

The Sun

**Fifth judge will be added to ease load  
District Court needs help with growing number of cases  
Some call for minority  
Legal experts say four people likely interested in position**

by Dana Hedgpeth

August 2, 1998 Page(s): 1B  
Edition: HOWARD  
Section: NEWS  
Length: 688 words  
Record Number: BSUN08020866

---

Howard County District Court will get a fifth judge as early as Oct. 1 to deal with a growing caseload.

Four people -- some of whom have expressed interest in previous bench openings -- are said by politicians and legal experts to be interested in the position, which will be advertised this week.

They are Bernard A. Raum, a Howard County juvenile master; Sue-Ellen Hantman, senior assistant Howard County state's attorney; Constantine James Sfekas, a private attorney; and Pamela Junette Brown, counsel to the state Department of General Services. None returned phone calls seeking comment.

Some black leaders say they are concerned that because Alice Gail Pollard Clark was appointed last year to the District Court, there may not be as much of a push to get another minority on the local judiciary. Clark is the lone African-American among nine circuit and district judges.

Of the four candidates, Brown is the only African-American.

"We do have one black on the District Court, but we need to increase the representation of minorities in the leadership of the courts," said county Councilman C. Vernon Gray. "We need to have all groups of our community represented. We shouldn't have any institutional exclusiveness.

"When people are excluded, it sends the wrong message of how they may be treated before that body," Gray said.

Del. Frank S. Turner, a District 13A Democrat, said: "We're beginning to move in the direction of having diversity. We needed at least one woman; we have one now, but over 50 percent of the county [residents] are women. If you don't appoint a woman, you're only representing a portion of the county."

But the judicial opening does not promise to raise some of the strong debates on race that surfaced during a bitter election two years ago that polarized the legal community.

In the 1996 election, the county's first black circuit judge -- Donna Hill Staton -- was ousted from office, prompting advocates to push for a minority member of the local judiciary. Last year, Gov. Parris N. Glendening appointed Clark.

'Bounced back'

"I think Howard County has bounced back" from the 1996 election, said Martha F. Rasin, chief judge of Maryland's District Court system. "They were bruised. It was an unfortunate thing to have to go through."

The Rev. Robert A. F. Turner, president of the African-American Coalition of Howard County, said: "I don't think we are haunted by history. We still ought to strive to reflect the diversity of the county."

Up to seven nominees

A 17-member judicial nominating commission will forward a list of up to seven names to the governor's office by Aug. 27.

The new position, created under legislation signed by the governor, is effective Oct. 1. But it could take longer to name someone, officials say, depending on the interview process.

## NewsBank, inc.

### Skyrocketing caseload

The District Court has had four judges since 1989. But in the past few years, judges and administrators say, the caseload has skyrocketed.

In fiscal 1997, each of Howard's District Court judges handled 22,092 cases, compared with a statewide average of 20,628 cases per judge, according to state statistics.

A state report says the caseload of motor vehicle, criminal and civil cases in Howard County rose from about 87,400 in fiscal 1996 to more than 103,000 cases last year. The current caseload exceeds projections for 2000.

### Visiting judges

Although the District Court's chief judge, James N. Vaughan, has brought in visiting judges, a backlog of more than 60,000 minor traffic cases exists, administrators say.

"We now have traffic dockets where we can't fit everybody in the courtroom," Rasin said. "The dockets are becoming larger than our courtrooms."

Copyright 1998 The Baltimore Sun Company