



United States Courts for the Ninth Circuit

Office of the Circuit Executive · 95 7th Street, San Francisco, CA 94103 · (415) 355-8800 · mediarelease@ce9.uscourts.gov

NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Katherine Rodriguez
mediarelease@ce9.uscourts.gov

FPD Heather E. Williams Reappointed to Fourth Term for Eastern District of California

SAN FRANCISCO — The U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit has announced the reappointment of Federal Public Defender Heather E. Williams for the Eastern District of California to a fourth four-year term. First appointed to lead the office in 2013, her reappointment is effective May 6, 2025.

“Heather Williams is an outstanding Defender,” said Circuit Judge Kim McLane Wardlaw, who chairs the Ninth Circuit’s Standing Committee on Federal Public Defenders. “Heather is a truly committed advocate whose office provides the highest quality of representation for indigent defendants.”

“I thank the Ninth Circuit for reappointing me and to have the honor to continue working with such dedicated, talented and compassionate folks in my Office,” said Williams. She noted, “The Eastern District is such a special place to practice. Who else can say they watched a bobcat cross the porch during a client meeting at Yosemite Court?”

Williams is supported by 82 attorneys and support staff working in offices in Fresno and Sacramento. In addition to criminal defense and appeals, the office represents capital prisoners in habeas corpus proceedings and reported 1,378 new criminal cases opened in the fiscal year ending Sept. 30, 2024.

Prior to becoming FPD in 2013, Williams served as an assistant FPD in the District of Arizona for nearly 20 years. She began her career in public service in 1988 as an assistant public defender with the Pima County Public Defender’s Office in Tucson, Arizona, where she handled felony cases including death penalty homicides, drugs, sex crimes and child abuse. Prior to that, she was an associate attorney in San Diego from 1986 to 1988.

Williams was a member of the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts’ Defender Services Peer Advisory Group, which advises the federal judiciary on policies affecting the delivery of

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services under the Criminal Justice Act. She also served on the Defender Services Automation Working Group, which develops long-range plans to meet automation and technology needs necessary to effective legal representation of financially eligible defendants.

The Office of the Federal Public Defender was created by Congress to fulfill the constitutional requirement that financially eligible individuals charged with crimes in the federal justice system be provided with professional legal representation at no cost. By statute, judges of the courts of appeals select and appoint the federal public defender for a renewable four-year term. In the 9th Circuit, applicants are evaluated by both a local screening committee and the court's Standing Committee on Federal Public Defenders, applying Equal Employment Opportunity guidelines. Reappointment to additional terms is based on a comprehensive evaluation of the federal public defender's performance, including an invitation for public comment.

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