



# **ETHICAL ELECTIONS:** JUDICIAL RACES, BIAS AND WOMEN CANDIDATES OF COLOR

September 30, 2020

12:00pm – 1:30pm (PT)

1.5 Ethics CLE Credits, pending

**FREE**

**CLE PRESENTED BY**

**THE THURSTON COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION  
DIVERSITY & INCLUSION SECTION**

**AND**

**CO-SPONSORED BY  
WASHINGTON WOMEN LAWYERS  
CAPITOL CHAPTER**

**REGISTER BY  
9/25/2020**

**AT:**

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# CLE AGENDA

12:00:

Introductions and Code of Judicial Conduct: Disclaimer

12:05pm:

Sharonda Amamilo will talk about her approach to her judicial race and the importance of authenticity in presenting oneself as an option to the voters. She will share specific instances of challenges to her eligibility to run and how she handles gender and race-based questions on whether she can handle the job of a Superior Court Judge. Finally, she will share her sense of why the voters have positively responded to her candidacy as a woman and potentially the first African American to serve them as a Judge in Thurston County.

12:25 PM:

Commissioner Thomas will discuss her experiences running as the first woman of color to run for judge in Thurston County. She will discuss the challenges of running a campaign while a sitting Commissioner. Commissioner Thomas will also share her experiences on the campaign trail.

12:45 PM:

Justice Montoya-Lewis will discuss the challenges of running as the first Native American on the Washington State Supreme Court, and one of a very few in the nation. This is further complicated by running a campaign in the virtual world; how do we engage various communities in judicial campaigns that have to be virtual? Are there communities that are being left out having an active voice in such campaigns when the campaigns are dependent on high speed internet? Justice Montoya-Lewis will also discuss how she handles media, her unique experience as a tribal and state court judge, and how discussions about access to justice become even more critical during COVID 19.

1:05 PM:

Justice Whitener will prepare a short PowerPoint presentation titled, "What is the Gavel Gap and why should it matter?" This will be a brief overview of why diversity matters in building Trusts and Confidence in the justice system.

1:25 PM:

Thanks and Acknowledgments.

# **SPEAKER BIO**

## **Judicial Candidate for Thurston County Superior Court Judge, Position Number 8**

### **Sharonda Amamilo**



Sharonda's decision to pursue the Thurston County Superior Court Judge position came when it was clear that she could contribute even more to her community by running for local office. Her experiences with her own family motivated her to learn the law so she could protect those closest to her from deep-rooted systemic injustice. It is because of those experiences that Sharonda is committed to protecting the constitutional rights of all citizens, bringing diversity of experience and background to objectively deliberate, educate, and render compassionate justice to litigants appearing before the court; many with traumatic backgrounds. Sharonda is a very passionate practitioner who is actively engaged in various levels of systemic change and strategic planning, continually assessing services to individuals in crisis.

Sharonda returned to private practice on October 1, 2019 after 12 years with Thurston County Public Defense. She served as supervisor of the Juvenile and Dependency unit from 2014 until her departure. She currently manages a private practice representing youth in foster care. Sharonda is known as a dynamic problem-solver. She is a Board Member of Washington Trafficking Prevention and a member of Community Youth Services' (CYS) Program Review board sub-committee. She is the defense representative on the Governor's appointed Criminal Justice Treatment Act Panel and the Criminal Justice Opioid Workgroup.

Sharonda received her Masters of Business Administration ('97) degree from Saint Martin's College in Lacey and her Juris Doctor ('03) from Seattle University School of Law. She is a Chief Warrant Officer Four (CW4) with the U.S. Army Reserves with 22 years of military service.

Sharonda and her husband Reuben have 7 children and 3 grandchildren. Sharonda is described by some peers as "an unsung hero, fully committed in mind, body, and spirit to helping others. At the end of the day, she doesn't clock out."



