



# Reflections of the Incoming Judicial Class of 2022-23

BY JUDGE DEBORAH WESTBROOK, NEVADA COURT OF APPEALS

Two years ago, I was elected to serve a six-year term as a judge on the Nevada Court of Appeals. At the time, I did not have prior judicial experience. But after spending nearly two decades as an advocate, I relished the opportunity to approach the law from a neutral perspective.

On January 3, 2023, I gave up my spot at the podium and took a seat on the bench. And as I joined Chief Judge Michael Gibbons and Judge Bonnie Bulla for the first time in our conference room behind the red velvet curtains, I began to see how my life was about to change.

Before becoming a judge, I worked up my cases alone; now, as part of a three-judge panel, I get to collaborate and decide every case with my esteemed colleagues. As a litigator, I focused on making the best appellate argument I could for each client; now, as a judge, I can focus on reaching the right, and just, result. Before becoming a judge, I had almost too much free time. I read a lot of fiction, cooked whole-food, plant-based meals, and exercised regularly. Now, on a high-volume appellate court, I find myself reading primarily for work (and at all hours of the day), eating less healthy options, and exercising less frequently. While I may have gained the judicial equivalent of the “freshman 15,” I can say without hesitation that I love my job and am so grateful to the voters for this opportunity to serve.

Reflecting on my first two years as a judge made me wonder about the experiences of other new judges from the incoming judicial class of 2022-23. Thankfully, several judges were willing to share their experiences and offer advice for attorneys considering making the transition from practice to the judiciary.



**JUSTICE PATRICIA LEE,  
NEVADA SUPREME COURT**

## **What inspired you to become a judge?**

“When the vacancy became available, I was prompted to apply by some of my most cherished mentors and heroes. When I was confronted by my daughter who asked how many women of color have ever been on the Nevada Supreme Court, I answered ‘none.’ She rolled her eyes and said ‘well, that’s unfortunate.’ I got the message.”

## **What advice do you have for attorneys who are interested in becoming judges?**

“Work hard, give back, and otherwise carefully curate your reputation.”

**Now that you've become a judge, how has your life changed?**

“Dramatically! It’s lovely not having to bill hours (although I do oftentimes miss litigation). There is a lot of back and forth between Las Vegas and Carson City, so my husband has had to pick up a lot of the slack (he’s a supportive rock star!). Also, I have to be mindful about public expressions of personal opinions.”

**What is the most challenging aspect of your job?**

“Probably the time away from my family. My son is almost 14 and my daughter is almost 16. But I do believe the quality of our time together has increased exponentially, notwithstanding the decrease in quantity.”

**What is the most rewarding aspect of your job?**

“Getting to know more of my colleagues throughout the state and working with the best group of justices on the planet!”



**JUDGE GREGORY GORDON,  
EIGHTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT  
COURT, FAMILY DIVISION**

**What inspired you to become a judge?**

“A passion for helping others is what drew me to family law when I started practicing 30 years ago. The work is challenging but rewarding, especially when I can assist families in solving difficult problems.”

**What advice do you have for attorneys who are interested in becoming judges?**

“Become an expert in your field, whether it is civil, criminal, or family law. It is essential that you know your craft and that you have frequently practiced it in the courtroom.”

**Now that you've become a judge, how has your life changed?**

“I work a lot more hours than when I was in private practice. In addition to my daily docket, I spend about two to three hours per day prepping for the next day’s calendar and on average eight to 10 hours per week decision-writing. I make a lot of decisions every day, so when we go out to dinner, my wife now decides where we eat.”

**What is the most challenging aspect of your job?**

“Facing the occasional novel issue which never arose before and was not contemplated by the existing legal principles. Family law encompasses any number of personal issues, and it therefore is not static but is a constantly changing and evolving area of the law.”

**What is the most rewarding aspect of your job?**

“Trying to have a positive influence on people’s lives, whether by just listening to them or by making decisions for them, realizing the result could change the future in the lives of families by helping them move forward for the better. And conducting adoptions, which are extremely important for families and personally very fulfilling.”



**JUDGE JACOB REYNOLDS,  
EIGHTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT  
COURT, CIVIL-CRIMINAL  
DIVISION**

**What inspired you to become a judge?**

“Many events in my life inspired me to be a judge, but mainly I believe it was my experiences with great judges. I externed with Judge Lloyd D. George, I clerked for Chief Judge Roger Hunt, and I loved going to trial before great judges like Judge

Nancy Allf in my practice. In practice, I was frustrated when a judge was, in my opinion, not measuring up to what a judge should be, so I am trying my best to be a great judge, because I believe practitioners and their clients deserve to have great judges.”

**What advice do you have for attorneys who are interested in becoming judges?**

“First, do a frank analysis of your own ability to understand your opponents’ point of view. Second, do a frank analysis of how well you get along with opposing counsel – a great way to do this is to seek a rating from Martindale Hubbell. Third, set appointments with four or five prominent members of the legal community who are great litigators and ask them for advice about being a judge.”

**Now that you've become a judge, how has your life changed?**

“My practice was a high-end complex commercial litigation practice that required all-nighters and long working hours that eventually evolved into an in-house legal position requiring unpredictable travel. This job pays a lot less but has more predictability in my schedule and is more accommodating to an enjoyable family lifestyle.”

