

Judge Nicole Gaines Phelps

Judge Phelps joined the King County Superior Court bench on January 9, 2017 as the first African-American Women to win a contested election for an open seat on the Superior Court Bench. Judge Phelps assumed the position in Department 14 previously occupied by Judge Brian Gain, who retired from the bench.

Judge Phelps' interest in the law began at an early age. She announced her intent to become an attorney when she was eight years old, and never looked back.

Judge Phelps grew up in Indiana and is the youngest of four children from a middle-class, African-American family. After witnessing the discrimination and racism her parents faced, she committed herself to helping people gain access to the legal system and find justice in unjust situations.

Judge Phelps received her undergraduate degree from Butler University and studied at the University of London Law Consortium before completing her legal degree at the Indiana School of Law.

From law school, Judge Phelps joined a small Seattle-based boutique family law firm and three years later moved to the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office (KCPAO). As a deputy prosecuting attorney she spent seven years prosecuting cases from misdemeanors and juvenile crimes to high-profile felonies. After leaving KCPAO, she moved to a small civil practice firm focusing on civil litigation, worked as a contract public defense attorney, ran a solo practice, and served nine years as an administrative law judge (ALJ) in the Washington State Office of Administrative Hearings. During Judge Phelps' tenure as an ALJ she specialized in cases involving Child Protective Services (CPS) allegations of child abuse and neglect against parents and foster parents; eligibility for public benefits, including medical care and benefits for persons with developmental disabilities and eligibility for special education services for child attending public schools.

Judge Phelps served two years as president of the Loren Miller Bar Association from 2010-2012. She also served three years as a Central District Trustee on the King County Bar Association Board before stepping down to run for her position with the court.

Judge Phelps currently serves as a member of the King County Superior Court's Local Rules and Uniform Family Court Committees. Additionally, she serves as co-chair of the King County Courts and Community Committee and the Superior Court Judges Association's Equity and Fairness Education Committee. She is a proud Silver Star Member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. In the community, Judge Phelps dedicates time serving on the Pike Place Senior Center and Food Bank Board of Directors and is a highly regarded keynote speaker on various legal topics including eliminating barriers to justice system.