



April 5, 2021
Report from District 11
Honorable Maria Salas Mendoza

ARKANSAS, OKLAHOMA and TEXAS

State Chairs Committee Formation

Arkansas and Oklahoma: **Judge Stacey Zimmerman** will serve as Arkansas state chair. A tentative plan was made to hold an event honoring retiring judge Joyce Warrant, the first elected Black woman judge in Arkansas; it was decided that others might be honored too. Currently there are no active members from Oklahoma; outreach efforts continue.

Texas: Members have met monthly and decided that the State Chairs Committee should be comprised of representatives from the big urban areas, rural areas and all levels of court. The current State Chairs are: Supreme Court: **Justice Eva M. Guzman**; Coastal Areas/Courts of Appeal: **Justice Gina Benavides** and **Justice Leticia Hinojosa**; Travis: **Judge Orlanda Naranjo**; Dallas: **Judge D'Metria Benson**; Harris: **Judge Ronique Robinson** (also municipal), **Justice Julie Countiss** and **Judge Leslie Briones**; San Antonio: **Judge Antonia "Toni" Arteaga**; rural judges: **Judge Sarah Clark**; Justices of the Peace: **Judge Jan Morrow**. Members decided that we should look at court of appeals district for guidance in representation; that this view will ensure that rural/urban counties are covered. Members also want representation for all levels of court to include Justices of the Peace, Municipal Court judges, administrative law judges, federal courts, courts of appeal and Supreme Court.

Programs

On January 21st, 2021, a webinar was hosted: Supreme Women: Meet a Quartet of Justices Making Texas History. The four women serving on Texas's highest court introduced themselves to attendees which included lawyers, judges and law students. They also gave advice and encouragement based on their experiences and practice. The event was co-sponsored by the Hispanic Issues Section (SBOT), Women and the Law Section (SBOT), Judicial Section (SBOT) and Texas Women Lawyer.

The virtual Austin Color of Justice Program was held on March 25th and can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/5etxiT1NWxw> A \$1000 scholarship was awarded to Laura Rativa of the UT School of Law.

The Houston Color of Justice Program will be held on April 23rd, 2021. Its program is attached separately.

Programs are pending in El Paso (tentatively May 1st), San Antonio and the Coastal Areas.

Membership

Recruitment is ongoing with the District's High Five Challenge, a challenge for each member to recruit five (5) new members. Since November, twenty-one (21) members have joined and several others have renewed their dues.

Meetings:

District 11 State Chairs have met every month starting in November 2020, generally on the first Wednesday of the month at noon CST. These meetings are open to all members and approximately 20 members attend the meetings each month.

A Holiday Toast on December 30, 2020. Members joined for a toast to the end of 2020 and beginning of 2021. Members also toasted to the memory of Judge Klein.

Just Us (a take on "justice") is a new effort spearheaded by new member Judge Selena Solis, 243rd District Court (El Paso). It is a chance to visit with one another during a zoom "happy hour" which is just a non-structured time to chat and support each other. During its first session members visited about Harry and Megan, the Judicial Commission report regarding judicial elections, book clubs and the pending resolution from the NAWJ LGBTQ committee. The second Just Us will be held on April 8th.

Communication:

A quarterly (more or less) newsletter is sent to members. The two issues are attached to this report.

Special Events:

NAWJ is collaborating with Senator Judith Zaffirini's office to commemorate Texas Women Judges Day at the Capitol. Chief Justice Rebeca Martinez has been instrumental in ensuring that the pandemic does not halt this important tradition; a program highlighting the resolution reading and member testimonials is being planned.



NAWJ District 11

From the Director's Desk

It's been years since I have drafted a newsletter! In this short one, I wanted to introduce myself and tell you about some goings on as we all get ready to welcome the new year—hopefully with the end of a pandemic and a return to our courtrooms!

