

2024 NAWJ Midyear Meeting

April 4-6, Austin

Schedule

Thursday, April 4

- 12:00 PM - 4:00 PM NAWJ Board Meeting
- 4:15 PM - 5:30 PM Law Student Mentorship Program - Planting the Seed
- 4:30 PM - 5:30 PM Committee Meetings
- 5:30 PM - 7:00 PM Opening Reception

Friday, April 5

- 9:00 AM - 9:50 AM Welcome & Breakfast
- 10:00 AM - 10:45 AM Plenary Session - Judicial Security: A Personal Perspective
- 11:00 AM - 12:15 PM Education Session - Safety Planning for Judges: From Pre-attack Indicators to Protecting Personally Identifiable Information
- 12:30 PM - 1:45 PM Plenary Luncheon - Taking the Lead
- 2:15 PM - 3:30 PM Education Session - Beyond the Basics: Domestic Violence and the Judiciary
- 3:45 PM - 5:00 PM Education Session - A Transgender Perspective on Transgender People
- 5:00 PM - 6:00 PM Resource Board Meeting
- 6:15 PM - 8:00 PM Dinner on own
- 8:00 PM - 9:00 PM Dessert Reception

Saturday, April 6

- 8:00 AM - 9:00 AM Breakfast
- 9:00 AM - 10:30 AM Education Session & Closing Conversation - SOS! IVP Toolkit for Protecting our Judiciary



Presenters and Presentations

Judicial Security: A Personal Perspective

Speaker: Hon. Julie Kocurek

In this Plenary Session, Judge Julie Kocurek will talk about her personal experiences concerning judicial security. By the end of the session, the audience will be privately provided security tips and tools for Judges' personal and family safety.



Judge Julie Kocurek has served Judge as the presiding judge of the 390th District Court of Travis County in Austin since 1999. Kocurek presides over felony criminal cases and has been Board Certified in Criminal Law for 25 years. Her most significant work has been improving the indigent defense system in Travis County and creating the first Mental Health Court in Travis County.

After an assassination attempt on her life in November of 2015, 40 days in the hospital and 30 surgeries, Kocurek returned to the bench after only four months. She came back to the bench because of her passion for being a judge and for helping people change the course of their lives. She worked with the legislature to pass the Judge Julie Kocurek Judicial Security Act and she continues to advocate for judicial security in Texas and across the country.

Most importantly, Julie Kocurek is a wife and mother of 24-year-old twins.

Safety Planning for Judges: From Pre-attack Indicators to Protecting Personally Identifiable Information

Speaker: John Muffler

The recent history of judicial attacks and assassinations has been paved by bad actors who have exploited online personal information to carry out their attacks. This session will address safety and security planning for judges and their families at home, where most targeted attacks occur, and digitally. Discussions will center on the attacker's pathway to violence and pre-incident indicators, the importance of situational awareness, and what a judge can do to mitigate their risk in this ever-polarizing environment. Tips on protective measures will be offered on how best to secure one's home and digital footprint.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand pathway to violence behavior of a judicial pursuer.
- Identify strategies in your work and home environment to reduce victimization.
- Develop skills to conduct your own risk assessment.

John Muffler, MS, CTM, Principal of Aequitas Global Security, LLC, is a consultant for Atlas Privacy, a next generation privacy company that removes personal information from data broker websites. He led the National Center for Judicial Security for the U.S. Marshals Service prior to retirement and is faculty/consultant for the National Judicial College, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, Florida Judiciary's Advanced Judicial Studies program, the National Center for State Courts, and is a member of the American Bar Association's Judicial Division. John has authored dozens of publications on judicial security, threat assessment, and stalking and has been a guest speaker on CNN, NewsNation, and ABC News.



Presenters and Presentations

Taking the Lead,

Speaker: Paige Flink

Community safety can be improved when judges work with the system to help solve challenges. The session will explore the ideas of dedicated domestic violence courts, creative solutions to offender gun removal, the establishment of high-risk offender teams and other ideas implemented in Dallas County, TX.

Learning Objectives:

- Develop an understanding of processes needed to speed up the time between the dispatch of 911 DV calls to the disposition of cases.
- Determine if a high-risk felony domestic violence docket makes sense in your community.