# **SPEAKER BIO**

## **Thurston County Superior Court Commissioner**

### **Indu Thomas**



Indu Thomas was appointed as a Court Commissioner to the Thurston County Family and Juvenile Court in April 2007. Since that time, she has served as both the Juvenile Court Commissioner and the Family Law Commissioner.

Prior to taking the bench Commissioner Thomas practiced law for 10 years. She served as a public defender working with Society of Counsel Representing Accused Persons in King County, an Assistant Attorney General with the Attorney General's Office and as nonpartisan staff counsel to the Human Services and Corrections Committee of the Senate.

She currently serves as the Family Law Commissioner. In that capacity Commissioner Thomas hears Family Law and Involuntary Treatment cases. She co-chairs the Superior Court Judges Association Education Committee and serves on the Racial Justice Workgroup. She was the Dean of the 2020 Washington State Judicial College. She is an active member of the Robert Bryan Inns of Court, a society for the furtherance of professionalism and civility in the legal profession.

In 2016, she received the Phoenix Award for her commitment and dedication to youth and adults on the road to recovery, through her work with Family Recovery Court and Juvenile Drug Court.

For fun and relaxation, she sings in the church choir, teaches Sunday school, paddles on a dragon boat team, practices yoga and cooks traditional South Indian meals.

# **SPEAKER BIO**

## **Washington State Supreme Court Justice**

### **Raquel Montoya-Lewis**



Justice Raquel Montoya-Lewis was appointed to the Washington State Supreme Court by Governor Jay Inslee in December 2019 and took the oath of office on January 6, 2020.

Justice Montoya-Lewis is an enrolled member of the Pueblo of Isleta and a descendant of the Pueblo of Laguna, two federally recognized tribes in New Mexico. She is the first enrolled member of any tribe to sit on a state supreme court in the U.S. and the second Native American to sit on a state supreme court. She is also of Jewish descent.

Prior to becoming an Associate Justice, she served as a Superior Court judge for Whatcom County for five years, where she heard criminal and civil trials and presided over the Whatcom County Therapeutic Drug Court. In the 15 years prior to her work on the Superior Court, she served as a tribal court judge for multiple tribes in the Pacific Northwest and the Southwest. She served as Chief Judge for the Upper Skagit Indian Tribe, the Nooksack Indian Tribe, and the Lummi Nation. In addition to her work as a tribal court judge, she was a tenured Associate Professor at Western Washington University's Fairhaven College where she taught law-related courses and courses on cultural identity development.

She has continued to use her teaching skills as a jurist, teaching a wide variety of audiences including judges, social workers, lawyers, and advocates on implicit bias, the Indian Child Welfare Act, and best practices in child welfare and domestic violence cases.

Justice Montoya-Lewis graduated with her BA degree from the University of New Mexico in 1992 and completed her law degree and Master of Social Work degree at the University of Washington in 1995 and 1996 respectively.

# **SPEAKER BIO**

## **Washington State Supreme Court Justice**

### **G. Helen Whitener**



Justice G. Helen Whitener Washington State Supreme Court Justice G. Helen Whitener served as a Pierce County Superior Court judge until her appointment to the Washington State Supreme Court in April of 2020.

Governor Jay Inslee appointed her to the Pierce County Superior Court in 2015 and she was elected to her position in 2015 and was re-elected to a full term in 2016. Prior to serving on the Superior Court bench, Justice Whitener served as a judge on the Washington State Board of Industrial Insurance Appeals and as a pro-tem judge in Pierce County District Court and the City of Tacoma Municipal Court.