About me: I have been the judge of the 120th District Court since January 2007, served as Administrative District Judge from 2014-2018, have been involved in numerous State Bar of Texas activities where I currently serve as treasurer for the Hispanic Issues Section Council and am council member for the Women in the Law Section and Judicial Section. I have also been a judicial advisor to Texas Women Lawyers for many years. Most recently I am honored to have been on faculty for the Texas Center for the Judiciary's 2019 and 2020 College For New Judges.

I was born and raised in El Paso and aside from college and law school, I am proud to call this small big city my home. My oldest son, Michael, is a prosecutor for Ft. Bend County; my daughter, Melina, is working on a Master's degree and holds her BA from St. John's University (Queens) and the baby, Dillon, is graduating from high school this year having had, in my opinion, the worst senior year ever.

I am looking forward to a great year as your District Director. Together, I know that we can build our District, support each other and serve our communities.

Meet Your District 11 State Chairs

The State Chairs Committee provides support for district governance. District 11 includes Arkansas, Oklahoma and Texas. The goal is to have representation from all areas of each state and all levels of court. More help is needed.

Arkansas: Stacey Zimmerman

Texas: Eva M. Guzman (Supreme Court)
Ronique Robinson (Harris; municipal)
Julie Countiss (Harris/appellate)
Lesley Briones (Harris)
Gina Benavides (Coastal Areas/appellate)
Leticia Hinojosa (Coastal Areas/appellate)
Sarah Clark (rural)
D'Metria Benson (Dallas)
Antonia Arteaga (San Antonio)
Jan Morrow (JPs)

District 11 Needs **YOU**:
OKLAHOMA
Tarrant
West Texas (not EP)



UPCOMING EVENTS

SUPREME WOMEN: A QUARTET OF JUSTICES MAKING TEXAS HISTORY THUR, JAN. 21, 2021 @ NOON CST Meet the four women Justices now serving on the Texas Supreme Court. The Justices will share their stories and impart advice and guidance for all judges. Their historic service on the Texas's highest court comes at a time when the judiciary has had to meet the challenge of keeping the courts operating and continuing to administer justice. This webinar seeks to begin 2021 with inspiration and motivation for the continuing challenges. **Mark your calendars.**

COLOR OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS

District 11 has co-chairs in Austin, Houston, Coastal Areas and El Paso planning COJ Programs in their cities for Spring 2021. Please email me at masalas@epcounty.com so that I can put you in touch with the judges on these committees.

NAWJ 43rd ANNUAL CONFERENCE IN NASHVILLE, TN

October 6th through the 10th, 2021. Details coming your way soon.



NAWJ District 11

Volume 1 Issue 2

December 2020

HISPANAS HACEN HISTORIA / LATINAS MAKE HISTORY

CONTRIBUTED BY JUDGE LESLEY BRIONES

Univision recently featured several Houston-area Latina judges on its national “Despierta America” (“Good Morning America”) program. In its segment, “Hispanas Hacen Historia,” Univision highlighted the Latina judges known as—“Las Super Seis” (“The Super Six”), who recently won their elections in Harris County.

Even though Harris County has over 2 million Latinos, which make up approximately 45% of the population, Latinos are substantially underrepresented on the bench in Harris County. For example, even after the recent November 2020 election, only 4 of 30 civil judges in Harris County are Latinos. Further, there are no federal judges in Harris County who are Latino, and there are no Latinos on the U.S. 5th Circuit Court of Appeals. While more work is needed, Univision highlighted the historic progress made with the election of these Latinas. With the election of Associate Municipal Judge Amparo Guerra and Veronica Rivas-Molloy, for instance, Texas’ 1st Court of Appeals will now have Latino representation, which it has not had for years.

