

Judge Julie Sneed's Investiture

By Drew Domina

On July 12, 2024, hundreds gathered in Orlando, Florida to witness the next step in the incredible journey of United States District Judge Julie Simone Sneed. The investiture ceremony at the United States District Court in the George C. Young Federal Annex was a testament to the far-reaching impact that Judge Sneed has had on the broader legal community across the Southeastern United States. In explaining Judge Sneed's impact to those gathered, attorney Anitra Clement quoted Sir Isaac Newton: "If I have seen further, it's because I'm standing on the shoulders of giants." Judge Sneed is truly a giant in Florida's legal community and throughout her distinguished career has not only offered her shoulders for younger attorneys and students to stand upon, but has without fail offered them a helping hand and smile on their way up. The overwhelmingly positive effect that Judge Sneed has had and continues to have on those around her set the theme for her investiture ceremony and permeated the remarks of those offering their congratulations.

Judge Sneed's Court Security Officer Brian Rivera opened the proceedings by calling to order those gathered in the ceremonial courtroom and viewing in the multiple overflow rooms throughout the courthouse. The Honorable Timothy J. Corrigan presided over the ceremony in his role as Chief United States District Judge in the Middle District of Florida. Those present were then graced with a stirring rendition of the national anthem sung by Monica Williams Harris, Esq., Judge Sneed's longtime friend and colleague in the George

Edgecomb Bar Association, who had traveled from Atlanta to attend. Reverend Edward Henley of St. James House of Prayer Episcopal Church then led the attendants in an invocation asking that Judge Sneed be granted "the wisdom to discern right from wrong, the courage to uphold justice, and the compassion to consider the plight of those who come before her."

Chief Judge Corrigan then welcomed the hundreds in attendance and recognized those members of Judge Sneed's family that had travelled from across the state to be there. Numerous distinguished guests and revered members of the legal community were also in attendance, including the Honorable Charles Wilson of the U.S. Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals, Bankruptcy Judge Denise Barnett from the Western District of Tennessee, retired

Florida Supreme Court Justice Peggy Quince, the Honorable Jessica Costello and Honorable Barbara Twine Thomas from Florida's Thirteenth Judicial Circuit, United States Congressman Maxwell Frost of Florida's tenth Congressional District, the Middle District of Florida Clerk of Court Elizabeth Warren, Chief Probation Officer Parker Anderson, Deputy Chief Pretrial Services Officer Suzanne Arwady, United States Attorney Roger Handberg, Federal Defender Alec Hall, United States Marshal William Berger, as well as several U.S. District, Magistrate, and Bankruptcy judges and Florida state court judges and justices. When asked after the event, Judge Sneed recounted how grateful she was to have so many family members, friends, and colleagues

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U.S. District Judge Julie Sneed with her family as she is welcomed by her colleagues to the bench after receiving the oath of office.

in attendance from her time spent growing up in Orlando to her years practicing law and serving as a Magistrate Judge in Tampa.

Chief Judge Corrigan then introduced Attorney Valeria Obi to begin the presentation of gifts in appreciation of Judge Sneed's generous contributions to many local and state legal organizations. On behalf of the George Edgecomb Bar Association and along with the immediate past president Cornelius Demps and current president Tiffany Hilton, Ms. Obi expressed her appreciation to Judge Sneed for her service as a past president of that organization. Ms. Obi also expressed her gratitude to Judge Sneed on behalf of the Virgil Hawkins Florida Chapter of the National Bar Association, along with its current president Benjamin Garcia, and the Paul C. Perkins Bar Association, the National Bar Association's affiliate chapter in Orlando, along with its current president Ayana Barrow and Paul C. Perkins, Jr., for Judge Sneed's dedicated engagement, service, and support over the years. On behalf of Virgil Hawkins, Ms. Obi

presented Judge Sneed with a Bible and expressed her wish that its teachings may inspire Judge Sneed "to serve with integrity, fairness, and compassion in all your decisions and your values and principles." Ms. Obi then expressed her personal admiration for Judge Sneed, including Judge Sneed's "unwavering poise" and "kindness," and that Judge Sneed's journey to the federal bench was "one of inspiration to many, showing that dedication and perseverance can lead to great accomplishments."

Linette "Starr" Brookins, Esq. then spoke on behalf of the Florida Association of Women Lawyers and Hillsborough Association of Women Lawyers. Ms. Brookins described Judge Sneed as "an incredible beacon of hope" and as "an inspiration and living proof that a dream and perseverance make all things possible." Ms. Brookins explained that "[e]very person who enters [Judge Sneed's] courtroom will find a patient and willing ear and an equal application of the law she so respects and will follow." On behalf of FAWL and HAWL, Ms. Brookins presented Judge Sneed with a hanger for her

robes and a small glass sculpture designed to inspire greatness.

