

NAWJ PRESIDENT'S REPORT

The year of my Presidency has been one with great challenges. I took my presidential oath at the 40th Annual Meeting of the National Association of Women Judges in Los Angeles and charted a course for the work I was to embark on. The theme for my presidential year is “Innovative Efforts to Improve Access to Justice through Global Judicial Leadership”. The unprecedented pandemic of Covid-19 shaped our vision to go beyond what I planned for my year of presidency. When I took my oath, I could not fathom NAWJ would soon be engaged in developing real time innovations to address access to justice and our courts. Now more than ever we have equipped ourselves with the ability to lead our organization through the uncharted territory.

With the dawn of new challenges due to the pandemic, NAWJ shifted its role of planning programs district wide and nationally. In April, I appointed Judge Lisa Walsh as the Chair of Technology and formed a Taskforce on Covid-19 with Judges Elizabeth White and Elizabeth Lee as co-chairs of the Taskforce. Click [here](#) for a brief summary of the webinars the Taskforce organized.

Judges and court systems at every level have implemented many changes in the wake of the global pandemic. In most jurisdictions, chief justices responded to Executive orders by implementing regulations and limiting the number of persons in a courtroom “Courts on the Frontline: Providing Access to Justice While Protecting Public Health during a Pandemic”, aired on May 13, 2020. This remarkable webcast included: Chief Judge Anna Blackburne-Rigsby, of the District of Columbia Court of Appeals; Chief Justice of the State of California, the Hon. Tani G. Cantil-Sakauye, Chief Justice Susan Christensen, Iowa Supreme Court; and, Chief Justice Bridget Mary McCormack, of the Michigan Supreme Court. The panelists addressed what each Court is doing to ensure access to justice and, what policy, rules and processes were set in place since March of 2020. It was my pleasure to give the opening remarks while NAWJ Past President Judge Lisa Walsh moderated this panel.

Our next webinar explored courtroom tools for addressing Human Trafficking, Domestic and Sexual Violence, and Child Exploitation in the time of COVID-19. This webinar addressed the current international dynamics in human trafficking, the local perspective of how trafficking manifests itself in communities, and the response by local agencies. It further addressed the ways we can improve services to victims, and what is taking place in our courts. Program Coordinators for this webinar included: Judge Ann Breen-Greco, Independent Administrative Judicial Professional, Chicago, Illinois and Judge Bobbie J. McCartney, Judicial Officer, Office of the Secretary, USDA. Judge Elizabeth R. Finn of Glendale City Court, Arizona, moderated the panel, which included Judge Pamila Brown, District Court of Maryland, Howard County; Judge Virginia M. Kendall, United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois; Summer Stephan, San Diego County District Attorney; and, Christi Wigle, CEO of United against Slavery.

On May 20, 2020, the American Bar Association invited me to be a speaker at the webinar, hosted by the ABA Commission on Domestic Violence, titled: “Unsheltered at Home: COVID-19, Guns and Domestic Violence.” This webinar focused on victim safety, gun violence, access

to courts and other issues. Including myself, the speakers included ABA President Judy Perry Martinez; Paige Flink, CEO of The Family Place; Carolyn Thomas, Survivor; and, Moderator Angela Downes, Law Professor, UNT Dallas College of Law

Judges face a huge backlog of cases not easily addressed when jury trials are not feasible. To address how the pandemic has had a tremendous impact on Civil Courts, Judge Elizabeth White planned a webinar entitled: “The Pandemic - What Is Its Impact on Our Civil Courts.” This webinar provided inventive solutions and featured three outstanding jurists confronting the backlog of cases due to Covid-19. Judge Jennifer D. Bailey, Judge Samantha Jessner and Judge Lisette Shirdan-Harris, from Miami, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia respectively, spoke, while Judge Lisa Walsh graciously moderated the panel.

In the wake of the global pandemic, courts across the country are working hard to ensure that citizens have equal access to justice. NAWJ invited the Louisiana Chief Justice Bernette Joshua Johnson, Washington State Chief Justice Debra Stephens and Justice Lucy Billings of New York as panelists on the webinar: “Bridging the Justice Gap in a Pandemic” The justices discussed the specific programs in their states that are targeting access to justice for their constituents. Judge Lisa Walsh moderated this esteemed panel.

