



*For Immediate Release*

## **Harris County Courts at Law elect four judges to serve in key judicial leadership roles representing and advocating for the Courts**

Jan. 3, 2023 — The Harris County Courts at Law have elected four judges — two new and two returning — to serve in judicial leadership roles representing their courts.

The judges elected a new local administrative judge to represent both the 16 County Criminal Courts at Law and four County Civil Courts at Law.

They also elected a new administrative judge tasked specifically with representing the County Civil Courts at Law and re-elected the existing presiding and co-presiding judges representing the County Criminal Courts at Law — also known as the criminal misdemeanor courts.

Administrative and presiding judges are tasked with providing judicial leadership and general administrative guidance, including convening and presiding over judicial meetings and serving as the primary representative to various county departments, officials, and projects.

All positions took effect on Jan. 1, 2023.

### **Local Administrative Judge, Harris County Courts at Law**

Harris County Criminal Court at Law No. 9 Judge Toria Finch was elected to serve as the Local Administrative Judge for the County Criminal and Civil Courts at Law. She will serve a two-year term, taking over for Harris County Criminal Court at Law No. 15 Judge Tonya Jones.

Judge Finch has experience in civil litigation, as well as criminal, family, and juvenile law. She previously served as an assistant juvenile public defender with the Travis County Juvenile Public Defender's Office in Austin, where she became board certified in juvenile law.

Upon moving to Houston, she served as an assistant district attorney for the Harris County District Attorney's Office, where she tried misdemeanor and felony bench and jury trials and achieved the level of felony prosecutor, juvenile detention court chief and misdemeanor court chief. She later founded The Finch Law Firm.

Most recently, Judge Finch was elected in November to her second term on the bench of Harris County Criminal Court at Law No. 9.

Judge Finch currently serves as an adjunct professor for Texas Southern University Thurgood Marshall School of Law as well as an adjunct professor and advisory committee chairperson for the Alvin Community College Paralegal Studies Program.

She earned a bachelor's degree in business marketing from Alabama A&M University, a Paralegal Certificate from Southeastern Paralegal Institute, and a law degree from Texas Southern University Thurgood Marshall School of Law.

### **Administrative Judge, Harris County Civil Courts at Law**

Harris County Civil Court at Law No. 3 Judge LaShawn Williams was elected Administrative Judge of the Harris County Civil Courts at Law. She will serve a one-year term, taking over for Harris County Civil Court at Law No. 1 Judge Audrie Lawton-Evans.

Judge Williams has nearly three decades of experience and has practiced extensively in state, federal, and appellate courts. She began her career as a staff attorney for the Office of the District Attorney General in Nashville, Tennessee. After that, she served as in-house counsel for Cracker Barrel Old Country Store, a Tennessee-based national Fortune 500 company. She later went into private practice, serving first as managing principal for LAWilliams Law Firm PC and later as a founder and managing partner of Baldwin Williams & Associates PLLC.

Most recently, Judge Williams was elected in November to her second term on the bench of Harris County Civil Court at Law No. 3.

She earned a bachelor's degree in Criminology from Sam Houston State University and a law degree from Texas Southern University Thurgood Marshall School of Law.

### **Presiding and Co-Presiding Judges, Harris County Criminal Courts at Law**

Harris County Criminal Court at Law No. 12 Judge Genesis Draper and Harris County Criminal Court at Law No. 1 Judge Alex Salgado were re-elected to their posts as Harris County Criminal Courts at Law presiding judge and co-presiding judge, respectively. Both were first elected to their posts in July 2022 and will now serve a second six-month term.

Most recently, Judge Draper was elected in November to a second term on the bench of Harris County Criminal Court at Law No. 12. She presides over both Court No. 12 and one of Harris County's S.O.B.E.R. courts, which aims to address addiction and reduce recidivism by providing treatment programs for individuals who are facing drunk driving charges and are at high risk for becoming repeat offenders.

Judge Draper also teaches advanced trial advocacy as an adjunct professor at the University of Houston Law Center and was selected as a 2022 Fellow for the American Leadership Forum.

Before assuming the bench, she spent 12 years as an assistant public defender at both the state and federal level. She holds a bachelor's degree in English from Spelman College and a law degree from University of Texas School of Law.

Judge Salgado was elected in November to a second term on the bench of Harris County Criminal Court at Law No. 1. He presides over Court No. 1 as well as one of Harris County's S.O.B.E.R. courts.

Prior to taking the bench, Judge Salgado spent nine years as an assistant district attorney in Walker and Fort Bend counties. During that time, he prosecuted a wide range of criminal cases, including misdemeanor, felony, and juvenile offenses.

He earned an English degree from Texas Tech University and a law degree from Texas Southern University Thurgood Marshall School of Law. While in law school, he worked with the Harris County District Attorney's Office and served as a student attorney with the Earl Carl Institute for Legal and Social Policy.

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