



Judicial Panelist Biographies

THE HONORABLE KIMBERLY M. ESMOND ADAMS **Judge, Superior Court of Georgia, Atlanta Judicial Circuit**

The Honorable Judge Kimberly Esmond Adams is serving her fifth term on the Superior Court of Fulton County in the Atlanta Judicial Circuit. She has been re-elected to four successive terms without opposition. Over the course of more than 16 years on the State of Georgia's largest and busiest trial court, Judge Adams has presided over a panoply of cases that include high-profile criminal prosecutions, complex civil litigation, multi-million-dollar land and contract disputes, medical malpractice actions, and personal injury claims. She also has handed down decisions in significant cases involving state constitutional questions.

Prior to her election, Judge Adams amassed extensive criminal and civil trial experience. She served the citizens of Fulton County as a Chief Senior Assistant District Attorney in the Office of the Fulton County District Attorney where her exceptional commitment to victims and community safety earned her the coveted distinction of *Special Unit Trial Attorney of the Year*. Judge Adams began her public service career after practicing as an employment attorney with a national labor and employment boutique.

A past president of the Georgia Association of Black Women Attorneys (GABWA), Judge Adams is a well-respected bar leader and community servant. She recently completed a successful term as Chair of the Judicial Council of the National Bar Association and a member of the National Bar Association Board of Governors. Judge Adams also has served in a number of other leadership capacities, both professionally and in her community, including the Board of Directors of the Atlanta Technical College Foundation, Boys and Girls Club of Metro Atlanta, Restorative Justice Board of the Atlanta Municipal Court, Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers Foundation, the Atlanta Bar Association Judicial Section, the Atlanta Bar Association Lawyer Referral Information Service, the Foundation of Wesley Woods and the Leadership Atlanta Board of Trustees.

Judge Adams is a Past Chair of the National Advisory Board for *Foreverfamily*, a non-profit organization committed to mitigating the collateral effects on children of incarcerated parents. A life member and international leader of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated and a national

leader in The Links, Incorporated, Judge Adams has been an active member of Cascade United Methodist Church in Southwest Atlanta for more than 30 years where she continues to serve in leadership and as an active member of the Music Ministry. She also is award-winning Executive Producer for the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority documentary, *Twenty Pearls*, and an editor of the companion coffee table book with the same name published in 2022.

Recognized both for her commitment to her profession and the community, Judge Adams has been the recipient of numerous honors and awards, most notably, Howard University Charter Day Award in the Field of Law (2013); Who's Who in Law and Business by the Atlanta Business Chronicle (2006); Superwoman by Atlanta Tribune Magazine (2011); Woman of the Year - "Ordinary Woman With Extraordinary Talents" by Women Looking Ahead News Magazine (2008), Women Looking Ahead Woman of the Year Honoree – One of Georgia's Most Influential Judges (2013). Judge Adams also is a recipient of the Pinnacle Leadership Award from the East Point/College Park Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. (2012); The Torch Award from the Atlanta Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. (2017); and she was named to the Atlanta Business League's 2012, 2013 and 2018 Lists of Atlanta's Top 100 Women of Influence. In 2012, Judge Adams received the *Spirit of GABWA Award* – the Georgia Association of Black Women Attorneys' highest award. She also was an honored recipient of the Justice Robert Benham Award for Community Service in 2013 and the prestigious Community Service Award from the Atlanta Bar Association in 2015.

More recently, Judge Adams was named an Unsung Heroine and received the Pioneer Award from the Metropolitan Atlanta Chapter of the National Coalition of 100 Black Women (2017), and she was named a Woman of Excellence in the field of Community Engagement by the MECCA Chapter (2018). She also was named a National HBCU Pre-Law Hall of Fame Honoree (2018) and received both the Sankofa Award (2020) and the Congressman John Lewis "Good Trouble" Award (2021) from the National Bar Association. Additionally, Judge Adams has been recognized by Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority and the faith community for her commitment, dedication, and service.

