

News Advisory

From the Rhode Island Judiciary



Supreme Court launches employment education program for high school students

February 9, 2018: On Monday, January 29, students from the Academy for Career Exploration (ACE) visited the Licht Judicial Complex for a day filled with activities designed to introduce participants to career opportunities across the Judiciary and services offered by each of the state courts.

State Court Administrator J. Joseph Baxter, Jr. welcomed the students, who participated in panels where the court administrators and judicial technology staff exposed them to daily operations. Additional activities included two interactive presentations facilitated by Heather L. Martino, employee relations director, and Dorca M. Paulino, Supreme Court diversity coordinator.

ACE is a public charter high school serving a primarily minority population, and its curriculum focuses on developing technology talent at the high school level. In the United States, Latinos and blacks only earn 18 percent of computer science degrees. Organizations such as Black Girls Code and Code2040 are influencing the tech industry by developing a pipeline of diverse and qualified candidates. In Providence, ACE is leading change by offering career pathways in the areas of data science, networking and cybersecurity, application programming and software engineering.

During the program, students had an opportunity to learn about technology in the Judiciary. “In 2014, the Judiciary began a conversion project to transform the Judiciary’s operations from one almost completely reliant on paper to an almost paperless solution,” said Peter J. Panciocco, executive director of Judicial Technology. The project, which was completed in 2017, was done on time and under budget thanks to the contributions of the Judicial Technology staff. Workforce data from fiscal year 2017 showed that 19

percent of the Rhode Island Judiciary’s judicial technology workforce identified as belonging to a minority group, and 33 percent identified as female.

Although efforts are being made to influence female and minority participation in computer science, recruitment challenges expand to affect other fields. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2010 American Community Survey, 85.7 percent of attorneys in the United States identified as white, while 14.3 percent identified as minorities. In Rhode Island, only 2.2 percent of practicing attorneys identified as minorities, while 97.8 percent identified as white. The lack of diversity among attorneys accredited by the Rhode Island Bar Association has imposed a unique challenge for the authorities responsible for



appointing Judicial Officers. Data from December 31, 2017, showed that 4 percent of the judges and magistrates in the Rhode Island Judiciary identified as minorities, exceeding the available selection pool by 1.8 percentage points. Census data gathered by the American Community Survey showed that 28 percent of lawyers in Rhode Island identified as female, yet women occupy 37 percent of judicial officer positions in the Rhode Island Judiciary.

“While female and minority representation in the Judiciary’s workforce has shown an upward trend, the Judiciary’s outreach efforts have expanded to include an early intervention program designed to inspire participants to pursue a career in the legal field,” said Paulino. “By launching the Judiciary

Employment Education program, our goal is not only to educate high school students about careers opportunities across the Judiciary but also about the required skills and qualifications. Over time, we hope to create a diverse applicant pool that includes more women, veterans, disabled and minorities.”

Paulino continued, “In fiscal year 2017, the Rhode Island Judiciary filled sixty-three (63) vacancies of which twenty-six (26) were law clerk positions requiring candidates to be enrolled in law school, and four (4) were judicial officer positions. Only thirty (30) positions did not require applicants to be practicing attorneys or law students, yet 22 percent of the fiscal year 2017 new hires were members of minority groups.”

The Rhode Island Judiciary consists of the Supreme Court, Superior Court, Family Court, District Court, Workers’ Compensation Court, and the Rhode Island Traffic Tribunal. In fiscal year 2017, the Judiciary had 695 full-time employees of which 64.89 percent were women, 12.37 percent minorities, 2.45 percent veterans, and 0.72 percent disabled.

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