***Paige Flink** is the recently retired CEO of The Family Place, the largest family violence service organization in North Texas. Paige has been a vocal advocate for ending family violence since she joined the organization in 1991. Paige has been instrumental in changing public perception and the North Texas community's response to family violence.*



Beyond the Basics: Domestic Violence and the Judiciary

Speaker: Kelsey McKay

This training program is designed to provide judges with a comprehensive understanding of domestic violence and the critical role they play in addressing this pervasive issue within the legal system. The course will delve into the multifaceted dynamics of domestic violence, how it intersects with various legal systems, and the strategies judges can employ to prevent further victimization. By the end of this training, judges will be equipped with the knowledge and tools to effectively navigate the complexities of domestic violence within legal systems, mitigate re-victimization, and contribute to safer and more equitable outcomes for survivors.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the dynamics and prevalence of domestic abuse and domestic violence within society.
- Identify the various forms of domestic abuse and domestic violence, including physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, and financial abuse.
- Recognize the impact of domestic abuse and domestic violence on victims, families, and communities.
- Develop skills in conducting risk assessments and safety planning for victims of domestic abuse and domestic violence.
- Identify potential biases and stereotypes that may impact judicial decision-making in domestic abuse and domestic violence cases and learn strategies to mitigate them.
- Explore strategies for holding perpetrators of domestic abuse and domestic violence accountable while ensuring due process and procedural fairness.
- Reflect on the ethical considerations and self-care practices for judges handling domestic abuse and domestic violence cases.

***Kelsey McKay** is an attorney and a recognized expert in criminal asphyxiation, interpersonal violence, sexual assault, and homicide prevention. With twelve years of experience as a child abuse and domestic violence prosecutor in Travis County, Texas, Kelsey specialized in prosecuting strangulation-related crimes, including assault, sexual assault, and capital murder. Her expertise led to the development of a widely used strangulation supplement for law enforcement, medical professionals, and other first responders in the community.*



She has served as counsel and consultant in cases to assist victims in the criminal system, family court, Title IX, civil cases, and has successfully defended criminalized survivors charged with crimes ranging from assault to murder.

Presenters and Presentations

A Transgender Perspective on Transgender People

Speakers: Stephanie Byers, Lori Haas, Hon. Victoria Kolakowski, Sofia Sepulveda

Issues regarding transgender individuals, especially transgender youth, have dominated both the headlines and legislative calendars for the past several years. Unfortunately, the voices of actual transgender people are often ignored, allowing the public discourse to be dominated by misconceptions and polemics on all sides.

The purpose of this presentation is to educate NAWJ members about transgender people, including transgender youth, and their families. The panelist will discuss how the current debates are impacting transgender people and their families in Texas and throughout the country. Panelists include a transgender former legislator and teacher, a therapist whose practice focuses on transgender people and their families, and a community organizer who meets with transgender people and their families in the community. The moderator is an openly transgender judge who has worked with the transgender community for decades and frequently teaches about law and the transgender community.

Learning Objectives:

- Learn about the lived experiences of transgender individuals.
- Gain a more nuanced understanding of the complex issues regarding transgender people.
- Learn about the impact of actions taken regarding transgender people on their family and friends.
- Identify challenges faced by transgender individuals and their families due to legislative actions.



Stephanie Byers received the National Educator of the Year from GLSEN in 2018. In 2019, Stephanie retired from a 32 year career in public education. In 2020 she made US History as the first transgender, Native American ever elected to a state legislature in the United States. Stephanie served in the Kansas House of Representatives in 2021 and 2022. A late in life transitioner, Stephanie began living as her authentic self in 2014. Since that time she has become a frequent panelist and presenter on transgender issues in politics, healthcare, education, and general transgender 101 discussions. She was part of the featured panel for the White House Virtual Pride Celebration in 2021. In 2023, Stephanie and her wife, Lori Haas, moved from Kansas to San Antonio to help with aging parents.

Judge Victoria Kolakowski became the first openly transgender trial court judge of general jurisdiction when she was elected in Alameda County, California in 2010.

Before becoming a trial court judge, she was an attorney for twenty-one years in Louisiana and California, serving as a sole practitioner, attorney in a small patent boutique firm, patent and licensing counsel for a publicly-traded company, patent and general counsel of a second publicly-traded company, a senior government utility regulatory attorney, and an administrative law judge (ALJ) for two different California agencies.



