

HONORABLE PHINIA ATEN
CHIEF MAGISTRATE JUDGE, MAGISTRATE COURT OF ROCKDALE COUNTY, STATE OF
GEORGIA

Judge Phinia Aten is the Chief Judge of the Magistrate Court of Rockdale County. She was the first African American woman to become a judge in the Rockdale Judicial Circuit's history when elected in 2012. Judge Aten was re-elected in 2016, and 2020, with overwhelming voter support. Judge Aten is a national judicial leader, currently serving as District Five Director for the National Association of Women Judges and Immediate Past Chair of the American Bar Association's National Conference of Specialized Court Judges Conference. She previously served on the National Association of Women Judges 2017 Annual Conference Planning Committee in Atlanta.

Some of Judge Aten's important state and local leadership roles have included Georgia Council of Magistrate Judges' Executive Committee, Georgia Next Generation Courts Commission, Rockdale Jail Diversion Steering Committee, Rockdale County Re-entry Program Steering Committee, Rockdale County Child Abuse Protocol Committee, Rockdale County Sexual Assault Protocol Committee, Gate City Bar Association Judicial Section as Executive Committee Member at Large, NewRock Legal Society Executive Committee as Judicial Section Chair, Salem High School Career and Technical Advisory Committee and Leadership Rockdale. Judge Aten was the inaugural president of NewRock Legal Society, a minority bar association serving Rockdale, Newton and Walton Counties. In this trailblazing role, she spearheaded the launch of the Society's signature free public legal program, *Know Your Rights*. From 2004-2012, Judge Aten served as the inaugural chair of the Continuing Legal Education at Sea Program for the Georgia Association of Black Women Attorneys (GABWA), organizing professional international legal conferences in a host of countries, including Haiti, Belize, Egypt, Spain and Brazil among others. In addition, she is a former adjunct professor of Herzing University's Atlanta campus where she taught business law, critical thinking, speech and career development

Her judicial administration has meant increased court-to-community engagement, innovative educational opportunities and exemplary judicial leadership, demonstrated by her development and implementation of several unique court programs including the *Smart Justice Series*, a televised and e-lecture program that provides general procedural information to the public about the Magistrate Court's jurisdictional matters; her annual youth law camp for middle and high school students interested in the law-related professions; and *Just Art* Competition and Exhibition, a unique Law Day opportunity that showcases law-themed art of local adult and youth artists in a judicial environment. This visionary offering promotes cultural and intellectual public discourse on issues of justice and liberty, dynamically fosters civic pride and connection through the beautification of public space and supports trauma-informed litigation practices

Judge Aten has demonstrated a passionate commitment to best practices in court management. Her use of evidence-based court tools such as family violence and behavioral health assessments and mental health stabilization protocols have helped the Rockdale Judicial Circuit experience an impressive reduction rate in recidivism. Under her judicial leadership, the Magistrate Court of Rockdale County ranked fifth among 159 counties for division caseload management and garnered a Clearance Rate Excellence Award from the Judicial Council of Georgia prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, Judge Aten has been recognized as an inclusive trailblazer by several state and local legal and community-based organizations for historic inclusive hiring in the Rockdale Judicial Circuit. She appointed the first African American male and female chief clerks of the Magistrate Court of Rockdale County, and the first Latin junior clerk in the Circuit.

Judge Aten earned her law degree and a certificate of sports law from Tulane University and a bachelor's degree in public relations from Wayne State University. She garnered headlines and a reputation as a tenacious and seasoned criminal defense and family law litigator during her 14 years of private law practice. She was admitted to the State Bar of Georgia in 1998. As a result of her trial skills and legal scholarship, Judge Aten is a frequent guest speaker and lecturer on litigation techniques, substantive legal topics, leadership and inspirational matters. Judge Aten has presented over 20 professional legal papers, trainings and presentations for national, state and local judicial and legal institutions.