In August, a discussion of the pandemic’s impact on vulnerable children and families in the child welfare system provided insight into how courts and communities are building resilience through innovation solutions. The webinar, titled “The Critical Roles of Child Welfare Judicial Leadership and Community Collaboration: Building Resilience in the Wake of COVID-19”, included panelists: Justice Elizabeth Clement, Judge Edwina Mendelson, Justice Anne McKeig, and Judge Patricia Macías. Chief Justice Amy Nechtem moderated the panel. Topics included discussion of the current national child welfare landscape and four states' judicial responses to safeguarding children and family well-being.

As Program Coordinators, Judges Ann Breen-Greco and Bobbie J. McCartney planned a webinar on Human Trafficking: A Focus on Inequity. Judge Elizabeth R. Finn of Glendale City Court, Arizona, moderated the panel, which included Judge Pamila Brown, District Court of Maryland, Howard County; Judge Virginia M. Kendall, United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois; Summer Stephan, San Diego County District Attorney; and, Christi Wigle, CEO of United Against Slavery.

The coronavirus pandemic is a public health and safety emergency for women who suffer from domestic violence, those cornered by the pandemic’s virus while incarcerated, and people struggling to maintain the mental balance necessary to accomplish work and meet economic needs. On September 16, 2020, we held the NAWJ's 15th Annual Meeting with the Congressional Women's Caucus, titled “Families in Crisis: The Impact of the Pandemic on Families in the Wake of COVID 19.” There, NAWJ presented a panel addressing the challenges caused by COVID-19’s disruption in the lives of women and their families.

Judge Toni E. Clarke and Chief Judge Anita Josey-Herring co-chaired the event. I presided at the meeting with an opening remark and introduced the Congresswoman Marcia L. Fudge, Representative for Ohio's 11th District, which includes Cuyahoga (Cleveland), and Summit

Counties. A video presentation with a message from Senator Diane Feinstein of California followed a panel discussion moderated by Chief Judge Anna Blackburne-Rigsby. The panelists included: Vanessa Batters-Thompson, Managing Attorney, Family Law Programs, D.C. Bar Pro Bono Center; Deborah Epstein, Professor of Law and Director of the Domestic Violence Clinic, Georgetown University Law Center; Judge Cathy Hollenberg Serrette, Circuit Court for Prince George's County, Maryland; and, Stephanie Troyer, Supervising Attorney, Domestic Violence/Family Law Unit, Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia.

NAWJ also collaborated with the Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles and the Los Angeles County Bar Association on the 19th Amendment Speaker Series.

[Start here with the remainder of her message](#)

NAWJ Annual Meetings of the past were full of wonderful times that we all shared. I am so sorry that this year we will not see each other in-person at the NAWJ Annual Meeting in Nashville, Tennessee. I will miss those wonderful hugs.

There are no words adequate to express my deep gratitude to the Conference Chair, Judge Barbara Holmes for an outstanding job in putting together plans for the Annual Meeting, which is postponed to October of 2021. Judge Holmes has however, planned a teaser in anticipation of the full conference next year. NAWJ will host a Virtual Conference from October 14-16, 2020 beginning with NAWJ Day at the United Nations. NAWJ member and a dear friend, Mrs. Sally Kader, President of the International Federation for Peace and Sustainable Development to the United Nations, has graciously partnered with NAWJ to plan a program to address Access to Justice and Gender Equality. The day will end with a virtual tour of the United Nations and a wine tasting reception.

I would be remiss if I did not thank each of you for your kind and generous contributions to NAWJ during our financial crisis. I wish to specially thank Judge Orlinda Naranjo for her generous matching gift.

As my year as President of our beloved organization comes to an end, I look back and I am reminded that none of this would have been possible without the wonderful work of the Board of Directors and Staff in making this year the most successful year despite the many challenges we all faced.

With warmest regards,
Bernadette

Judge Bernadette D'Souza
Orleans Civil District Court
NAWJ President