



## **JUDGE RENATHA FRANCIS**

When she's not working in chambers these days, Judge Renatha Francis may be found in Courtroom 6B at the Judge Daniel T.K. Hurley Courthouse (the main courthouse) in West Palm Beach. Since early November, 2019, she has presided over Family Division "FC" and Probate Division "IC," which had a vacancy due to the untimely and tragic passing of Judge Meenu Sasser.

Tracing Judge Francis' path to the bench, one sees the remarkable journey of a very driven little girl, propelled from very humble Jamaican roots, to a hard-working American jurist who has earned the respect and trust of many, including state leaders.

Judge Francis' life journey began in Jamaica in a household with her parents and younger sister. Her family fractured when her father abandoned it, leaving her mother to raise the children alone. Despite not having finished high school, Judge Francis' mother had an impeccable work ethic, and resilience and determination galore, all of which fueled her vision of a better life for herself and her children. She was business savvy, and started a trucking company and a bar, in order to support her family.

In her late teens, Judge Francis inherited the businesses. While diligently completing a double major in International Relations and Political Science at the University of the West Indies (UWI), Judge Francis successfully managed the businesses for the next five years. She did all of that while also serving as a surrogate mother to her younger sister.

All of these responsibilities could have quickly and easily worn down a seasoned, mature adult. Indeed, many people would have caved under such enormous pressures---but not Renatha Francis. Rather, demonstrating formidable strength, and supported by her strong religious faith, Judge Francis juggled her many critical responsibilities with grit, determination, and laser-like focus. While walking through this crucible of responsibilities, she burnished many important life skills that have served her well to this day, including managing people and processes, negotiating, multitasking, and time management.

After graduating from UWI with honors, Judge Francis migrated to the United States, and took a job in the retail industry, while saving money for law school. She ultimately enrolled in Florida Coastal Law School in Jacksonville, where she shined as a victor in many moot court competitions, and earned several other accolades.

Following her law school graduation, she went to work at the First District Court of Appeal in Tallahassee, where she served with distinction in three different positions: as an attorney to Judge Scott Makar, a Central Staff attorney; and as a Law Clerk to Judge Peter Webster. Thereafter, she joined Shutts & Bowen, Of Counsel, where she represented Fortune 500 companies as a member of the class Action and Mass Litigation Practice Group.

In 2017 Governor Rick Scott appointed her as a Miami-Dade County Court judge. A year later, Governor Scott elevated her to the Miami-Dade Circuit bench. She was only the second ever black female in the history of Miami-Dade County to be appointed to the circuit bench, her appointment coming some twenty-five years after the first. Most recently, Governor Ron DeSantis appointed her to the bench here in Palm Beach County.

Judge Francis has been an active member of many organizations, including the American Appellate Inn of Court, the Florida Association of Women Lawyers, and the Gwen S. Cherry Black Women Lawyers Association. She has also served as a panelist or participant at several conferences, and given a number of speeches at various events. On January 4th, 2019, the Florida Supreme Court appointed her to serve on the Judicial Management Council-Workgroup on Appellate Review of County Court Decisions.

Five years ago, Judge Francis married Phillip Fender, whom she met years before in Jamaica. They reconnected after her migration to the United States. They are now the parents of a beautiful two-year-old boy, Joshua.

Judge Francis submitted her name for consideration for a judgeship here, after her husband received a job offer in Palm Beach County. She and her family are enjoying life here, as much as they did in Miami-Dade County. Judge Francis' adaptability has assisted her in transitioning to life in Palm Beach County, and the bench here.

She readily expresses enormous gratitude for the many life experiences and people that, together, launched her into a shining trajectory. "I have succeeded well beyond my wildest dreams," she says. "I take nothing for granted, and am so grateful to God, my mother, my mentors, and my upbringing, for making me who I am, and will become."

Judge Francis is well aware of the special and unique perspective her background and life experiences give her, as she issues, from the bench, rulings affecting people from various walks of life. She considers it a high privilege to be entrusted to dispense proper justice in each case.

She lives by the Golden Rule, always striving to treat others, including lawyers, litigants, and court personnel, with proper dignity and respect. In the end, Judge Francis wants every lawyer and litigant to leave her courtroom feeling heard and understood, even if he/she did not prevail. She is guided by respect for the rule of law, and the limited role of judges in applying the law to the facts before them. She brings to the bench the

same determination, experience, hard work, and intellect, that have served her well from Jamaica, to Palm Beach County.

The Fifteenth Judicial Circuit welcomes Judge Renatha Francis to the bench. Please greet her warmly when you see her.

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