A sought-after leader in the City of Atlanta, the State of Georgia, and nationally, Judge Adams is an alumna of both Leadership Atlanta and Leadership Georgia. She possesses a deep commitment to the development of young people and frequently serves as a mentor, lecturer, speaker, moderator, and panelist on topics ranging from the law and professionalism to education and the family. She is a 2009 alumna of the National Judicial College and was invited to the White House in 2012 to participate in a workshop on parental incarceration.

Judge Adams earned her Bachelor of Arts Degree from Howard University in Washington, D.C. and her Juris Doctor Degree from the Notre Dame Law School. She resides in Atlanta with her husband, Michael, and they are the proud parents of an adult son, Michael.

THE HONORABLE PRESIDING JUDGE M. YVETTE MILLER

Presiding Judge, Georgia Court of Appeals (Retired)

Presiding Judge M. Yvette Miller was appointed to the Georgia Court of Appeals on July 12, 1999, by Governor Roy Barnes, becoming the 65th Judge on the Court of Appeals. She holds the distinction of being the first African-American woman to serve on the Court and the first African-American woman to serve as the Court's Chief Judge. During her tenure as Chief Judge, Judge Miller implemented the e filing initiative, enhancing access to the appellate court for attorneys and parties throughout Georgia. She has been re-elected unopposed statewide for four consecutive six-year terms, most recently in May 2018.

Before her appointment to the Court of Appeals, Judge Miller worked as one of the first female Assistant District Attorneys in the Fulton County District Attorney's Office. She went on to represent the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority as senior in-house counsel, prior to serving as general manager and general counsel for the family business, a new Ford, Lincoln, Mercury car dealership in Jesup, Georgia. In South Georgia, Judge Miller became one of the first African-American women to practice law throughout the Brunswick Judicial Circuit. In 1992, Governor Zell Miller appointed her as the Director/Judge of the Appellate Division of the State Board of Workers' Compensation, where she became the first woman, first African-American, and the youngest person ever to hold the position in Georgia. In 1996, she was appointed to the State Court of Fulton County and was re-elected without opposition.

Judge Miller has received numerous awards for her service and contributions to the practice of law and the community, including the *Randolph Thrower Lifetime Achievement Award* from the State Bar of Georgia, the *Professionalism Award* from the Atlanta Bar Association, and the first *Inspiration Award* for guiding a new generation of lawyers from Emory University School of Law Supreme Court Advocacy Program in 2024. She was also awarded the *Tony Baldwin Trailblazer Award* from Mercer University's Black Law Students Association in 2018 and was selected by Emory University School of Law as one of "*The Emory Law 100*" in 2017. She has been named a Fellow of the American Bar Association, received The *Justice Robert A. Benham Legacy Award*, and was named *Law and Justice Woman of the Year* by the Women Works Media Group in 2016. Among other honors, in 2013, Judge Miller received the Georgia Association of Black Women Attorneys' *Leah Ward Sears Founders Award for Distinction in the Profession*, and the *Women of Excellence Award* presented by the Atlanta Daily World.

In addition to numerous accolades, Judge Miller served as Chair of the Public Trust and Confidence Commission on the Judiciary. She was inducted into the "*Academy of Women Achievers*" by the Young Women's Christian Association in 2011. In 2010, she was awarded the *Who's Who in Law*, by the Atlanta Business Chronicle, and in 2008, she was inducted into the "*Hall of Fame*" by the Gate City Bar Association. In 1992, Judge Miller was President-Elect of the Georgia Association of Black Women Attorneys. She has also been recognized as one of "*Georgia's Top 50 Influential Black Women*" by the Georgia Informer from 1991 to 2015.

Active in both professional and civic spheres, Judge Miller holds membership in several esteemed national and state organizations. The national organizations include, Council of Chief Judges of the State Courts of Appeals, the National Bar Association, National Association of Women Judges, and the International Association of Women Judges. Several of the state

organizations include, the American Bar Association, Atlanta Bar Association, Atlanta Bar Association Judicial Section, Gate City Bar Association Judicial Section, Georgia Association of Black Women Attorneys, Georgia Association of Women Lawyers, Lamar Inn of Court, Lawyers Club of Atlanta, Lawyers Foundation of Georgia, Cobb Bar Association and the Macon Bar Association. In addition, Judge Miller is a member of several civic associations, including Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. and the Azalea Chapter of The Links. She also currently serves on the Board of Trustees of Mercer University.

