

OPINION

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Frequenting '1 percent banks' helps bolster legal aid

To the editor:

The fed fund rates remains at near zero. This translates into far fewer IOLTA funds, and thus far fewer low-income Massachusetts citizens receiving help with their civil legal problems.

This is happening at a time when the demand for legal assistance with issues such as foreclosure, eviction, domestic violence, public benefits and unemployment is reaching astronomical proportions.

The only thing that prevents the dramatic drop in IOLTA interest rates from completely decimating legal aid is the agreement by a group of banks to keep their IOLTA rates at 1 percent, even as the federal funds rate falls to unprecedented lows.

These "IOLTA Leadership Banks" include Century Bank, Bristol County Savings Bank, The Cooperative Bank of Cape Cod, North Cambridge Cooperative Bank and the Institution for

Savings in Newburyport, as well as a number of smaller community banks. For a complete list of 1 percent banks, check www.maiolta.org.

These banks have a long history of supporting IOLTA and legal services in Massachusetts. By banking at one of these institutions, you help to bolster civil legal aid programs and contribute to keeping the promise of justice for all. Be sure to let your banker know you appreciate their commitment to serving their communities.

If your bank is not on the list, encourage it to join. Or, consider moving your accounts to a Leadership Bank. For more information about IOLTA or the Leadership Bank program, visit www.maiolta.org or contact Steve Casey at 617-723-9093.

Jayne Tyrrell
Boston

The writer is director of the Massachusetts IOLTA Committee.

SJC to bar: 'a time not just of reflection but of action'

The following letter from the Supreme Judicial Court was sent to members of the judiciary and the bar on June 3.

The events of the last few months have reminded us of what African-Americans know all too well: that too often, by too many, black lives are not treated with the dignity and respect accorded to white lives. As judges and as lawyers, we are both saddened and angry at the confluence of recent events that have revealed how much more we need to do to create a just, fair and peaceful society.

But we must do more than express our feelings of sadness and anger.

As judges, we must look afresh at what we are doing, or failing to do, to root out any conscious and unconscious bias in our courtrooms; to ensure that the justice provided to African-Americans is the same that is provided to white Americans; to create in our courtrooms, our corner of the world, a place where all are truly equal.

As lawyers, we must also look at what we are doing, or failing to do, to provide legal assistance to those who cannot afford it; to diminish the economic and

environmental inequalities arising from race; and to ensure that our law offices not only hire attorneys of color but also truly welcome them into the legal community.

And as members of the legal community, we need to reexamine why, too often, our criminal justice system fails to treat African-Americans the same as white Americans, and recommit ourselves to the systemic change needed to make equality under the law an enduring reality for all. This must be a time not just of reflection but of action.

There is nothing easy about any of this. It will be uncomfortable; difficult conversations, challenging introspection, hard decisions. We must recognize and address our own biases, conscious and unconscious. We must recognize and condemn racism when we see it in our daily lives.

We must recognize and confront the inequity and injustice that is the legacy of slavery, of Jim Crow, and of the disproportionate incarceration of African-Americans, and challenge the untruths and unfair stereotypes about African-Americans that have been used to justify

or rationalize their repression. And we must examine the underlying reasons why African-Americans have suffered disproportionately from the COVID-19 pandemic, both in terms of the number of deaths and the extent of economic hardship it has caused, and, where possible, address the causes of those disparities.

Perhaps most importantly, it is a time for solidarity and fellowship with African-American judges and attorneys, to acknowledge their pain, to hear about the conversations they now have with their children, and to stand together when others may try to divide us. As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote from a Birmingham jail:

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

Chief Justice Ralph D. Gants
Justice Frank M. Gaziano
Justice Kimberly S. Budd
Justice Scott L. Kaker
Justice Barbara A. Lenk
Justice David A. Lowy
Justice Elspeth B. Cypher

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