

NEVADA TRAILBLAZERS

Meet Cristina Silva: Federal Judge Wants to Increase Pipeline of Hispanic Attorneys in Nevada



BY MARY BACON, ESQ. AND RYAN GORMLEY, ESQ.

With her self-effacing style and warm personality, Judge Cristina Silva has blazed a trail from her west Texas hometown through the Nevada legal landscape in a relatively short period of time, all while trying to make the same path more accessible to the next generation of women and Latino leaders in the law.

Silva was raised in El Paso, Texas. Her family owned a local grocery store in one of the most socio-economically challenged neighborhoods, where she and her brother spent time growing up. Her family prioritized the importance of education, and Silva responded well, always earning good grades and serving as an active participant in several organizations.

One such organization, the National Hispanic Institute (NHI), helped open Silva's eyes to potential opportunities outside the state of Texas. In large part because of her participation in NHI, Silva set her sights on attending Wellesley College in Massachusetts. While adjusting to the winter was a challenge, she loved her time there and graduated with a dual degree in political science and Spanish.

Although Silva grew up in an entrepreneurial-minded family, she knew she wanted to be an attorney from a young age. After college, she moved to Washington, D.C., to gain more work experience before applying to law school. There, she worked for two non-profits: one focused on women's reproductive health and, the other, the National Association of Women Judges (NAWJ).

During her time with NAWJ, she attended a talk with two of her idols, U.S. Supreme Court Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Sandra Day O'Connor. She had the opportunity to ask them what advice they would give a young woman planning to become a lawyer. Justice Ginsburg answered that it was the same advice she received from her mother-in-law about marriage: "it helps to be a little deaf."

Silva said that, at the time, the advice struck her as lackluster. But it would not be long before the advice resonated with her. Now, she passes on the same advice to young women planning to enter the legal field.

For law school, Silva stayed in the nation's capital and graduated from the American University Washington College of Law. From there, knowing she wanted to pursue trial work, Silva accepted a position as an assistant state attorney for the Miami Dade State Attorney's Office. Within the first few weeks in the role, she was off to the races, taking seven cases to trial.

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Following a few years in Miami, Silva learned of an opening with the U.S. Attorney's Office in the District of Nevada. Looking for a change and to be closer to her family in west Texas, she applied for the position. Much to her surprise, she was hired and started her work as an assistant U.S. attorney (AUSA) in January 2011.

Silva spent the next eight-plus years as an AUSA for the District of Nevada, trying numerous cases to verdict. In 2013, she was promoted to deputy chief of the Organized Crime Strike Force and handled high-profile cases, including the October 1 shooting investigation. In 2018, she was promoted to chief of the Criminal Division.

In 2019, Silva was appointed to an open department in the Eighth Judicial District Court (EJDC), where she handled a mixed civil and criminal docket. In 2021, she was reassigned to be one of only four judges handling homicide cases in the EJDC. Later that year, she was nominated for an open seat in the U.S. District Court, District of Nevada. She was confirmed by the U.S. Senate and took the oath of office on April 8, 2022.

When asked how she handles the pressure and responsibility of such leadership roles throughout her career, Silva reflected that she simply keeps her focus on accomplishing the task at hand, emphasizes the power of hard work, and holds herself to a high standard.

Silva also stresses the importance of mentorships and community service. She currently serves as president of the Nevada Latino Bar Association and is focused on initiatives to increase the pipeline of Latino attorneys in the state of Nevada.

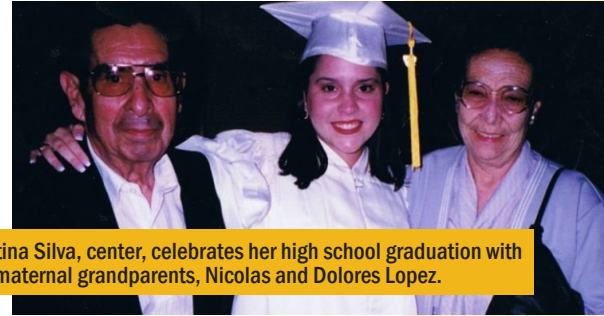
Judge Eric Johnson supervised Judge Silva during her early years as an AUSA and helped her overcome the learning curve when she first joined the bench for the Eighth Judicial District Court. Most recently, he served as the officiant at her wedding. He had high praise for Judge Silva.

"I recall interviewing her for a supervisory position in the U.S. Attorney's Office as Deputy Chief of the Criminal Division," Judge Johnson said. "When the interviewers asked her questions regarding her youth and experience and ability to handle the job, Judge Silva alluded to the children's story of the 'Little Engine that Could,' explaining that while she understood why people might underestimate her, she knew what she could do and believed in herself and her ability to handle the job. Judge Silva proved her beliefs right time and time again, successfully transitioning from an AUSA to deputy chief to chief and then to the Eighth Judicial District Court. I have no doubt, given her intelligence, passion, and sense of justice, that this trend will continue in her new role with the federal judiciary and in whatever the future might hold."

In her free time, Silva likes to stay active, having completed several half and full marathons. Lately, she has grown fond of her Peloton. She also shared a little-known fact: she was once interviewed by Michael Connolly, the renowned legal author, regarding a case she handled. In addition, she clogged for many years and performed clogging dances while rope twirling, and knows every line in the movie "My Best Friend's Wedding."



Cristina Silva, center, poses for a photo with her parents, Martin and Jo Anne Silva, and her brother, Martin James Silva.



Cristina Silva, center, celebrates her high school graduation with her maternal grandparents, Nicolas and Dolores Lopez.



Judge Cristina Silva swears in her former law clerk, Maliq Kendricks.



Judge Cristina Silva and her brother, Martin James Silva, get together after her hearing in front of the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee on December 15, 2021.



Judge Cristina Silva, center, values her investiture with long-time friends Erica Hansen, left, Noemi Lopez, Bianca Georgakakis, and Ethel Badawi.



Cristina Silva, second from left, goes for a hike in Sedona, Arizona, with her "Wellesley sisters," Erica Hansen, left, Jennifer Yarger, Ethel Badawi, and Emily Yu.