

## ■ THE JUDICIARY

# Youth Mentoring Program Brings Chief Judge Bell to Show and Tell

*Maryland's Top Jurist Goes to Needy Neighborhood To Provide Students with a Lesson in Possibilities*

BY SONIA TAYLOR

*Capital News Service*

Chief Judge Robert Bell, Maryland's highest-ranking judicial officer, played the part of a role model with style.

Dressed in a tailored suit with a bluish-lavender tie and black onyx lapel pin, the Court of Appeals jurist gave a motivating speech to over 300 Langston Hughes Elementary School Students last week as a part of a new Upper Park Heights Football, Mentoring and Tutoring Program.

"They need to be told and shown what's possible — not so much what I say, but that they see someone who occupies a position," Bell said.

Bell told the children about how he grew up poor in East Baltimore without many opportunities children have today.

"What I had to do is to think about an accomplishment — any

accomplishment — to make some success of myself," he said.

Bell did that, he said, by listening to his mother, his friends and by knowing the difference between right and wrong.

"You need to be doing the right things so you are in a position to learn," he warned, adding, "you can do anything you want to do. ... A lot has to do with attitude."

The football, mentoring and tutoring program, started in August, is based at Hughes, in Bell's childhood neighborhood.

Many of the students are from low-income, single-parent households.

The program — with the motto "soaring to success" — sponsors a neighborhood football team, the Rockets. It recruits monthly mentors to give speeches and is in the process of getting three tutors to help Hughes students three days a week.

Activities are funded by private and federal grants, donations and fund-raising projects. It is run with the help of about 15 part-time volunteers at present.

"I'm not trying to save them all," said Program Director Rick Lias, "but at least give them an opportunity to achieve. ... They need to understand that life is a choice."

## Money matters

Lias said the program is waiting for federal grants to kick in to support the tutors and expand services to Arlington Elementary and Pimlico Middle schools, where some students are members of the Rocket football team.

He also plans on taking the group to one cultural event a month.

Seven-year-old Rudolph Williams, a second grader at Hughes, listened to Bell's speech. He said he enjoyed it, and learned "I can go to any college I want to go."

Melody Knowles, a 10-year-



BELL: ROLE MODEL AND MENTOR

# Bell

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old fifth grader, said, "I learned to stay in school because if you want to be somebody, you've got to work hard."

Afterward, some students asked questions, including "what do you get paid?"

Bell willingly told the children that his salary is a matter of public record and added he made just over \$125,000.

Later, he said he was glad they had asked, because "it suggests to me that they understand what they believe is a legitimate salary."

Lias added that it was important for Bell to show himself to the children, so that they believe people can have nice clothes and other luxuries without being a drug dealer.

People interested in becoming volunteers for the program may contact Rick Lias at (410) 578-7538.

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