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Providence Journal

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Newsroom

May 23, 2016

Yelnosky on Judicial Selection

Dean Michael Yelnosky in the ProJo, on the governor's efforts to change perceptions that you've got to "know a guy" to be a judge in Rhode Island.



From the PROVIDENCE JOURNAL: ["Fewer seek to be judges in 'know-a-guy' R.I. "](#) by Edward Fitzpatrick

The number of people applying for state judgeships is dropping in part because people think you've got to "know a guy" to be a judge in Rhode Island [...]

On May 9, the Democratic governor [Gina Raimondo] nominated people for eight state judgeships, including new chiefs of the Family and Workers' Compensation courts. But from a political perspective, perhaps the most interesting choice was who she did not pick: former state Rep. Timothy A. Williamson, D-West Warwick, a part-time legal counsel for the House Judiciary Committee who was a finalist for a District Court judgeship. [...]

Roger Williams University law school dean Michael J. Yelnosky, who studies the judicial selection process, said the decline in judicial applicants is cause for concern, and skepticism about a "know-a-guy" system could be one factor. "Passing over someone like Tim Williamson sends a signal that these positions won't go to the most connected," he said. [...]

Raimondo also nominated Rossie Lee Harris Jr. for a Family Court vacancy, and he would be the first person of color on that court. "I am thrilled she made the pick of Rossie Harris, who is very well qualified," said Jim Vincent, president of the Providence branch of the NAACP. "He is making history."

[...] Yelnosky said, “There is a serious need to increase the racial and ethnic diversity on the bench,” but “solving the pipeline problem doesn’t happen overnight.” He said an estimated 2 percent of the state’s lawyers are African American or Hispanic, and while the state’s only law school has increasingly diverse graduating classes, applying for judgeships is usually a mid-career move.