

What's Happening to Judicial Independence?

Friday, October 21, 2022
1:45 – 3:00 PM



This session will address threats to judicial independence and fair and impartial courts. Panelists will address the impact of declining trust and confidence in the courts and the judiciary, the politicization of the judicial branch, reprisals for unpopular decisions, and other challenges facing the courts. Highlights of what judges can do to counter these attacks will be presented and resources provided.

At the end of the session, participants should be able to:

1. Recognize historical and contemporary threats to judicial independence
2. Evaluate public trust and confidence in the judicial branch
3. Engage in public presentations to strengthen public understanding of our courts and the judiciary
4. Identify resources to educate the public on the judicial branch and the importance of an independent and impartial judiciary

Speakers:

Hon. Robin Hudson, North Carolina Supreme Court and Co-Chair of the NAWJ Judicial Independence Committee



Robin E. Hudson is a Georgia native but has lived in North Carolina since her early teens. She has been serving on the Supreme Court of North Carolina since January 2007 and her current term runs through 2022. Previously, she served on the North Carolina Court of Appeals from January 2001 through December 2006. She is the first woman in North Carolina elected to either appellate court without having been appointed first.

Justice Hudson graduated from Page High School in Greensboro, then Yale University in 1973, and the University of North Carolina School of Law in 1976. She practiced law out of Raleigh and Durham until her election to the Court of Appeals. Her practice concentrated on workers' compensation and civil and criminal litigation and included numerous appeals.

Justice Hudson was a member of the steering committee that founded the North Carolina Association of Women Attorneys in 1978 and has been a member of the organization ever since. She has served on the Family Court Advisory Committee since 2001. She has been a member of the National Association of

Women Judges since 2003; since 2015 she has served as national co-chair of its Judicial Independence Committee, which oversees the award-winning “Informed Voters Project (IVP)”.

She is married and has two grown children, two beautiful granddaughters and a handsome grandson.

Hon. Cymonie Rowe, 15th Judicial Circuit, State of Florida and member of the NAWJ Judicial Independence Committee



Judge Rowe graduated from the University of Miami double majoring in Broadcast Journalism and Psychology. She earned her Juris Doctor degree from Nova Southeastern University College of Law, where she was the Managing Editor of the *ILSA Journal of International & Comparative Law*. She is a first generation Jamaican American. Prior to serving on the bench, her practice focused on insurance defense and complex commercial litigation.

Judge Rowe is a member of the Florida Supreme Court Alternative Dispute Resolution Committee, and Chair of the Emergency Preparedness Subcommittee. She is a Florida Supreme Court Judicial Mentor, a member of the Florida Bar Judicial Constitutional Judiciary Committee, New Judges Co-Chair for the Florida Conference of Circuit Court Judges, and a Conference Management Committee Member of the Florida Conference of Circuit Court Judges. In 2018, the Florida Bar honored Judge Rowe as the Florida Bar Jurist of the Year. In 2019, she received the South Palm Beach County Bar Association’s first Diversity and Inclusion Impact Award. In 2021, she received the Palm Beach County Florida Association for Women Lawyers Jurist of the Year Award, the Craig S. Barnard American Inns of Court Jurist of the Year, and the Florida Association for Women Lawyers Rosemary Barkett Award for Outstanding Achievement.

Governor Rick Scott appointed Judge Rowe to the 15th Circuit Court in July of 2016. She is the first Jamaican American to serve on the judiciary in Palm Beach County. She began her judicial career presiding in the Civil Division. In January 2018 until January 2021, she presided over a Civil Division with the majority of the *Engle* progeny cases. Currently Judge Rowe presides in the Juvenile Division, handling delinquency and dependency matters. Judge Rowe is actively committed to her community, volunteering at her church as well as several schools and universities with a focus on civics education.

Annette Boyd Pitts, Director of the Justice Teaching Center at Florida Southern College, and National Education Chair NAWJ IVP Judicial Independence Committee



Annette Boyd Pitts is a civic learning specialist, curriculum developer, and education policy strategist. She currently serves as the director of the Justice Teaching Center for Civic Learning and teaches at Florida Southern College. She is the Education Chair for the National Association of Women Judges (NAWJ) Judicial Independence Committee and Informed Voters Fair Judges Project. She also serves on the NAWJ Judicial Education and Academic Network Committee. Pitts has worked in over 25 countries to advance education for democracy efforts and has administered trilateral international partnerships in Eastern/Central Europe and Latin America. She is the recipient of the Sandra Day O'Connor National Advancements in Civic Education Award, presented by Justice O'Connor during the National Center for State Courts annual conference. She is also the recipient of the National Improvements in Justice Award and the American Bar Association Isidore Starr Award for Excellence in Public Education, Pitts is the principal author of the Benchmarks Adult Civic Education curriculum, and has created, scripted, and published a multitude of civic learning resources and models. Pitts administers a wide range of civic and law-related education programs targeting K-12 and adult audiences. She is currently completing research on civic learning policies and focusing on the characteristics of high and low-performing school districts. Additional research interests include declines in public trust and confidence in the courts and the politicization of the judicial branch. Pitts holds advanced degrees and certifications from Florida State University and Harvard University and is continuing doctoral research at Florida Southern College.