



Harris County Criminal Court at Law No. 8 judge places focus on respect and representation as she takes the bench

March 7, 2023 — The daughter of two social workers, Judge Erika Ramirez has always felt compelled to help others.

Steady in her belief that people are inherently good, she was drawn to jobs in public service, working first as a teacher and then as a caseworker assistant before turning her attention to the law.

“As I got time in the courtroom, I really enjoyed seeing both sides of it. I liked that the state advocated for the plaintiff, and I loved that the defense advocated zealously for their clients,” Judge Ramirez said. “It was really about both sides doing the best they could to represent and help other people. That’s what I really liked.”

Judge Ramirez assumed the bench of Harris County Criminal Court at Law No. 8 on Jan. 1, 2023, after being elected to the post last fall. She replaced Judge Franklin Bynum after winning the Democratic primary in March 2022 and then the general election in November 2022.

She is now the first woman and first Latina to preside over Harris County Criminal Court at Law No. 8. She joins a small but historic group of Latinos and Latinas presiding over the Harris County Courts at Law — a distinction she carries with pride, she said.

“Harris County is over 40 percent Latino. I think we are just now shifting to start to represent that,” Judge Ramirez said. “I didn’t meet my first judge until I was in college. I wanted a face like mine to be visible to folks who come in and say, ‘It’s possible. We belong at the table.’ I want everyone to feel that. Representation is important.”

Judge Ramirez holds a public relations degree from the University of Texas and a law degree from South Texas School of Law. After graduating from UT, she worked as a teacher, promotions coordinator for the Houston Comets, and caseworker assistant for the Harris County District’s Attorney’s Office, helping victims of domestic violence — the last of which spurred her interest in law school.

She returned to the Harris County District Attorney’s Office after law school to work as a prosecutor. During her seven years there, she handled both felony and misdemeanor cases, working in the trial bureau and domestic violence, juvenile, and financial crimes divisions.

As an attorney, Judge Ramirez remembers watching as people sometimes were treated poorly and talked down to when they came before the court. That treatment clouded their view of the process, she said, and made them feel like they hadn’t received a fair shake.

She said she doesn’t want people to experience that in her courtroom.

“My number one goal was always to make sure everyone who walked into the courtroom was treated with respect and given a fair process,” Judge Ramirez said. “No matter what’s going on in people’s lives, we’ve got to respect each other. That is just huge for me.”

Harris County Courts at Law Newly Elected Judges

- Criminal Court at Law No. 1
Judge Alex Salgado
- Criminal Court at Law No. 2
Judge Paula Goodhart
- Criminal Court at Law No. 3
Judge Leslie Johnson
- Criminal Court at Law No. 4
Judge Shannon Baldwin
- Criminal Court at Law No. 5
Judge David Fleischer
- Criminal Court at Law No. 6
Judge Kelley Andrews
- Criminal Court at Law No. 7
Judge Andrew Wright
- **Criminal Court at Law No. 8
Judge Erika Ramirez**
- Criminal Court at Law No. 9
Judge Toria Finch
- Criminal Court at Law No. 10
Judge Juanita Jackson
- Criminal Court at Law No. 11
Judge Sedrick Walker
- Criminal Court at Law No. 12
Judge Genesis Draper
- Criminal Court at Law No. 13
Judge Raul Rodriguez
- Criminal Court at Law No. 14
Judge Jessica Padilla
- Criminal Court at Law No. 15
Judge Tonya Jones
- Civil Court at Law No. 1
Judge Audrie Lawton-Evans
- Civil Court at Law No. 2
Judge Jim Kovach
- Civil Court at Law No. 3
Judge LaShawn Williams
- Civil Court at Law No. 4
Judge Manpreet Monica Singh

When people — defendants and victims, alike — come before Court No. 8, Judge Ramirez wants them to feel heard and respected. She wants them to walk away feeling like they got to have their day in court and the process was fair, even if they didn't like the verdict.

For that to happen, the community must better understand the criminal justice system and how it works, Judge Ramirez said, pointing to community involvement as a key way for judges to educate people about the importance of the work they do. After all, she said, justice isn't just a verdict — it's the fair process that leads you to one.

"The criminal justice system can be highly stigmatized," she said. "We're not here just to punish people. This is supposed to help our community. We want folks to understand what we're doing to help the community."

Editor's Note: This is the second in an occasional series featuring newly elected Harris County Court at Law Judges who are new to their Court.

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