

# TEXAS SUPREME COURT ADVISORY

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## TEXAS JUDICIAL LEADERS PLAN STATE CONFERENCE IN DALLAS TO CONFRONT DISTRUST OF COURTS

New Houston Police Chief Art Acevedo will headline a conference next week in Dallas sponsored by the two highest Texas courts to foster racial understanding and trust in the judicial system in the wake of police shootings and ambushes on officers.

The daylong conference – the Beyond the Bench: Law, Justice and Communities Summit – will begin at 10 a.m. Wednesday at Paul Quinn College in Dallas. It will bring together Texas judges, law-enforcement officers, activists and other community leaders to confront simmering civil strife and its spillover effect on all Texas courts.

“This summit is intended to bring together many different perspectives to listen to and learn from each other,” Chief Justice Nathan L. Hecht said. “As judges, we’re concerned that whole communities without trust in police will not trust their courts – and not just the criminal courts. We can either accept distrust as inevitable or we can work to change it. We choose to work to change it.”

The conference will feature a presentation by Dr. Jeffrey Rachlinski, a Cornell Law School professor whose research specialty in cognitive and social psychology has focused on unconscious bias in judicial decision-making. He will address decision bias in a broader context.

Rachlinski’s presentation will follow firsthand accounts by people who have been wrongly incarcerated or in violent confrontations involving police. Emily Thompson, widow of Dallas Police Officer Brent Thompson, one five officers killed July 7 in downtown Dallas, will speak.

In addition to the principal sponsors, the Texas Supreme Court and the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals, the National Center for State Courts is supporting the conference as part of its longtime effort to bolster trust and confidence in American courts. Survey research by the National Center indicates significant distrust of courts among minority communities.

Acevedo, as Austin police chief for nine years, led that department through community crises after several shootings during his tenure involving both police officers killed on duty and police officers who shot unarmed suspects. Acevedo took charge of the Houston Police Department on Nov. 30.

“We can’t pretend that one conference will change troubling developments on American streets,” Hecht said. “But we have to try to make sure tensions don’t fester into disrespect or distrust of our courts.”

The Beyond the Bench conference will open with remarks by Chief Justice Hecht; Paul Quinn President Michael Sorrell; Court of Criminal Appeals Presiding Judge Sharon Keller; and Supreme Court Justice Eva M. Guzman, the conference's chief organizer.