As someone who has served on both sides of the courtroom bench, Richard B. Teitelman, JD '73, is able to offer students a special perspective as the School of Law's jurist-in-residence. Now a judge on the Missouri Supreme Court, Teitelman formerly directed Legal Services of Eastern Missouri.

At the School, he blocks out office time to meet with students when he is on campus each week. Teitelman provides them an up-close-and-personal look at the judicial process and helps interested students apply for judicial clerkships.

"It's important for students to be able to interact with me in the academic community. No matter what their career choice, they'll be interpreting the law in some fashion. And I'm here to inform them about how judicial decisions are made."

Teitelman expects his own career to be enhanced by the jurist-in-residence position because, he says, becoming a judge requires judgment, experience, and scholarship. "All of those can be formed in a law school environment," he says. "This experience will aid in my decisionmaking."

Named to the Missouri Supreme Court in February 2002, Teitelman had served on the Missouri Court of Appeals, Eastern District, since December 1997. Before his judicial appointment, he worked for Legal Services of Eastern Missouri, joining the organization in 1971 as a volunteer and serving as executive director from 1980 until his appellate appointment.

"There's nothing more gratifying than helping people get access to justice," says Teitelman of providing legal services to the poor.

"I grew up in a lower-income neighborhood in West Philly and understand how that can affect a person's sense of worth and dignity; I also grew up with a disability," says Teitelman, who is legally blind from a congenital deformity to the optic nerve. "I found out that people need help from others. I received help from so many that I wanted to give back."

Teitelman says his court appointment sends a message to the less fortunate that the justice system's playing field is now more level. The state's first legally blind appellate judge, he is also the first Jewish person to serve on the Missouri Supreme Court in its 182-year history.

As one of the first students with a visual disability to attend Washington University School of Law, Teitelman credits faculty and staff for much of his success. School personnel were pivotal in gaining examiners' approval for a reader to help Teitelman take the state bar exam after he failed to pass it the first time when forced to read on his own.

"If I could give back one-tenth of what the School of Law has given me, I'd be happy," says Teitelman, a member of the National Council for the School of Law and an active and strong supporter of the School's clinical program for the past 25 years.

"Judge Richard Teitelman is one of the most prominent Missouri judges because of his outstanding career on the Court of Appeals and his recent appointment to the Missouri Supreme Court," says Joel Seligman, dean and the Ethan A.H. Shepley University Professor. "I anticipate that, as a jurist-in-residence, he will be of great value to our students initially as someone to meet with about the judiciary and later as a potential teacher. He also will help the School better connect to the legal and judicial community in the state and in the nation. He is a great appointment to the National Council because of his extraordinary career and great loyalty to our School."

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