Judge Miller's academic achievements are a testament to her intellectual prowess and unwavering commitment to excellence. She earned her B.A., *cum laude*, from Mercer University, before embarking on her legal journey at Mercer University School of Law, where she earned her Juris Doctorate, laying the foundation for her illustrious legal career. Her pursuit of knowledge and excellence continued unabated, as she later attained an LL.M. in litigation from Emory University School of Law and an LL.M. in Appellate Judicial Process from the University of Virginia School of Law.

A proud alumna of Mercer University, in 2019, the unveiling of Judge Miller's portrait at Mercer University School of Law, serves as a poignant tribute to her substantial contributions to the University. In January 2019, Judge Miller established an endowed scholarship at the Mercer University School of Law to promote diversity and inclusion in the legal profession. Moreover, in this same year, Judge Miller received the *Nikki T. Randall Servant Leadership Award* from the Georgia Women's Legislative Caucus of the Georgia General Assembly.

Judge Miller had the distinct honor of serving as the keynote speaker at the 2024 Annual Judicial Reception, hosted by the Georgia Association for Women Lawyers (GAWL), Columbus, Georgia Chapter. This prestigious event underscores her commitment to the legal profession and her support for women in law. Throughout her career, she has delivered several commencement speeches. Notably, in 2001, she was selected by John Marshall Law School to give the commencement address to the graduating seniors, and in 2021, she was selected by the Dean of Mercer University School of Law to deliver the commencement speech to the graduating students.

Judge Miller is a native of Macon, Georgia, and a former "Miss Macon." She is the daughter of Conrad and Patricia J. Miller and has one sibling, Conrad N. Miller, Jr., M.D., who resides in Macon with his family. She cherishes her role as a proud Aunt to Conrad III and Kira. Judge Miller is a member of Cascade United Methodist Church in Atlanta, and a lifelong member of Steward Chapel AME Church in Macon.

THE HONORABLE LEAH WARD SEARS
Chief Justice, Georgia Supreme Court (Retired)

Chief Justice Leah Ward Sears (Retired) is a partner in the Business Litigation and Appellate Practice at Smith, Gambrell & Russell LLP. Before returning to private practice, she enjoyed 17 years of distinguished service on the Georgia Supreme Court, including four years as Chief Justice. She was the first woman to serve on the Supreme Court, the first woman to serve as a Superior Court Judge in Fulton County, and the first woman elected state-wide in Georgia.

Justice Sears holds a Bachelor's degree from Cornell University, a JD degree from Emory University Law School, and an LLM from the University of Virginia. She also holds honorary degrees from Spelman, Clark Atlanta, Piedmont, LaGrange, Savannah State and Morehouse Colleges and Universities, as well as John Marshall Law School. In addition, she is a recipient of the Emory Medal, the American Bar Association's Margaret Brent Award, the Daily Report's Lifetime Achievement Award, and she's been named a Best Lawyer in Georgia and a Georgia Super Lawyer for the past few years, to name just a few. Justice Sears was also bestowed the honor of being named The Lawyer of the Year/Appellate by The Best Lawyers in America for 2019. A Biography of Leah Ward Sears, entitled "Seizing Serendipity," written by Professor Rebecca Davis, was published by The University of Georgia Press, September 2017.

Justice Sears contributes her talents in the legal, academic, and non-profit sectors, as well as the community at large. She serves on the Board of Trustees of Emory University, The Carter Center and the American Academy of Appellate Lawyers. In addition, she continues to be involved with the Atlanta chapter of the Links, Inc. as an alumni member, and Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated.

Justice Sears is married to Haskell Sears Ward, and has two children, Addison and Brennan Sears-Collins.