



For Immediate Release

Harris County Civil Courts at Law name new associate judge to preside over eviction docket, tackle post-pandemic surge in eviction appeals

Dec. 15, 2023 — A veteran Houston lawyer has been tapped to serve as the Harris County Civil Courts at Law’s first associate judge, a newly created position designed to tackle the county’s increasing volume of eviction appeals.

Judge Jermaine Thomas will begin hearing eviction cases on Jan. 8, 2024. Focused exclusively on evictions, his targeted caseload is designed to help alleviate the civil case bottleneck caused by the continuing surge in eviction cases across the county.

The 48-year-old lawyer comes to the county from Houston-based civil law firm Barry Barnes and Associates, where he spent the past two decades practicing law. He holds a bachelor’s degree in political science from Texas Southern University and a law degree from South Texas College of Law.

“I hope to run a court where individuals or litigants on both sides believe they got a fair hearing,” Thomas said. “I’d like them to walk away saying that I was fair, impartial, and I heard them — and I applied the law.”

In Texas, evictions fall under the jurisdiction of Justice Courts, with cases filed in the Justice of the Peace precinct where the property in question is located. Appeals, however, are heard by the Harris County Civil Courts at Law.

There are 16 Justice Courts, but just four county civil courts to hear their appeals. Compounding the issue is the fact that evictions have risen dramatically in wake of the pandemic, especially as eviction assistance and moratorium programs ended.

During the first 11 months of 2023, the Harris County Civil Courts at Law reported 7,371 eviction appeals cases — more than double the pre-pandemic caseload of 3,568 recorded in 2018. The numbers have been rising since 2022, when Harris County Civil Courts at Law recorded 6,279 cases.

“Even with our additional eviction dockets, the surge is creating a bottleneck that impacts our ability to hear all civil cases in a timely manner,” said Harris County Civil Courts at Law Administrative Judge LaShawn Williams, who also presides over County Civil Court at Law No. 3. “We’re excited to have Judge Thomas on board to help us tackle the issue. We know he will be compassionate and fair in his administration of justice.”

The associate judge position was approved by the Harris County Commissioners Court in late October. Judge Thomas was hired by the county civil courts on Dec. 4 and will spend the next month monitoring eviction dockets, sitting in on eviction cases, and attending required judicial training. He’ll start hearing cases in the new year.

Born to a single teen mom, Judge Thomas said he believes he brings a unique perspective to the bench — both as a lawyer representing people going through the eviction process and as a child whose own family faced eviction.

“I want to deliver justice with a degree of empathy. I believe that’s something valuable I can bring to the bench,” Judge Thomas said, adding that he hopes his work will honor the legacy left by his late mother, who died in 2008. “That’s what I’m looking forward to doing.”

MEDIA CONTACT

Holly Huffman, Communications Director, Office of Court Management
Email: Holly_Huffman@ccl.hctx.net