Univision asked each judge/judge-elect to share their backgrounds, highlight the importance of having a diverse bench, and give advice to youth on the importance of dreaming big and working hard. The Super Six featured on “Despierta America” include: Judge Julia Maldonado (507th District Court), Judge Lesley Briones (Harris County Civil Court at Law No. 4), Associate Municipal Judge/Justice-Elect Amparo Guerra (1st Court of Appeals, Place 5), Justice-Elect Veronica Rivas-Molloy (1st Court of Appeals, Place 3), Judge-Elect Natalia ‘Nata’ Cornelio (351st District Court), and Judge-Elect Ana Martinez (179th District Court).

NOTE: Judge Jo Ann Delgado—Justice of the Peace, Precinct 2, Place 1—Judge Delgado was featured in the background screen/pictures of “Despierta America,” yet did not appear and is not considered part of the “Super Seis.” She made history as the first Latina to hold the office of Harris County Justice of the Peace when she was elected in January 2001.

KUDOS

Judge **Darlene Byrne**, 126th District Court, elected Chief Judge of the Third Court of Appeals.

Judge **Brandy Mueller**, former District II Director, serves as secretary of the NAWJ Board.

Judge **Karen Sage**, former District II Director, serves as Chair of NAWJ Special Projects.

Judge **Maya Guerra Gamble** and Justice **Julie Countiss** serve on the NAWJ Membership Committee.

Congrats to Chief Justice **Dori Contreras**, 13th Court of Appeals, now serving on the executive committee of the Council of Chief Judges for the State Courts of Appeal (CCJSCA) and as Chair of its membership committee.

Congratulations to New Judges!

Almost 90 new judges from around Texas participated in the first (I hope last) virtual College for New Judges on December 7-8, 2020. All judges are encouraged to join NAWJ!

<https://www.nawj.org/join>





NAWJ District 11

Volume 1 Issue 2

March 2021

From the Director's Desk

Happy New Year, Valentine's Day and St. Patrick's Day!

Are you like me—thinking that we are going to get back to our lives as they were prior to March 2020 and then it's another day and another month and another catastrophic event (after another) and all of sudden we are still in pandemic mode one year after it started!! Time is a weird concept these days; some days I feel like things are the way they should be and I feel calm and blessed and the next day (sometimes it's one minute to the next), I'm filled with dread that life will never be the same.

Through it all, I am fortunate to have called on so many of you for advice and leadership. Since our last newsletter, we've met in District meetings, our Holiday Happy Drink and most recently in our Just Us social session. Talking with you, laughing, discussing and commiserating has been great for my sanity. Thank you.

Our work continues. We just held the first virtual Color of Justice program in Texas—out of Austin. Thank you to Judge Orlinda Naranjo, Judge Lora Livingston, Judge Karin Crump and Emily Morris for all your help. You may watch it on Judge Livingston's YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCltYtLgXTXDaHawKmX0koGw>.

I sent to each one of you the information about IDLO's (International Development Law Organization) program "Women Delivering Justice: Achieving Gender Parity in the Justice Sector." I hope some of you caught it. The program was organized by the International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ—to which we all belong as members of NAWJ), IDLO, the ABA and the Institute of African Women in the Law (IAWL).

ABA President Patricia Lee Refo remarked that the ABA's first report from the Commission on Women, delivered by Hillary Clinton, in 1988 found that the increase of women in the profession did not diminish the obstacles for women and that there remains a need to review the structures that create challenges and obstacles for women. In the most recent report of the Commission, President Refo notes that while there have been some improvements for women these improvements have not been experienced at the same level for women of color. And Dr. J Jarpa Dawuni, Howard University Professor, emphasized that this qualitative review should consider "lift experiences" from an intersectional perspective.

Chief Justice Rebeca Martinez, 4th Court of Appeals, asked what could be done about the perception that courts where women predominate are seen as less competent or effective. The answer given was that it will help once there are more women in those positions (that's how I heard the reply from President Refo). Is that enough? Can we be more proactive?

