

PRESS RELEASE

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF INDIANA

United States District Court for the Southern District of Indiana Announces New Chief Judge

INDIANAPOLIS, Indiana (March 22, 2021): On Saturday, March 20, 2021, the United States District Court for the Southern District of Indiana came under the leadership of a new chief judge, the Honorable Tanya Walton Pratt. She succeeds Judge Jane E. Magnus-Stinson. Chief Judge Pratt is the first person of color to serve as the Southern District of Indiana's chief judge, and the tenth chief judge in the court's history. Chief Judge Pratt was appointed as a district judge on June 15, 2010, becoming the first African-American federal judge in Indiana history. She filled the vacancy created by the elevation of Judge David F. Hamilton to the United States Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit.

From 2008 until her appointment to the bench of the District Court, Chief Judge Pratt served as a judge in the Marion Superior Court, Probate Division. She was elected Marion Superior Court Judge in November 1996, and she served as Presiding Judge of the Superior Court, Criminal Division, from 1997 to 2008. She also served as Master Commissioner for the Marion Superior Court from 1993 to 1996. Prior to her election as a Marion Superior Court Judge, she was active in private practice as a partner with the law firm of Walton & Pratt, focusing primarily on family law, bankruptcy, and probate law. She also served as a contract county public defender during her years of private practice.

Chief Judge Pratt is active in the Indianapolis and Marion County Bar Associations; she has served as past Vice President of the Indianapolis Bar Association and is a member of the Board of Directors of the Marion County Bar Association. She is an active member of the Indiana State Bar Association. Chief Judge Pratt has served on the American Inn of Court, Indianapolis (Master) and the Judicial Conference of the United States Committee on Codes of Conduct. She presently serves on the Federal Judges Association Board of Directors, and the Seventh Circuit's Pattern Civil Jury Instructions Committee.

Chief Judge Pratt received the Rabb Emison Award from the Indiana State Bar Association in 2015, the Antoinette Dakin Leach Award from the Indianapolis Bar Association in 2017, Howard University's Distinguished Alumna Award in 2020, an Honorary Doctor of Law degree from Ball State University in 2011, and an Honorary Doctor of Law degree from Franklin College in 2017. In 1981, Chief Judge Pratt received her B.A. from Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia, and in 1984, she received her J.D. from Howard University School of Law in Washington, D.C.

Judge Magnus-Stinson provided the court with unshakable leadership during her four-and-a-half-year term as chief judge, a time marked by many challenges. The court mourned the deaths of Senior District Judge Larry J. McKinney and Magistrate Judge Denise K. LaRue. District Judge William T. Lawrence assumed senior status, and the Clerk's Office underwent a change of leadership with the retirement of long-time Clerk of Court Laura A. Briggs. Judge Magnus-Stinson led the court during a government shutdown, sequestration threats, and an assault on the Indianapolis federal courthouse that resulted in property damage during the civil unrest of May 2020.

Most notably, Judge Magnus-Stinson navigated the court through the COVID-19 pandemic. From participating in daily conference calls with federal partners when the pandemic first struck, to issuing general orders that suspended jury trials, to offering her courtroom to other judges to allow for adequate social distancing during

in-person hearings, Judge Magnus-Stinson deftly handled the many challenges that the pandemic presented, and continues to present, all while keeping the court operational and accessible.

There were also moments of celebration during Judge Magnus-Stinson's tenure as chief judge, as the court welcomed District Judge James R. Sweeney II, District Judge James Patrick Hanlon, Magistrate Judge Doris L. Pryor, and new Clerk of Court Roger A. G. Sharpe. Judge Magnus-Stinson worked with the Judicial Conference of the United States to secure a sixth magistrate judge position for the court, which will be filled by Mario Garcia on April 5, 2021.

Through these ups and downs, the court continued to process cases at a remarkable level. Between November 28, 2016, and March 18, 2021, the Southern District of Indiana's judges closed nearly 18,000 civil and criminal cases. The court ranked second in the nation, based on weighted caseload per judge, in 2017, 2018, and 2019, the most recent year for which published data is available.

The position of chief judge is assigned based on length of service, and is given to the judge in regular active service who is senior in commission of those judges who are (1) 64 years of age or under; (2) have served for one year or more as a judge; and (3) have not previously served as chief judge. The chief judge serves for a term of up to seven years and handles administrative matters related to the operation of the clerk's office and the courthouse that do not require the attention of all the judges. The chief judge carries a full caseload in addition to these administrative duties and does not receive any additional pay.