

Hon. Ernestine Steward Gray, Retired Juvenile Court Judge

Judge Gray was first elected to the Orleans Parish Juvenile Court, Section "A" on November 6, 1984. She served on that bench until her retirement on December 31, 2020.

A native of South Carolina, she received her early education in the public schools of Orangeburg, South Carolina. She attended Spelman College of Atlanta, Georgia, and the Louisiana State University School of Law, where she received her Juris Doctorate degree in 1976. She completed a training program for new judges at the National College of Juvenile Justice at the University of Nevada, in 1985. In May of 1987 she successfully completed a faculty development seminar sponsored by the National Judicial College and the National Association of Women Judges.

Before election to the bench, worked in private practice, with the Baton Rouge Legal Aid Society handling family law cases, the Louisiana Attorney General in the Antitrust Unit, and the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

Active in civic and community affairs, she is a member of numerous professional and civic organizations and has served on many boards and committees. In addition to her membership in the Louisiana State Bar she is an active member of the American Bar Association, the National Association of Women Judges, the National Bar Association the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges as well as several specialty bar associations. She is a member of the NAACP, the New Orleans Chapter of the Spelman College Alumnae Association, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. and the New Orleans Chapter of the Links, Inc.

She is past president of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, National Court Appointed Special Advocates as well as the local YWCA, YMCA, and the Volunteers of America Boards of Directors.

While on the bench she developed innovative programs in her court room to reduce her docket with the goal of being able to hear and decide cases as expeditiously as possible to meet the needs of the children, families, and the community. She regularly appeared before the state Legislature to speak and provide information on issues relating to youth in both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. In addition, she has been invited on several occasions to speak before committees of the United States Congress.

Her numerous leadership awards include: 2020 ABA Criminal Justice Section's Charles R. English Award, 2020 National Court Appointed Special Advocates/Guardian ad Litem (CASA/GAL) Children's Champion Award, 2020 Distinguished Alumnus of the Year, Louisiana State University School of Law, 2019 Member of the Louisiana Justice Hall of Fame, 2019 Casey Excellence for Children Award – Leadership, 2018 Member of the National Bar Association Fred C. Gray Hall of Fame, 2018 Outstanding Service Award, The Fellows of the American Bar Association, 2008 Honorary Membership, Louisiana Chapter of the Order of the Coif, 2004 Recipient of the Spirit of Crazy Horse Award Reclaiming Youth International, 2002 Albert Elias Award for Advancement of Compassionate Care of Troubled Youth, National Council on Crime and Delinquency, 2000 Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, in recognition for achievements that have made the future safer and brighter for children and families in America's communities and the 1995 American Bar Association Franklin D. Flaschner Judicial Award.