



February 11, 2022
Mid-Year Report from District 11
Honorable Maria Salas Mendoza

Arkansas, Oklahoma and Texas

MEMBERSHIP NEWS:

Members attended virtual meetings of District 11 on November 3, 2021 and January 5, 2022. District 11 currently has 101 members.

Welcome to the following new members!

Julia A. Maldonado (507th District Court, Harris), Josefina M. Rendon (fmr judge of 165th District Court, Harris), Sheila Garcia Bence (County Court at Law #4, Cameron), Denise M. Fortenberry (130th District Court, Matagorda), Shanice Johnson (Circuit Court, District 6, Arkansas), Fredericka Phillips (61st District Court, Harris), Barbara Stalder (280th District Court, Harris), Noemi Garcia-Martinez (Juvenile Court Referee, Cameron), Kathleen Overly (Associate Member, Director of Judicial Programs, UT School of Law), Holly Ann D'Andrea (Immigration Court, Conroe).

District 11 members Judge Kitty Schild (ret., El Paso), Judge Karen Sage, 299th District Court (Travis), Judge Brandy Mueller, 403rd District Court, Justice Bea Ann Smith (ret., Austin), Justice Gina Benavides, 13th Court of Appeals (Corpus Christi and Edinbur), and Sr. Judge Orlanda Narango (ret., Travis) and District Director Judge Maria Salas Mendoza, 120th District Court (El Paso) met in-person at NAWJ Annual Conference, October 2021.



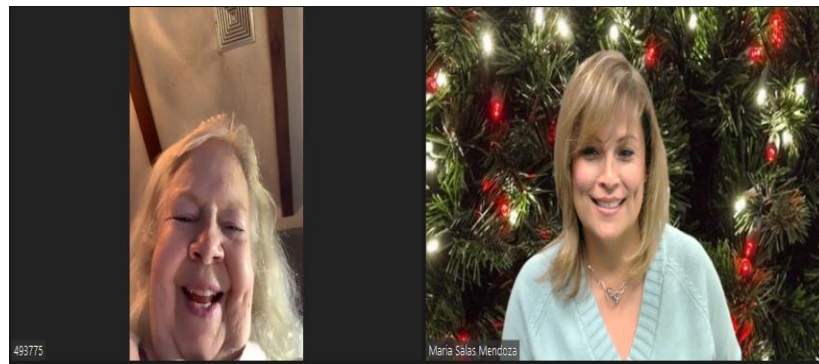
PROGRAMS/ACTIVITIES:

Congratulations to Judge Lesley Briones, Judge Victor Villarreal, Chief Justice Dori Contreras, Judge Maria Salas Mendoza, Judge Antonia “Toni” Arteaga, Justice Gina Benavides and Sr. Judge Orlinda Naranjo, founders of Texas Latinx Judges, for a well-attended second General Membership meeting on February 9, 2022. This is the only organization by and for Texas Latinx Judges in the state of Texas and only the 4th such organization in the United States. Its mission is to empower Latinx judges in the State of Texas, promote diversity, inclusion, integrity, and excellence in the judiciary.



On January 6, 2021, District Director Maria Salas Mendoza moderated a presentation for Texas Latinx Judges on Campaign Finance reports, Ask the Expert: Top Ten Campaign Filing Mistakes, featuring Jordan Hunn from the Texas Ethics Commission.

Holiday Toast: Members ended 2021 and Toasted to a New Year on December 16, 2021:



District 11 held a Membership Social in San Antonio, Texas, on December 9, 2021. Hosted by District 11 member and former District Director Chief Justice Rebeca Martinez at the 4th Court of Appeals, members and prospective members enjoyed lunch together and heard an NAWJ update from District Director Maria Salas Mendoza.



Later that evening, hosted by the Herrera Law Firm, District 11 members who are founding members of Texas Latinx Judges held a reception with the Hispanic Issues Section of the State Bar of Texas in San Antonio, Texas. Texas Latinx Judges was founded May 5, 2021, by District 11 members Judge Lesley Briones, Judge Victor Villarreal, Chief Justice Dori Contreras, Judge Maria Salas Mendoza, Justice Gina M. Benavides, Judge Toni Arteaga and Senior Judge Orlinda Naranjo.



Kudos to Judge Victor Villarreal who moderated a panel discussion, Navigating the Federal Judge Appointment Process, featuring Ambassador Edward C. Prado, Judge Fernando Rodriguez, Judge Irma Carrillo Ramirez and John W. Griffin (Chair of the Magistrate Merit Section Panels for the Southern District of Texas) on December 1, 2021.

A program of Texas Latinx Judges, *Succeeding in Law School & Our Journeys to the Bench*, featured District 11 members: Judge Renee Rodriguez-Betancourt (449th District Court), Judge Lesley Briones (Harris County Civil Court at Law No. 4), Justice Gisela Triana (Third Court of Appeals), Justice Gina Benavides (Thirteenth Court of Appeals), Judge Jessica Vazquez (El Paso County Criminal Court at Law No. 4), Judge Victor Villarreal (Webb County Court at Law No. 2) on November 4, 2021.

On October 27, 2021, Judge Lora Livingston, Justice Gina M. Benavides and Judge Selena Solis, were panelists for the presentation, *Can We Really Do That? The Ethics of Judicial Involvement in Pro Bono*, by the State Bar of Texas Pro Bono Work Group—Judiciary Subcommittee.