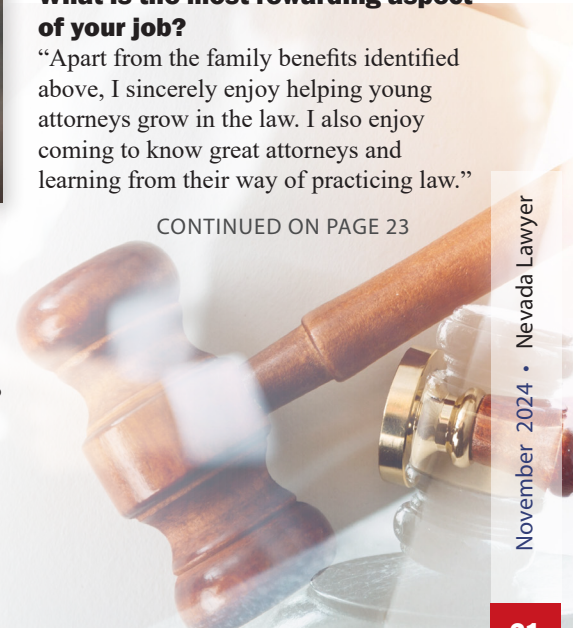
**What is the most challenging aspect of your job?**

“Being a politician.”

**What is the most rewarding aspect of your job?**

“Apart from the family benefits identified above, I sincerely enjoy helping young attorneys grow in the law. I also enjoy coming to know great attorneys and learning from their way of practicing law.”

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**JUDGE REGINA MCCONNELL,  
EIGHTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT  
COURT, FAMILY DIVISION**

## **What inspired you to become a judge?**

“As a family law practitioner for more than 15 years, I saw families get bogged down by the lengthy process. Now I can impact more lives as I help our community through our family court system as I focus on any inefficient areas in my courtroom. Overall, I hope most litigants in my court feel that I took the time to understand their arguments and reached a fair conclusion.”

## **What advice do you have for attorneys who are interested in becoming judges?**

“My advice would be to have courtroom experience because there is a learning curve going from private practice. The other thing I did not realize was the amount of preparation required outside of normal working hours. I hear cases all day, so to be prepared for the next day, I spend significant time after hours reviewing the cases for the following day.”

## **Now that you’ve become a judge, how has your life changed?**

“Professionally, I have the ability to make a better impact on our community. In my personal life, I have to be more intentional on a work/life balance.”

## **What is the most challenging aspect of your job?**

“Self-represented litigants are most challenging. I am sympathetic to their cause because I know that professional representation is out of reach for many in our legal system. However, it can be challenging trying to help them understand the process without giving them legal advice.”

## **What is the most rewarding aspect of your job?**

“The most rewarding part of my job is making an impact in children’s lives. These are difficult issues, and it is the children who struggle the most. Knowing that I was able to help a family get through the process with as minimal effect on the children as possible is by far the most rewarding.”



**JUDGE KENDRA BERTSCHY,  
RENO JUSTICE COURT**

## **What inspired you to become a judge?**

“As an attorney, I witnessed the profound impact that a judge can have on our community. Judges are at the forefront of resolving issues that bring people into contact with the justice system. Seeing how a judge could turn someone’s life around inspired me to pursue this path.”

## **What advice do you have for attorneys who are interested in becoming judges?**

“For attorneys interested in becoming a judge, I recommend accepting a pro bono case to gain experience outside your usual field of practice. This approach broadened my understanding of the justice system and the diverse issues faced by different members of our community. Volunteering with programs like ‘Lawyer in the Library’ also honed my skills in explaining complex legal issues to pro se litigants quickly and effectively.”

## **Now that you’ve become a judge, how has your life changed?**

“The biggest change has been in my relationships. It has been an adjustment to transition from engaging in lively discussions with former coworkers and opposing counsel to encountering silence when I enter a room with those same individuals.”

## **What is the most challenging aspect of your job?**

“The most challenging aspect of my job is making tough decisions that significantly impact people’s lives while ensuring fairness and justice. It is also crucial that I communicate the ruling and rationale clearly to parties who may not be legally trained.”

## **What is the most rewarding aspect of your job?**

“Presiding over the Court Assistance Program (CAP), a therapeutic court designed to assist individuals with mental health and substance use disorders, is deeply gratifying. It is incredibly rewarding to work with our team to help participants overcome obstacles and achieve milestones such as reuniting with their family, securing stable housing, or reaching personal goals for the first time.”

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**JUDGE REBECCA SAXE,  
LAS VEGAS JUSTICE COURT**

### What inspired you to become a judge?

“My mother and grandmother instilled in me a commitment to public service. Running for judge was an opportunity to help the community in a broader way.”

### What advice do you have for attorneys who are interested in becoming judges?

“My advice is to talk to people who are judges about their experience to see if being a judge is the right fit for you. There are challenges to transitioning from lawyer/advocate to judge and it’s important to be aware of them when making your decision.”

### Now that you’ve become a judge, how has your life changed?

“I have gained a lot more insight and respect for all that goes into making the court system work effectively. From pre-trial services to IT, to security, there are many hardworking court employees who are vital to making the justice system run smoothly.”

### What is the most challenging aspect of your job?

“There are days when being the final decision-maker weighs on me, and I worry whether I made the right decision.”

### What is the most rewarding aspect of your job?

“Working with my staff, who have become my ‘work family,’ to ensure everyone in my courtroom is treated with respect and that our court moves efficiently has been very rewarding. On any given day, we will have family members in the audience, interpreters for defendants, private attorneys, the media, as well as the defendants, prosecutors, and public defenders. Having a courtroom that is run with compassion and fairness could not be attained without my amazing work family.”

**JUDGE DEBORAH WESTBROOK'S**  
biography is on page 6.



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