Sofia Sepulveda is the Community Engagement and Advocacy manager at Equality Texas, a first generation Mexican American Trans-Woman, She has been organizing in San Antonio for the past 9 years on Healthcare and Environmental Justice, she is the lead organizer for the Healthcare for All march in San Antonio, co-founder of Trans Power San Antonio, as well as organized the Women's March in San Antonio for the last 4 years. She was recognized as one of the 25 influential women who run San Antonio in 2019 for her work in healthcare. In 2021 alongside amazing activists and organizers in Texas she helped to pass legislation that extended Medicaid for new mothers from 2 to 6 months.

Presenters and Presentations

SOS! IVP Toolkit for Protecting our Judiciary

Speakers: Hon. Gina Benavides, Hon. Dori Contreras

The purpose of this presentation is to inform attendees of program materials prepared by IVP Committee members over the past several years that are available to use for public education in a variety of ways. These materials, which are available either through the NAWJ website or by direct request, include PowerPoint slide decks, videos in English and Spanish, animated video regarding judicial elections, and one-page single-subject handouts that can be adapted for specific state use and printed.

In an election year like this one, in which many judges are on ballots all over the country, we want our members to be aware of the existing tools they can use to combat misinformation and unfounded attacks on the records and service of judges that undermine judicial independence. We encourage NAWJ members to use these materials for public educational efforts of any kind, so that voters will have accurate and reliable information and criteria for evaluation of judges.

Learning Objectives:

- Recognize threats to judicial independence.
- Evaluate factors contributing to decline in public trust and confidence in the judicial branch.
- Engage in strategies to strengthen judicial independence.
- Identify resources to educate the public on the judicial branch and the importance of an independent and impartial judiciary.

Justice Gina M. Benavides was first elected to the Thirteenth Court of Appeals in 2006, and most recently elected to her third six-year term in 2018.

The Texas Supreme court Historical Society Awarded Justice Benavides the President's Award at their John Hemphill Dinner in September 2023. And at the State Bar of Texas Annual Meeting in June 2023, the Hispanic Issue Awarded her the Reynaldo Garza Lifetime Achievement Award. The Hidalgo County Bar Association most recently bestowed on her the Ethics Award at their annual Gala in May of 2023.

Justice Benavides currently serves on the Board of the Appellate Section of the State Bar of Texas and chaired the Appellate Diversity Subcommittee. She also serves on the Pattern Jury Charge on the Damages and recently joined the Texas Supreme Court Historical Society and is leading their website committee.



Chief Justice Dori Contreras was first elected as a Justice to the 13th Court of Appeals in 2002 and was re-elected in 2008 and 2014. She was elected Chief Justice in 2018 and will serve in this position through 2024. It is her honor to be the first woman Chief Justice of the 13th Court of Appeals and, at the time of her election, only the second Latina Chief Justice to serve statewide.



Chief Justice Contreras was raised as the youngest of four children. Her parents were first generation Mexican American. Both sets of grandparents immigrated from Mexico in the early 1900's. Chief Justice Contreras attended the University of Texas at Austin from which she received a Bachelor of Business Administration in Accounting in December of 1980. She was the first in her family to graduate from college. Chief Justice Contreras moved to Houston, Texas and worked as an accountant for several years before applying to law school. In 1987, as a wife and mother of two daughters, she began law school in the night program at the University of Houston Law Center and continued working full-time. After one year and one-half, she transferred to the full-time program. She was admitted to the Bar in December of 1990.

Leading & Supporting NAWJ

Board of Directors

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

President

Hon. Karen Sage, 299th District Court, Travis County, Texas

President-Elect

Hon. Michelle Rick, Michigan Court of Appeals, Lansing Michigan

Vice President, Districts

Hon. Vivian Medinilla, Superior Court of Delaware, Wilmington, Delaware

Vice President, Publications

Hon. Heather Welch, Marion Superior Court (Ret.), Indianapolis, Indiana

Secretary

Hon. Victoria Willis, 15th Judicial Circuit, Stafford, Virginia

Treasurer

Hon. Carmen Velasquez, Association of Justices of the Supreme Court of the State of New York, Jamaica, New York

Immediate Past President

Hon. Toni Clarke, Circuit Court for Prince George's County, Maryland (Ret.)