Speaking on the *Ethical Dos and Don'ts: The State Commission on Judicial Conduct, Social Media & More*, members Justice Gina M. Benavides and Sr. Judge Orlanda Naranjo, joined William J. Chriss, former Dean of the Texas Center for Legal Ethics and Professionalism, and Jacqueline Habersham, Executive Director of the State Commission on Judicial Conduct, for a fantastic presentation on October 21, 2021.

Judge Lesley Briones, Harris County Civil Court at Law No. 4, was a speaker at *COVID-19 and In Person Trials: What You Need To Know*, presented by the Hispanic Issues Section of the State Bar of Texas on October 6, 2021.

Chief Justice Dori Contreras, 13th Court of Appeals, spoke at the University of Houston Law Center on October 5, 2021, as part of the Center's Hispanic Heritage Program.

Judge Natalia Cornelio, 351st District Court (Harris), spoke at the Texas Democratic Women meeting celebrating Hispanic Heritage month in October 2021.

On October 2, 2021, Justice Gina M. Benavides was a panelist for the American Business Women's Foundation presentation, *Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Inspiration and Lessons from Successful Women in Male Dominated Fields*.

Justice Julie Countiss presented a *Legal Overview from the First Permanence Hearing through Final Orders and Beyond*, at the 2021 Child Welfare Judges Conference for the Texas Center for the Judiciary on September 2021.

Justice Julie Countiss also spoke at the Southeast Texas Area Correctional Facilities Committee Conference on the *Role of the Courts* in September 2021.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS and ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Long time member Judge Lora Livingston has announced that she will retire at the end of her term in December 2022. She has been the Travis County Local Administrative Judge since September 2020.

Judge Elisabeth Earle, County Court #7 (Travis County) is the new chair of the Judicial Section, State Bar of Texas. Founder of the court's DWI Treatment Court in 2008, she was elected by her peers and has been the Presiding Judge over County Court at Law Judges since 2011.

Judge Linda Chew, 327th District Court, will not seek re-election and will retire at the end of her term in December 2022. She is the Local Administrative Judge for the El Paso County Council of Judges since 2019.

Chief Justice Dori Contreras selected Chair of the Texas Council of Chiefs for 2021-2023. An NAWJ and founding member of Texas Latinx Judges, Chief Contreras is the first woman and Latina to serve as Chief Justice on the Thirteenth Court of Appeals. Likewise, she is the first Latina to serve as Chair of the Council. Chief Contreras was honored by the Hidalgo County Democratic Party on November 3, 2021, as the Democratic Woman of the Year 2021.

Senior Judge Orlinda Naranjo was awarded the Norma Wikler Excellence in Service Award by NAWJ at its annual conference held in Nashville, TN, in October 2021.

Judge Renee Rodriguez-Betancourt, 449th District Court, was appointed to the Texas Judicial Commission on Mental Health and the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute.

Judge Victor Villarreal was featured in UT Austin's School of Law Celebration honoring its alumni for National Hispanic Heritage Month in October 2021. Judge Villarreal was president of the Chicano/Hispanic Law Students' Association, the largest in the U.S., and he created the Susana I. Aleman Scholarship while a student at Texas Law. Judge Villarreal is proud of his NAWJ membership and is a founding member of Texas Latinx Judges.

Judge Rosie Speedlin Gonzalez, County Court at Law #13 (Bexar County) was named one of the Most Fascinating People in San Antonio for 2021. She was also recently appointed to serve on Congressman Joaquin Castro's Military Service Academy Nominations Committee.

The Hispanic Issues Section, State Bar of Texas, recognized the following members:

Justice Leticia Hinojosa, 13th Court of Appeals, received its Reynaldo G. Garza Lifetime Achievement Award. Named in honor of the first Mexican-American federal judge who subsequently was appointed in 1979 to serve on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, HIS recognizes Justice Hinojosa's contributions throughout her legal career to advance, support and open doors for others. A native of Brownsville, Justice Hinojosa was the first woman elected judge in South Texas and previously presided over Cameron County Court at Law No. 4 and the 139th District Court. She is an active member of local, state and national professional groups, she served on the Board of Texas Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) and was instrumental in establishing CASA in Hidalgo County. She was recognized by Governor Ann Richards for her exceptional community work as recipient of the Back to the People Award.

Judge Leslie Briones, Harris County Civil Court No. 4, received the James W. Wray, Jr. Founder's Award. The James W. Wray, Jr. Founder's Award, named for its first recipient, who vigorously advocated for the creation of Concerns of the Spanish Speaking Community, predecessor to this Section, will be presented to Harris County Civil Court at

Law No. 4 Judge Leslie Briones. A Laredo native, Judge Briones was a public school teacher there after graduation from Harvard University, before attending and being graduated from Yale Law School. She then was a litigator and tax lawyer at the Vinson & Elkins Law Firm, and has served as general counsel and chief operating officer of a national nonprofit organization. Presently, she is an adjunct professor at the University of Houston Law Center. She is the president and a co-founder of Texas Latinx Judges and Houston area co-chair of the National Association of Women Judges.



Chief Justice Rebeca Martinez, Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals, was named Judge of the Year. Chief Martinez graduated with honors from Incarnate Word Academy in San Antonio and was distinguished as a University Scholar at Southern Methodist University

before receiving her law degree from Boston University School of Law. She presides over a court with jurisdiction over 32 South Texas counties. She is a former District Director and continues to support the District's activities and programs.