Justice Susan Glazebrook, Supreme Court of New Zealand and President-Elect of IAWJ, commented about the importance of addressing arguments that "merit" is an objective qualifier, when merit is only considered from one perspective, typically from that of dominant white males. She argues that merit could consider diversity as a qualification. We need to urge this!

Thank you for your membership and participation. Look for all our meetings coming up! See you there!

District 11 State Chairs

- Stacey Zimmerman (AR)
- vacant (OK)
- Eva M. Guzman (TX Supreme Court)
- Gina Benavides (Coastal Areas/Appellate)
- Julie Countiss (Harris/Appellate)
- Leticia Hinojosa (Coastal Areas/Appellate)
- Antonia Arteaga (San Antonio)
- D'Metria Benson (Dallas)
- Lesley Briones (Harris)
- Sarah Clark (rural judges)
- Jan Morrow (JPs)
- Orlinda Naranjo (Austin)
- Ronique Robinson (Harris; Municipal)
- vacant (Ft. Worth)
- vacant (west Texas)



- 4-7-2021 District 11 Meeting, noon
Zoom Meeting ID: 255 147 9825
- 4-8-2021 Just Us session
Zoom Meeting ID: 255 147 9825
- 4-13-2021 Texas Women's Day at the Capitol

4-15-16, 2021 **NAWJ Mid-Year Meeting**
(virtual) Cost is \$25.

REGISTER HERE

4-23-2021 **Color of Justice (Houston),**





NAWJ District 11

Volume 1 Issue 2

March 2021

Why Participate in NAWJ?

I am a part of NAWJ because I love learning from brilliant, strong, female jurists from across the country. We empower each other, and by sharing our experiences and ideas—together—we improve the justice system.

*Judge Lesley Briones
Civil Court At Law #4
Houston*

NAWJ's "about us" information provides:

Since its formation in 1979, the National Association of Women Judges (NAWJ) has inspired and led the American judiciary in achieving fairness and equality for vulnerable populations. NAWJ's mission is to promote the judicial role of protecting the rights of individuals under the rule of law through strong, committed, diverse judicial leadership; fairness and equality in the courts; and equal access to justice.

Led by two visionary women - Justice Joan Dempsey Klein and Justice Vaino Spencer - 100 brave and intrepid women judges met and formed an organization dedicated to the following ideals:

- Ensuring equal justice and access to the courts for all including women, youth, the elderly, minorities, the under-privileged and people with disabilities;*
- Providing judicial education on cutting-edge issues of importance;*
- Developing judicial leaders;*
- Increasing the number of women on the bench in order for the judiciary to accurately reflect the role of women in the democratic society;*
- Improving the administration of justice to provide gender-fair decisions for both male & female litigations.*

NAWJ was at the forefront in the establishment and implementation of gender bias task forces in both federal and state courts. We have greatly advanced the administration of justice in areas of domestic violence, child support and child custody, and the treatment of women in the courts of America.

But with all you do and with so many organizations to which you can donate your time, why NAWJ?

** Because it has enabled me to meet so many incredible women who I admire and can learn from—both professionally and personally.
-Ret. Judge Kitty Schild, El Paso*

**Why not? -Judge Toni Arteaga, 57th Civil District Court, San Antonio*

ANNOUNCEMENT FROM TEXAS WOMEN LAWYERS

We are committed to the EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN ATTORNEYS....through our network we advocate THE INTERESTS OF WOMEN in the JUSTICE SYSTEM AND SOCIETY - TWL Mission Statement

We can't achieve these goals without **YOU!**

Texas Women Lawyers invites you to get involved today in 3 simple ways:

1....SIGN UP to attend our virtual annual meeting/CLE on March 25, 2021 at 3:00 pm. Attendance is free.

****I hope some of you did.****

2....JOIN OR RENEW your membership! Dues are only \$50/year for attorneys (licensed 6+ years), \$35/year for attorneys (licensed 1-5 years), \$35/yr. (members of judiciary) and \$10/yr. (law students). There are also memberships for women's organizations, sustaining members and lifetime members.

