our physical facilities, we are reminded that the rhythm of justice flows not just in our courthouses but in our communities as well.**

**We are working to make our judicial system less intimidating and less burdensome. This past fall, the Judiciary hosted its first Citizens' Summit in South Providence, complete with on-site, real time Spanish translation.**

**We are providing parking for jurors. We are trying to raise their daily pay. We are using a grant from the Rhode Island Foundation to produce a video which will explain the judicial process. The film will also be shown to members of the public including schools, community organizations, and public television viewers.**

**We have initiated the mandatory Appellate Mediation Program in our Supreme Court. I commend the efforts of retired Chief Justice Joseph R. Weisberger and retired Supreme Court Justice Donald F. Shea who have served as mediators. We are now enhancing the number of mediators by adding retired judges Orton, Israel, Palumbo, Rahill, and Pirraglia to these ranks.**

**In this first year alone, we have already resolved over 30 percent of all cases that have been mediated. What a great start. I expect that by the time we are fully operational our success rate will exceed 50%.**

**Inherent in everything we do, there is the underlying rhythm that moves us all. That internal beat to which each of us who work in this legal system must march.**

**Your continuing participation is crucial. In order to succeed and endure, we need to rise above the distinctions that divide us and embrace the common humanity that binds us.**

**We are trusted with an awesome task, preserving the freedoms of justice for the future.**

**It was former President Ronald Reagan who said, "It is up to us...to work together for progress and humanity so that our grandchildren, when they look back at us, can truly say that we not only preserved the flame of freedom, but cast its warmth and light further than those who came before us."**

**Today, we stand shoulder to shoulder, a unified force, with a sense of mission that calls us to draw on our reserve, to further develop an esprit de corps - to have that force from the heart - to become more than individuals, to become a unified judiciary of judges, attorneys, and staff - to become dare I say it? Yes, to become Braveheart.**