Two Appellate Judges Selected As Joint Recipients of 28th Annual Devitt Award

Two appellate judges will share the honor as recipients of the 28th Annual Edward J. Devitt Distinguished Service to Justice Award. Judge Anthony J. Scirica (3rd Cir.) and Judge Ann Claire Williams (7th Cir.) were chosen by a three-member panel chaired by Associate Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, with Judge Robert A. Katzmann (2nd Cir.) and Judge W. Royal Furgeson Jr. (N.D. Tex.). The Devitt Award honors Article III judges whose careers have been exemplary, measured by their significant contributions to the administration of justice, the advancement of the rule of law, and the improvement of society as a whole.

In announcing the panel’s selections, Sotomayor stated: “Both Chief Judge Scirica and Judge Williams have enjoyed remarkably distinguished careers as federal judges and have worked tirelessly through their extracurricular service to improve the justice system and the communities in which they serve. Both provide outstanding examples of the qualities sought in Devitt Award recipients.”

Scirica’s “critical role” in designing Pennsylvania’s sentencing statutes was cited by the panel, as well as his dedicated service to the Judicial Conference and his “exemplary
opinions and prolific public service activities.” The panel also lauded Williams’ service on a wide variety of Judicial Conference committees and her “extensive efforts to provide and improve legal education,” noting in particular her active role in supporting the study and practice of law in Africa.

The nominating letters of both judges expressed their colleagues’ high regard. Scirica’s Third Circuit colleagues noted the long arc of his career in public service and his continuing contributions “to the administration of justice, his advancement of the rule of law, and his improvement of society as a whole.” The letter acknowledged Scirica’s outstanding leadership as chief judge of the Third Circuit and as chair of the Executive Committee of the Judicial Conference.

Williams’ nominating letter observed that she “has devoted her professional career to helping others, teaching and training law students, lawyers and judges and serving in important positions that have literally changed, in a positive manner, the way the federal Judiciary functions. She has a passion for civic leadership, understands the importance of preserving judicial independence and seeks to promote the rule of law in a way that benefits the citizens of the world.”

The Devitt Distinguished Service to Justice Award is named for the late Edward J. Devitt, longtime chief judge of the U.S. District Court for the District of Minnesota. It is administered by the American Judicature Society with funding provided by the Dwight D. Opperman Foundation. The joint award will be presented at a ceremony later this year.