Finance Committee Chair

Hon. Leslie Stroth, New York State Supreme Court, New York

STATUS DIRECTORS

International Director

Hon. Lisa Walsh, 11th Judicial Circuit, Civil Division, Miami, Florida

ABA Delegate

Hon. Ann Breen-Greco, Independent Administrative Judicial Professional, Chicago, Illinois

Committees Liaison

Hon. Mimi Tsankov, National Association of Immigration Judges, New York, NY

Projects Committee Chair

Hon. Kathy J. King, Supreme Court of New York, Kings County, New York, New York

STAFF

Executive Director

Laurie Denham, CAE

Director of Development

Francie Teer, CFRE

Operations

Brian Gorg

Membership

Janelle Mihoc

Finance and Accounting

Megan Collie



Board of Directors (Continued)

DISTRICT DIRECTORS

District One (ME,MA,NH,PR,RI)

Hon. Amy Lyn Blake, Massachusetts Appeals Court, Boston, Massachusetts

District Two (CT, NY,VT)

Hon. Bianka Perez, Supreme Court, Bronx County Civil Term, Bronx, New York

District Three (DE, NJ, PA, VI)

Hon. Lisa James-Beavers, New Jersey Superior Court, Mt. Holly, New Jersey

District Four (DC, MD, VA)

Hon. Bobbie McCartney, U.S. Department of Agriculture (Ret.), Vienna, Virginia

District Five (FL, GA, NC, SC)

Hon. Phinia Aten, Magistrate Court of Rockdale County, Conyers, Georgia

District Six (AL, LA, MS, TN)

Hon. Barbara Holmes, U.S. District Court, Middle District of Tennessee, Nashville, Tennessee

District Seven (MI, OH, WV)

Hon. Miriam Perry, 15th District Court, Ann Arbor, Michigan

District Eight (IL, IN, KY)

Hon. Patrice Ball-Reed, Circuit Court of Cook County, Chicago, Illinois

Hon. Julie Verheye, St. Joseph Circuit Court, South Bend, Indiana

District Nine (IA, MO, WI)

Hon. Karen Romano, Iowa District Court, Johnston, Iowa

District Ten (KS, MN, NE, ND, SD)

Hon. Rachel Pickering, Kansas Court of Appeals, Topeka, Kansas

District Eleven (AR, OK, TX)

Hon. Gina Benavides, 13th Court of Appeals, Edinburg, Texas

District Twelve (AZ, CO, NM, UT, WY)

Hon. Jennifer Mabey, Utah District Court, Heber City, Utah

District Thirteen (AK, HI, ID, MT, OR, WA)

Hon. Bride Seifert, Homer Superior Court, Homer, Alaska

District Fourteen (CA, NV)

Hon. Victoria Kolakowski, Alameda County Superior Court, Hayward, California

NAWJ Resource Board

- Nicole Erb, Esq. (Co-Chair), White & Case
- Sarah London, Esq. (Co-Chair), Lief Cabraser Heimann & Bernstein
- Rachel Baumer, Thomson Reuters
- The Honorable Mary Becnel, Retired
- Elizabeth Cabraser, Esq., Lief Cabraser Heimann & Bernstein
- Teresa Harmon, LexisNexis
- David Horrigan, Esq., Relativity
- Robert Kaufman, Esq., Proskauer Rose
- Thomas Leighton, Thomson Reuters
- Richard Levenstein, Cummins-Levenstein Charitable Foundation, Inc.
- Diane McGimsey, Esq., Sullivan & Cromwell
- Elaine Metlin, Esq., Retired
- Mike Newlin, LexisNexis
- Christopher Poole, JAMS
- Cathy Winter-Palmer, Retired

Landmark Partners

GOLD

JAMS, Inc.
Robert Kaufman, Esq.
LexisNexis
Lief Cabraser Heimann & Bernstein
Thomson Reuters Corporation
White & Case

SILVER

Mary Becnel
Cummins-Levenstein Charitable Foundation, Inc.
Relativity

BRONZE

Sullivan & Cromwell



Sponsors

NORTON ROSE FULBRIGHT



ALEXANDER DUBOSE JEFFERSON
Appellate Counsel

SCOTT
DOUGLASS
McCONNICO



the answer company™
THOMSON REUTERS®



BURGESS
LAW



TRAVIS COUNTY
WOMEN LAWYERS'
ASSOCIATION



AUSTIN BAR ASSOCIATION

Honorable Orlanda Naranjo

Save the Date

2024 Annual Conference



**Bridging the Past, Present
and Future of Justice**

2024 Conference, October 17-19, San Diego

