



Gov. Martin O'Malley appoints 1st female chief judge

Mary Ellen Barbera to replace retiring chief judge

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ANNAPOLIS, Md. — Gov. Martin O'Malley has chosen Maryland Court of Appeals Judge Mary Ellen Barbera to be the first female chief judge of the state's highest court, retiring chief Judge Robert Bell said Tuesday night.

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"I present to you for the first time publicly the chief judge of the court of appeals of Maryland judge Mary Ellen Barbera," O'Malley said.

Bell, who reaches the mandatory retirement age of 70 on July 6, said in an interview with The Associated Press that O'Malley informed him of his decision earlier in the day. Bell said he believed Barbera would be a "great" chief judge after working with her since she arrived on the bench in 2008.

"Personally it's a thrill. It's wonderful for me as a public servant ever since as you heard my early days teaching in the Baltimore public school system and since then I've been a public servant in one form or another," Barbera said.

"She's also handled Judicial Institute and other matters, so we've seen her administrative skills," Bell said, referring to the entity responsible for developing and conducting continuing judicial education programs for the Maryland judiciary.



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"(My goal is) to achieve equal fair and timely access to justice here in Maryland. We've come a long way and we can go further," Barbera said.

O'Malley declined to discuss his selection while leaving the Maryland State House on Tuesday night after an event recognizing attorneys who do pro bono legal work, an event Bell also attended. The governor said he would have more to say on Wednesday morning at a news conference in Annapolis regarding judicial appointments.

Barbera, a 61-year-old Baltimore native, has represented Montgomery County on the Court of Appeals. She served as a judge on the Court of Special Appeals, the state's intermediate appellate court, from 2002 until 2008. She worked as an assistant attorney general from 1985 until 1989. From 1989 to 1998, she worked as deputy chief in the attorney general's criminal appeals division.

Bell, who represents Baltimore city on the bench, has served as chief judge of the seven-member court since 1996.

Barbera will serve along another newly appointed judge representing Baltimore City. Judge Shirley Watts is the first African American woman to serve on Maryland's Court of Appeals.

"Through God all things are possible and by his grace we have achieved this historic moment," said Watts.

These two nominations bring the Court of Appeals yet another first, the first ever female majority.

"I think it will lead the court onto greater excellence and it will be a wonderful experience for the state and the citizens of Maryland," Watts said.

NAME: Mary Ellen Barbera.

AGE-BIRTH DATE - 61, Sept. 10, 1951

EXPERIENCE - Assistant attorney general, 1985 to 1989; deputy chief, criminal appeals division 1989 to 1998; served as legal counsel to former Gov. Parris Glendening, 1988 to 2002; judge on the Court of Special Appeals, 2002 to 2008; judge on Court of Appeals, 2008 to the present.

EDUCATION - Bachelor's degree, Towson University; law degree, University of Maryland School of Law.

FAMILY - Husband, Gary Bair. Four children between them.

QUOTE - "As a woman and a judge on the court representing Montgomery County, a richly diverse county of our state, I appreciate, governor, the historic significance of this appointment."

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