



2024-2025 OFFICER NOMINEE BIOS

PRESIDENT: YVETTE GARCIA

Yvette Garcia is a Judicial Assistant with 17 years of experience currently working alongside newly appointed Magistrate Judge Michael A. Ambri. She holds a BA and MBA in management.

She previously served on the Federal Judicial Assistants Association (FJAA) Board as Secretary (from 2016-2018) and Treasurer (from 2018-2022). She was the co-chair of the 2022 FJAA Educational Conference which was held in Tucson, Arizona. Yvette is a powerful force in the workplace and uses her positive attitude and tireless energy to encourage others to work hard and succeed. She is enthusiastic, self-motivated, reliable, responsible, and hard working.

Yvette is inspired daily by her wife and their three adult daughters. In her free time, Yvette loves to run, cycle, hike, and travel.

PRESIDENT-ELECT: DEBBY SAWYER

Debby is the Judicial Assistant to USDC Judge Aleta A. Trauger in Nashville, TN. Prior to working for Judge Trauger, Debby was a Civil Case Manager/Courtroom Deputy for Chief Judge James C. Dever III - Eastern District of NC. She is an Advanced Certified Paralegal (ACP) and worked as a litigation paralegal for 22+ years prior to joining the federal judiciary. She has a Bachelor's Degree in Organizational Leadership and management from Regent University and a Paralegal Certificate from Jackson State Community College.

She enjoys reading, shopping, and traveling.

VICE-PRESIDENT: GABRIELA MA

Gabriela (Gaby) Ma is the Judicial Assistant to the Honorable James A. Soto, United States District Judge in the District of Arizona, Tucson Division. Gabriela became a judicial assistant when Judge Soto was appointed to the federal bench in 2014.

In 2011, Gaby graduated with a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Arizona. After graduation, she returned to Nogales, Arizona-her hometown. She started working as a booking clerk for the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office. Before moving to the United States District Court, Gaby worked in the Santa Cruz County Superior Court Administration Office as a secretary. It was there that she met Judge Soto, the presiding judge on the Superior Court bench in Santa Cruz County at the time.

In May 2022, Gaby completed her paralegal certification. She currently enjoys crocheting, tending to her desert tortoise, and collecting eggs from her chickens. Gabriela received the honor of the Secretary for the FJAA in 2022. She was instrumental in planning the 2022 FJAA Annual Conference.

SECRETARY: ELIZABETH DOUGLAS

Elizabeth Douglas is a Paralegal to the Honorable Armando O. Bonilla. Elizabeth began her service to the Federal Judiciary in 2018 as a Case Administrator for the District and Bankruptcy Courts for the District of Columbia. In May 2020, she accepted a position as an Electronic Court Records Operator (ECRO) with the United States Court of Federal Claims. Before her service to the Court, Elizabeth served as a lead Criminal Analyst for the State of Washington's Office of the Insurance Commissioner's Criminal Investigations Unit.

Elizabeth has an undergraduate degree from the University of Washington in Politics, Philosophy and Economics (Go Huskies!) and master's degree from Seattle University in Criminal Justice (MACJ). In December 2022, with the help of the FJAA Scholarship Program she successfully earned a Certificate in Paralegal Studies from Boston University Center for Professional Education.

Elizabeth has served as the FJAA Circuit Representative for the Federal DC/CIT/CFC Districts. She is currently the Editor of the FJAA "In Brief" Newsletter.

SECRETARY: DAPHNE E. RANKIN

Daphne E. Rankin is a seasoned paralegal with over 34 years of experience. Her extensive legal background includes her current position as Chambers Paralegal for Senior United States District Court Judge Samuel H. Mays, Jr., Senior Paralegal at the Law Office of the Shelby County Public Defender, and Managing Paralegal at law firms in Atlanta, Georgia and Memphis, Tennessee. Her experience includes administration of all judicial chambers operations, managed budgets, legal research and writing, and staff supervision. Her legal expertise is further highlighted by her success in expunging over 12,500 criminal charges and restoring voting privileges to more than 350 convicted felons.

Daphne is actively pursuing a Juris Doctor degree at Purdue Global Law School with an expected graduation date of August 2025, adding to her already impressive educational background. She holds a Doctor of Divinity and a Master of Ministry from Shalom Bible College and Seminary, both summa cum laude, and has also completed coursework in general law and litigation at Emory University and Cecil C. Humphreys School of Law and in business administration and management at Georgia State University School of Business. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in Political Science with a minor concentration in Business Administration and French from Howard University, graduating cum laude. Daphne's commitment to community service and professional development is demonstrated through her leadership roles in various organizations and her active participation in professional associations. Her comprehensive legal experience and dedication to excellence make her a distinguished nominee for the position of Secretary of the Federal Judicial Assistants Association.

Summarily, Daphne Rankin is a dedicated legal professional, nearing the completion of her law school studies and has been actively involved in the legal community throughout her 34-year career. Daphne's commitment to excellence and her organizational skills have been demonstrated through her various roles in legal associations and community service projects. She is looking forward to contributing to the Federal Judicial Assistants Association in the capacity of Secretary, bringing her passion for law and administration to the forefront.

TREASURER: MELISSA HARDIN

Melissa has been a judicial assistant since 1998, first with the state courts in Wisconsin, then joining the U.S. District Court for Western Wisconsin in 2002 as the administrative assistant to the Clerk of Court. After 10 months, she moved up to chambers as the judicial secretary for Judge John C. Shabaz until he retired. Since March of 2010, Melissa has been the judicial assistant for Judge William Conley. She has been a member of FJAA since 2003, spending four years as the Seventh Circuit Representative, two years as Vice President, before becoming President. Melissa is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point and has served on its Alumni Board of Directors since 2005. She also has a legal assisting degree from Columbus State Community College in Columbus, Ohio.

Melissa and her husband, Bob, love to travel the world. They have visited 6 out of the 7 continents and have 43 countries on their life list. Most recently, they traveled to Iceland in August of 2021 to see the lava flows from an active volcano and spent time hiking in Utah and Arizona. Other favorite places include Egypt, the Galapagos Islands, Machu Picchu, Venice & Rome, London, Angkor Wat, Japan, and the Great Ocean Road in Australia.