Before becoming a judge, Justice Whitener litigated both civil and criminal cases for 14 years as first a prosecutor and defense attorney and later as a managing partner of the law firm of Whitener Rainey Writt PS. Justice Whitener is well recognized by the legal community for her commitment to justice and equity. In 2019 alone, Justice Whitener was awarded the Washington State Bar Association's C.Z. Smith Excellence in Diversity and Inclusion Award, the King County Washington Women Lawyers President Award, the Tacoma-Pierce County Bar Association Diversity Award, and the Seattle University School of Law Woman of the Year Award. In 2018, Justice Whitener was the recipient of the Pierce County Washington Women Lawyer's Woman of the Year Award. Justice Whitener serves as co-chair of the Washington State Minority and Justice Commission and serves on the Board of Directors of the International Association of LGBT Judges as well as on the Washington State Office of Civil Legal Aid Oversight Committee. Justice Whitener is a member of the International Association of Women Judges, the National Association of Women Judges, and the American Judges Association. She is also a former chair and co-chair of the Washington State Superior Court Judges' Association – Equity and Fairness Committee.

Justice Whitener is a judicial member of Washington Women Lawyers and is a judicial member of the Advisory Council for the QLaw Association of Washington. Justice Whitener is the first Black woman to serve on the Washington Supreme Court, the fourth immigrant-born Justice, and the first openly Black LGBT judge in the State of Washington. Justice Whitener is often invited to speak to organizations locally, nationally, and internationally on human rights, access to justice, and the responsibility of the judiciary to ensure the right of all who appear before the court to basic dignity and respect in judicial proceedings. Justice Whitener was born and raised in the Caribbean island nation of Trinidad and Tobago. In 2015, at the request of the United States Embassy, Judge Whitener visited her home country to speak on human rights. In 2016, Judge Whitener gave a TEDxPOS Talk entitled, "Claiming your identity by understanding your self-worth" where she discusses the empowerment of embracing respect and how it informs her philosophy and approach to living. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=57FMau29O\\_g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=57FMau29O_g) Justice Whitener earned her B.A. degree in Business Administration and International Marketing from Baruch College, New York, and received her J.D. degree from Seattle University School of Law. Justice Whitener lives in University Place with her wife, attorney Lynn Rainey (CSM-US Army Ret)

## **THURSTON COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION DIVERSITY & INCLUSION SECTION**

The Diversity and Inclusion section of TCBA recognizes the unique worth our diverse backgrounds contribute to strengthening our legal community, increasing access to justice, and promoting laws and creative solutions that better serve clients and communities. Diversity includes: age; culture; disability; ethnicity; gender and gender identity or expression; geographic location; national origin; race; religion; sex; sexual orientation; veteran status; and socio-economic status.

We believe a diverse and inclusive bench and bar are necessary to attract and retain talented employees and leaders; effectively serve diverse clients with diverse needs; understand and adapt to increasingly diverse local and global markets; devise creative solutions to complex problems; and improve access to justice, respect for the rule of law, and credibility of the legal profession.

Mission Statement: The Diversity & Inclusion Section serves Thurston County by striving to increase the diversity of the local bench and bar to reflect the growing diversity of Thurston County; educating the legal profession and greater community about the cultural richness and diversity of the clients they serve; and working to dismantle barriers to justice.

## **WASHINGTON WOMEN LAWYERS CAPITOL CHAPTER**

WWL is Washington's largest organization dedicated to furthering the full integration of women in the legal profession and promoting equal rights and opportunities for women. Through the combined resources of a statewide organization and a network of local chapters, Washington Women Lawyers offers programming and support for women lawyers through out the state.

Mission Statement: The principal purposes of Washington Women Lawyers are to further the full integration of women in the legal profession, and to promote equal rights and opportunities for women and to prevent discrimination against them.

Want to learn more about the Thurston County Bar Association and the Diversity & Inclusion Section?

Visit these websites or contact a local board member or section member.

TCBA Website:

<https://thurstoncountybar.com/>

TCBA Facebook Page:

<https://www.facebook.com/thurstoncountybar/>

TCBA Diversity & Inclusion Section Page:

<https://thurstoncountybar.com/diversity-and-inclusion/>

Want to learn more about WWL?

Visit these websites or contact a local Capitol Chapter board member.

WWL Website:

<https://www.wwl.org/>

WWL Capitol Chapter Website:

<https://www.wwl.org/page-1072569>

WWL Capitol Chapter Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/pg/WWLCapitol/posts/>