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NEWS RELEASE

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Judge Aviva K. Bobb Wins 2005 Benjamin Aranda Access to Justice Award

San Diego—Chief Justice Ronald M. George tomorrow will present the 2005 Benjamin Aranda III Access to Justice Award to Superior Court of Los Angeles County Judge Aviva K. Bobb, a longtime advocate of fairness and access in the state's family courts.

The award will be presented at a luncheon at the Statewide Judicial Branch Conference, a meeting of court leaders held in conjunction with the annual meetings of the State Bar and California Judges Association.

The Aranda Access to Justice Award, named for the founding chair of the Judicial Council's Access and Fairness Advisory Committee, honors a trial judge or an appellate justice whose activities demonstrate a long-term commitment to improving access to justice. The award is co-sponsored by the Judicial Council, the State Bar, and the California Judges Association, in association with the California Commission on Access to Justice.

Judge Bobb was appointed to the Los Angeles Municipal Court in 1980 and became a judge of the Superior Court of Los Angeles County in 1994. Her judicial career has been devoted to pursuing full and equal access to the courts, stressing fairness and respect for all litigants. She has been at the forefront of dramatic improvements in the family law system to make it more friendly and accessible to self-represented litigants and more responsive to the evolving legal needs of all litigants, regardless of financial resources.

As family law supervising judge from 2000 through 2004, she was instrumental in developing and implementing a significant number of programs that greatly enhanced the rights of family law litigants. In 80 percent of family law cases at least one litigant is self-represented. Her efforts include making it easier to obtain domestic violence restraining

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orders by opening courtrooms in neighborhood courthouses and by ensuring that self-help centers are available to assist in the preparation of applications for restraining orders.

Judge Bobb supervised the opening of the self-help centers for litigants representing themselves in family law. She also worked with the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors to conveniently located and adequately supervised children's waiting rooms available in courthouses throughout the county.

Concerned with the inconvenient location of the court clerk's facilities in relation to family law, Judge Bobb arranged to have those functions relocated to the same floor as the family law courtrooms. Self-represented litigants can now place their children in the waiting area, pick up family law forms, obtain assistance in completing them, file the documents, and appear in court in one central location.

She videotaped a message to parents, reminding them of the importance of focusing on the needs of their children during the difficult process of divorce, and expanded and enhanced the existing free program sponsored by the courts for high-conflict parents.

She has been key in bringing together court administrators, judges, and legal aid advocates to improve the judicial process for self-represented litigants. She has been active in the Pro Per Working Group, a coalition of service providers who meet regularly to address the issues and problems that low-income people face, such as fee waivers and the availability of interpreters. She also played an important role in linking the self-help centers with JusticeCorps, a project of AmeriCorps that brings college student volunteers into the self-help centers and greatly increases the capacity of the centers to provide pro per assistance.

Judge Bobb was instrumental in forming the Unauthorized Practice of Law Task Force, because she was concerned about the growing number of litigants being assisted by non-attorneys who were engaging in the unlicensed practice of law and charging fees for shabbily prepared legal work that often negatively affected the litigants' legal rights.

In addition to being this year's Aranda Award recipient, she has received numerous other awards in the course of her career, including the Boalt Hall Alumni Association Distinguished Service Award in 1994 and the State Bar of California Family Law Section's Award for Judicial Officer of the Year in 2003.

Past recipients of the Aranda Award are Justice Judith D. McConnell (1999), Court of Appeal, Fourth Appellate District; Judge Veronica McBeth (2000), Superior Court of Los Angeles County; Judge Charles W. Campbell, Jr. (2001), Superior Court of Ventura County; Judge Donna J. Hitchens (2002), Superior Court of San Francisco County; Judge Kenneth M. Kawaichi (2003), Superior Court of Alameda County; and Justice Earl Johnson, Jr. (2004), Court of Appeal, Second Appellate District.

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