



**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT**  
**EASTERN DISTRICT OF TENNESSEE**  
Joel W. Solomon United States Courthouse  
900 Georgia Avenue  
Chattanooga, Tennessee 37402

**March 2024**

### **THE JUDICIARY IS ENRICHED BY THE INCLUSION OF WOMEN**

Since 1987, March has been recognized as National Woman's History Month, so it is fitting that we acknowledge and celebrate the contributions of women to our country's judiciary this month. From the four women serving as Associate Justices of the United States Supreme Court to the women serving on the lower federal courts and as justices or judges of state courts, the nation has much for which to be thankful.

#### **Women Were Historically Under-Involved in the Judiciary.**

If we could step back a hundred years and visit any courthouse, whether state or federal, we would see that the overwhelming makeup of the bench and the court's staff would be male. Historically, very few women could be found in any position at any level of the court system. This male-dominated system was not uncommon for the time, but not at all representative of our country.

With men making up the predominant proportion of judiciary personnel, a huge pool of talent went untapped. Including women in the court system has enriched and enhanced it. Now, women serve at all levels of the judiciary.

#### **Women Now Serve as Judges.**

When we think of the judiciary, we first think of judges, who are the faces and voices of the judiciary. As stated above, four of the nine justices on our highest court are female. On the lower federal courts, women make up 32% of sitting judges. A 2023 report by Forster-Long, LLC indicated that women make up 36% of state final appellate court judges, 39% of state intermediate appellate court judges, 33% of state general-jurisdiction court judges, and 36% of state limited- and special-jurisdiction court judges. These numbers show that women are continuing to join the state and federal judiciary. Though women are still underrepresented on the bench, this trend provides hope that there will continue to be a rise in the proportion of female judges across the country.

## **Women Serve in Various Other Capacities in the Judiciary.**

Although we often think of judges when we think of the judiciary, there are many other individuals behind the scenes whose work enables the judges to do their jobs. One such position is that of law clerk. On the federal level and in many state courts, judges have law clerks to assist them with their responsibilities. Law clerks are lawyers who help judges complete the high volume of legal research required to move cases toward resolution. Often, law clerks are fresh out of law school and serve in the judiciary for a few years before moving on to other types of legal practice. Some lawyers also serve as career law clerks. Clerkships are prestigious positions that often benefit lawyers throughout their career. Historically, it was not uncommon for all of a judge's clerks to be men. In 2018, the *New York Times* reported that, for the first time, more than half of the Supreme Court's law clerks would be women. Other reports indicate that approximately half of law clerks at most levels are now women.

The judiciary also has court administrators and staff who make the work of judges possible. On the federal level there is the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts, the top administrative body for federal courts. Women have headed the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts, as well as headed state court administrative offices that serve the same or similar purposes.

And in every court there is a Clerk of Court whose office consists of staff members called court clerks. The court clerk position differs from the law clerk position in that court clerks handle administrative matters—they receive filings, maintain dockets and court records, and interface with the public. One job-search site, Zippia.com, estimates that 81% of courtroom clerks are women. When judges conduct a trial or hearing, there must be an official record of the proceeding. Court reporters are responsible for recording these trials or proceedings. If you watch a trial scene in an old movie, you will see a male acting as court reporter. That was an accurate portrayal of how the position was staffed in years past. Now, the Association for Court Reporters and Captioners reports that women make up 89% of their members.

Regardless of the capacity in which they serve, whether at the top of the profession on the Supreme Court or in other capacities, women provide invaluable service to the judiciary. Their talents and contributions make our courts better, and their continued inclusion helps the judiciary to better reflect our nation.

Curtis L. Collier  
United States District Judge  
Chair, Eastern District of Tennessee Civics and Outreach Committee

Carrie Brown Stefaniak  
Law Clerk to the Honorable Curtis L. Collier  
Past President, Chattanooga Chapter of the Federal Bar Association

Erienne Reniajal Lewis  
Law Clerk to the Honorable Curtis L. Collier

Rachel Elaine Noveroske  
Law Clerk to the Honorable Curtis L. Collier