To join or renew, click [here \[r20.rs6.net\]](http://r20.rs6.net).

3....SERVE ON OUR BOARD! If you are interested in a board or advisory position, or to find out more information, please send an email to Deborah Cordova at dcordova@wmcnlaw.com.



NAWJ District 11



Judge Lora Livingston

KUDOS

Judge Lora J. Livingston, 261st District Court (Austin) is receiving the Jurisprudence Award from the Anti-Defamation League (Austin) on April 13, 2021, noon CST. For more information and to register to attend, visit the event website: www.adl.org/JurisprudenceAustin

Judge Tonya Parker, 116th Civil District Court (Dallas) received the Dallas Bar Association Martin Luther King Jr. Justice Award in January 2021. The award is presented to local leaders whose lives and practices exemplify the principles embodied by King's leadership.

Judge Emily Miskel, 470th District Court (Collin) was awarded the 2020 William H Rehnquist Award for Judicial Excellence by the National Center for State Courts in September 2020.

~ Send superlatives, recognitions and award information to me ANY time—masalas@epcounty.com~

TEXAS WOMEN JUDGES DAY AT THE STATE CAPITOL



NAWJ is proud to collaborate with Chief Justice Rebeca Martinez, who has ensured the support of Senator Judith Zaffirini to sponsor a resolution honoring Texas Women Judges on Tuesday, April 13, 2021. **DETAILS TO FOLLOW.**

The State Bar of Texas Women and the Law Section is seeking nominations for the Sarah T. Hughes Women Lawyers of Achievement Award and the Louise B. Raggio Award.

The Sarah T. Hughes Women Lawyers of Achievement Award honors women attorneys who have achieved outstanding recognition in the profession and paved the way for others. More information on award criteria can be found [here](#).

The Louise B. Raggio Award honors attorneys (and legal associations) that further justice in our society, particularly for women. More information on award criteria can be found [here](#).

Nomination letters or statements and the nominee's resume can be submitted by email to sbotwomenandthelaw@gmail.com. The deadline for submissions is April 23.

IAWJ Biennial Conference Auckland, New Zealand | May 7-9, 2021 (NZ time)

We are very excited to be hosting the IAWJ Biennial Conference from May 7-9, 2021 (NZ time). We have a glittering array of speakers and the conference will have a real New Zealand flavor, while retaining the usual features of IAWJ conferences. It is disappointing not to be able to welcome you to New Zealand in person but we really look forward to seeing as many of you as possible virtually. Please do not let COVID-19 deprive us of the pleasure of connecting globally with judges from around the world at the IAWJ's signature event.

In the interests of having as many of you at the conference as possible, we are pleased to announce that we have extended early bird to **April 12, 2021**. For IAWJ members, this means a registration fee for virtual attendance of USD 275. For non-members, the early bird registration fee is USD 400. To register, please click [here \[iawj2021auckland.com\]](http://iawj2021auckland.com).



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN JUDGES

COLOR OF JUSTICE

*Enhancing Diversity in Houston's Legal
Profession and Judiciary, One Student at a Time*

SPONSORED BY:

National Association of Women Judges

In collaboration with the:

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- Andrews Myers, P.C.
- Association of Women Attorneys – Houston
- Asian American Bar Association of Houston
- Baker Botts LLP
- Bastine Law Group
- Blank Rome LLP
- Hispanic Bar Association of Houston
- Houston Bar Association
- Houston Lawyers Association

FRIDAY, APRIL 23, 2021

9 A.M.-12:30 P.M. via ZOOM

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

- Judge Lesley Briones
- Judge Sandra Peake
- Justice Julie Countiss
- Justice Sarah Beth Landau
- McFarland PLLC
- Mexican American Bar Association of Houston
- South Asian Bar Association of Houston
- The Houston Family Law Group
- Vinson & Elkins LLP
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