



FEDERAL BAR ASSOCIATION SOUTH FLORIDA CHAPTER



President's Message

This month, we retreat from one another in an effort to protect our community against the coronavirus, which threatens the most vulnerable members of that community. This time of "social distancing," however, presents the perfect opportunity for us to reflect a little on our own community and some of the important figures who make-up and contribute to the South Florida Chapter of the Federal Bar Association.

Over the course of the next three weeks our Newsletter will provide you with the opportunity to get to know two of our newer judges - the **Honorable Rodolfo A. Ruiz II** and the **Honorable Jacqueline Becerra** - and our federal court **Executive Services Administrator, Catherine Wade Babyak**. We hope that you will enjoy reading the interviews as much as we have enjoyed putting them together. - *Alaina Fotiu-Wojtowicz, alaina@bfolegal.com*

Interview with Judge Jacqueline Becerra, Magistrate Judge for the Southern District of Florida - Interview by Jeffrey B. Crockett and John E. Thornton, Jr.



With extensive experience earned in both private practice as a Shareholder at Greenberg Traurig and as an Assistant United States Attorney in the District of Columbia and the Southern District of Florida, **Judge Jacqueline Becerra** brings confidence, eloquence, and intellectual firepower to an already-impressive bench. She attended college at the University of Miami, and she received her law degree from Yale Law School. Recently, Judge Becerra met with us to discuss her life and career.

When did you know you wanted to become a judge?

As long as I can remember, I wanted to be a lawyer, but being a judge felt more like a dream than something that would actually happen. I loved practicing law both in private practice and in public service. But after 25 years of experience, I felt ready for the next step, and now it seems that my childhood dream came true.

How do you think your prior experiences prepared you for the bench?

Nothing truly prepares you for the bench, but I was privileged to have many unique experiences as an attorney, which I think have given me a good foundation. I served at the Justice Department in the Civil Division when I came out of law school. That experience exposed me to significant and diverse civil matters across different jurisdictions. I later became an Assistant United States Attorney; first in DC and then in Miami. My time in public service exposed me to an array of legal issues, and gave me significant trial experience.

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Before becoming a judge, I was in private practice for 15 years. As a partner at Greenberg Traurig, I managed large teams of lawyers and again honed my civil skills with trials in state and federal courts. During the last eight years or so, my practice focused on FCPA compliance and investigations. My FCPA practice took me all over Latin America to handle sensitive issues and internal investigations for large clients with solution-driven priorities.

In some respects, this was an important segue from litigation to a position more focused on problem-solving. This was really an excellent transition. That said, serving as a judge is fundamentally different than anything I have ever done. It is an awesome responsibility to sit on the federal bench. There is no place to hide when you are a judge. It is just you up there. Your law clerks help you, and hopefully the attorneys help you too. But at the end of the day, only you are tasked with resolving difficult legal issues, and that is something that is simply unique.

Will you talk about the support systems that have helped you throughout your career?

My family provided overwhelming support and they are the heart of what I do every day. They always encouraged me to do whatever I wanted to do, even when they were not themselves sure what it might take to get there. My parents both came to the United States after the Cuban revolution. They were not given the opportunities to study, so they just worked and built a family. They ended up raising four college-educated women. They instilled in me the belief that even a Cuban-American girl from Hialeah could achieve the goals to which she set her mind. Professionally, I have been very blessed. I had wonderful role models when I served at the Justice Department; and in private practice, I had wonderful partners who guided me, clients who trusted me, and young lawyers and professional staff who helped me bring it all together.

As a new magistrate judge, I also received support from colleagues with whom I previously had the pleasure of working. As a judge, I work in an environment where everyone wants me to succeed, including other judges and

even the lawyers themselves. No one wants the judge to be unprepared or to do poorly.

Did you feel or experience any barriers when entering the legal profession as a minority woman?

Of course. There are always challenges facing minorities and women.

What is the easiest part of your job as a judge?

Serving as a judge is a very rewarding job. I love coming to work every day. I would not say that there is anything about being a judge that is easy, but serving my community and country makes everything worth it.

And the hardest part?

The job is very demanding, and the decisions can weigh on you. But if I were to pick one thing I would say it is the isolation. I came from an office of hundreds of peers, and constant interaction with clients. The solitude and the time of quiet reflection is not the life of a private practice partner!

How much information about an issue before the court do you want from attorneys when they present their arguments at hearings or in writings?

Be prepared! Err on the side of completeness, but please tailor your arguments to the issues before the court.

In closing, do you have any advice for attorneys appearing before you?

Yes—be prepared and act professionally. I take that very seriously. I work very hard, and I expect the same from the lawyers appearing before me. Also, know the local rules, my discovery procedures, the case, and the law. I am often learning from the lawyers, so they should know their case better than I do. Also, know that I read everything. And if I ask you a question about your matter, know the answer and answer my question before telling me more. Also, please be professional before me and with opposing counsel.

Upcoming Events

CANCELLED! FBA Hyatt Luncheon with Hon. Roy K. Altman

In light of the CDC interim guidance recommending that in-person events of 50 or more people be postponed for the next eight weeks, the Board of the South Florida Chapter of the FBA has made the necessary decision to cancel the upcoming March 25, 2020, Hyatt luncheon with the Honorable Roy K. Altman for the health and safety of our community. We will begin processing refunds for those who have already purchased tickets, and we are working with Judge Altman to re-schedule this program for a date in the fall. If you have any questions regarding your refund, please contact us at federalbar.southflorida@gmail.com. Thank you for your participation in the FBA and your support of our programs. We hope to see you soon.



South Florida to Host the 2021 Annual Meeting & Convention!

The South Florida Chapter will proudly be hosting the Federal Bar Association's 2021 Annual Meeting and Convention. The Annual Meeting and Convention will take place from September 22-25, 2021, and will feature several programs and events of value to the federal bench and bar. In addition to a broad range of CLE programs presented by federal judges and practitioners, the convention will offer a number of networking opportunities for hundreds of attendees, and will culminate with the installation of the FBA's national president on Saturday, September 25, 2021. There will be opportunities to meet attorneys and judges from around the country, participate in wellness events, and attend luncheons featuring notable speakers. The FBA's national sections and committees will also meet during the convention. Sponsorship opportunities will be available, and inquiries regarding the event can be directed to Alaina Fotiu-Wojtowicz, the Chapter's President, and to Oliver A. Ruiz, the Chair of the 2021 Annual Meeting and Convention Committee. – *Oliver Ruiz*, oruiz@malloylaw.com

Message from the FBA Diversity Committee

During Women's History Month, the FBA Diversity Committee reflects on the many contributions of women to the federal judiciary, from legendary pioneers such as Constance Baker Motley to the many distinguished women who have served, and continue to serve, as judges of the United States District Court for the Southern District of Florida. Here in South Florida, we are very fortunate to have a judiciary that is nearly as diverse as, and reflective of, the community it serves. Diversity within the judiciary is not just an intrinsic good, but also plays an important role in fostering public confidence in the federal courts. When decisions are made by those who look like us, and who share a common background, it lends legitimacy to the decision-making process. We should never take this for granted, and to the women of the federal judiciary who contribute to its diversity, we thank you for your service and celebrate your work during Women's History Month, and beyond.

If you are not already a member, join the FBA's South Florida Chapter today! Members have access to a wide array of events involving the judiciary, notable speakers, and lawyers in our community. Please visit our website for more information, <http://fba-sdfla.org/membership>.

Become a member today!