Administrative Office of the Courts

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Chief Justice Judith Nakamura to retire from NM Supreme Court

SANTA FE – Chief Justice Judith K. Nakamura has announced that she will retire from the New Mexico Supreme Court effective Aug. 1.

She has served as chief justice since June 2017, and joined the state's highest court in December 2015.

"In my years on the bench, I've always strived to not only make the best legal decisions possible but to improve people's lives and advance the administration of justice," Chief Justice Nakamura said.

The Court will elect a new Chief Justice on July 15.

While leading the judicial branch of government, Chief Justice Nakamura guided the state court system's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. State courts remained opened with safety precautions and conducted most proceedings using audio and video teleconferencing. Courts are now preparing to resume jury trials.

During fiscal year 2019, the Chief Justice launched the Campaign for Judicial Excellence to ensure that courts better met the needs of New Mexicans. The initiative focused on simplifying the structure of the state court system, expanding the use of technology to assist the public and improving access to court programs and services. As part of the campaign, district courts have assumed administrative oversight of magistrate courts to improve efficiency and provide streamlined local decision-making. Courts have implemented electronic filing of documents in criminal cases and an Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) program was established to help settle consumer debt cases.

Chief Justice Nakamura served on the National Judicial Opioid Task Force and co-chaired its Civil and Criminal Justice Workgroup. The task force issued a report late last year with recommendations for state courts to address the crises of addiction. In New Mexico, Chief Justice Nakamura formed a cross-disciplinary group, called the Z-Team, that worked with the

State Justice Institute to train judges to better meet the needs of those with mental illnesses and substance abuse problems who appear in courts. The Team is planning a summit to bring together teams from counties across the state to improve court and community responses to those with behavioral health issues.

Before joining the Supreme Court, Chief Justice Nakamura served nearly three years as a Second Judicial District Court judge and more than 14 years as a Bernalillo County Metropolitan Court judge. She oversaw day-to-day operations of Metropolitan Court as its chief judge from 2002 until 2013, and was named Judge of the Year in 2004 by the Albuquerque Bar Association.

Chief Justice Nakamura received her Juris Doctor degree in 1989 from the University of New Mexico, and earned an undergraduate degree from UNM. Before her election as a judge, she spent most of her legal career in the private practice of law in Albuquerque. She worked at the State Land Office after law school, serving as an assistant land commissioner and general counsel.

Chief Justice Nakamura is an avid hot air balloon pilot and a volunteer member of the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta's Board of Directors, and serves on the University of New Mexico Alumni Board.

The Chief Justice presides over Supreme Court hearings and conferences, and is the administrative authority over personnel, budgetary matters and general operations of all state courts. The Chief Justice also acts as an advocate for the Judiciary on legislation, funding for the courts and other issues.

The process for filling a court vacancy calls for a bipartisan Judicial Nominating Commission to interview applicants and recommend nominees to the governor for possible appointment.

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