

Dean Deborah Bell is 2017 recipient of Chief Justice Award

July 14, 2017

Deborah H. Bell, interim dean of the University of Mississippi School of Law, is the recipient of the 2017 Chief Justice Award.



Mississippi Supreme Court Chief Justice Bill Waller Jr. presented the award on July 14 during the Mississippi Bar Convention in Destin, Fla. The annual award recognizes an individual whose work has significantly improved the judicial system.

Chief Justice Waller cited Bell's visionary leadership in legal education and programs of the Mississippi Bar, her extensive teaching both at the law school and in continuing legal education seminars, and her dedication to assisting low-income people.

"Professor Bell's work significantly improved legal education, the practice of family law and the lives of the poor," Chief Justice Waller said.

Bell's primary area of expertise is family law. Her book, *Bell on Mississippi Family Law*, is considered the foremost treatise on family law and is widely used by chancellors and family law practitioners.

Bell has served as interim dean of the law school for the past two years. A member of the law faculty since 1981, she has taught commercial law, property, family law, housing law, lawyering skills and poverty law. She is the founder of the law school's Civil Legal Clinic and was its director until 2009. She developed the University of Mississippi Pro Bono Initiative, which provides law students with opportunities to gain practical experience working with licensed attorneys to assist low-income people in free family law clinics across north Mississippi. In May 2013, Bell was appointed as the law school's first Associate Dean for Clinical Programs. She leads the law school's expanded clinical program, which includes ten clinic practice areas.

Bell served as attorney for the Governor's Housing Task Force in 1988-89 and was involved in drafting legislation that created the Mississippi Home Corporation and the Mississippi Landlord-Tenant Act of 1991. She has served on the Access to Justice Commission Pro Se Committee, the Mississippi Gender Fairness Task Force, and the Supreme Court Domestic Violence Task Force.

Bell has received numerous honors and awards, including the Mississippi Bar Susie Blue Buchanan Award in 2009, and the Mississippi Center for Justice Champion of Justice Award in 2007. In 2005, she received the Mississippi Women Lawyers Association Outstanding Woman Lawyer of the Year Award, the University of Mississippi Law Faculty Public Service Award and the Mississippi Bar President's Award.

Bell was born in Indianola and grew up in the Delta. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Mississippi College and a law degree from the University of Mississippi School of Law. She served as Editor-in-Chief of the *Mississippi Law Journal*. She worked as a law clerk for Judge Elbert P. Tuttle of the Fifth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals and was a staff attorney for the Atlanta Legal Aid Society before returning to Ole Miss to teach.