Chief Judge Corrigan then introduced Leia Leitner, president of the Orlando Chapter of the Federal Bar Association, to make a presentation to Judge Sneed on behalf of her organization as well as the Young Lawyers Division of the Orange County Bar Association and Community Legal Services of Mid-Florida. In her remarks, Ms. Leitner cited Alexander Hamilton's observation in the Federalist Papers that nearly every right guaranteed under the Constitution would be meaningless in the absence of a virtuous and independent judiciary. Ms. Leitner explained that Judge Sneed's appointment is "so critical" to uphold these ideas of the Founders because Judge Sneed is someone "who will listen and think but act decisively; one who will ensure equality under the law; and one who is smart, fair-minded, and, perhaps above all, independent." In recognition of these qualities and in honor of Judge Sneed's appointment, Ms. Leitner presented Judge Sneed with a customized hanger for her robes, a framed portrait of Lady Justice, a personalized clock, and an engraved wooden desk wedge, and laptop bag. Ms. Leitner closed on behalf of each organization in stating to Judge Sneed that "we hope that these items will serve you well and remain enduring symbols of our esteem for your public service over what we expect will be a long and distinguished judicial career on our federal bench."

After the conclusion of the presentations, Chief Judge Corrigan joked to laughter from those in attendance that he has "been to a lot of investitures" but that he thought "Judge Sneed's got the most loot of anybody that [he has] ever seen." He then introduced the Honorable Charlene Edwards Honeywell for remarks about her new colleague.



The Honorable James D. Whittemore administers the oath of office to his former law clerk and new colleague, U.S. District Judge Julie Sneed, along with Judge Sneed's husband, Dr. Kevin Sneed.



Judge Sneed's family travelled from across the state to celebrate her investiture at the George C. Young Federal Annex in Orlando, Florida on July 12, 2024.

Judge Honeywell opened her remarks with a poem by Dr. Benjamin E. Mays, a former longtime president of Morehouse College:

I have only just a minute
 Only 60 seconds in it.
 Forced upon me. Can't
 refuse it.
 Didn't seek it. Didn't
 choose it.
 But it's up to me to use it.
 Give account if I abuse it.
 Just a tiny little minute.
 But eternity is it.

With these moving words, Judge Honeywell began her reflection on how Judge Sneed has so generously used the 60 seconds of her life to better others' lives, and that brought her to this "culmination of years of preparation, dedication, perseverance, and an unwavering commitment to justice." Affectionately referring to her colleague as "Judge Julie" (not to be confused with television's Judge Judy), Judge Honeywell recounted her pleasure in knowing Judge Sneed as a lawyer practicing in the Florida state courts of the Thirteenth

Judicial Circuit and as a member and officer of several organizations, including the Hillsborough County Bar Association, Hillsborough Association for Women Lawyers, George Edgecomb Bar Association, the J. Clifford Cheatwood Inn of Court, and many others. But more importantly to Judge Honeywell was her relationship with Judge Sneed "as a friend linked in friendship and connected in service to our community through our membership in The Links, Incorporated, Tampa Chapter, where [Judge Sneed] is the current president." According to Judge Honeywell, "[f]rom the early days of her career as a lawyer, it was evident that Judge Julie possessed an extraordinary combination of intellectual rigor, moral integrity, and a deep sense of commitment, qualities that are essential to a judge."

Judge Honeywell then recounted Judge Sneed's years as a Magistrate Judge in the Tampa Division of the Middle District of Florida and joked that she knew Judge Sneed "was special when she told me that she enjoyed handling discovery issues. Imagine that." Judge Honeywell then shared

an anecdote of Judge Sneed's deciding of a case involving allegations of international child abduction by a parent. Judge Honeywell told those gathered that "[a]fter listening to heart-wrenching testimony from both parents and numerous relatives for several days, [Judge Sneed] determined that the mother did not abduct the child and the father had given his consent for the relocation." According to Judge Honeywell, this case "reflects Judge Julie's ability to blend legal expertise, a steadfast commitment to the rule of law with compassion, understanding, and a sense of fairness."

Beyond her rulings from the bench, Judge Honeywell described Judge Sneed's contributions to the court, including her participation in the court's intensive reentry program, presiding over naturalization ceremonies, and developing and organizing the programming for the Tampa Division's rotational summer internship program for law students. Judge Sneed has also continuously performed community services through



Judge Sneed with some of her current and former law clerks, who gathered to celebrate Judge Sneed's appointment and to thank her for her mentorship and support.

The Links and Alpha Kappa Alpha, a public service sorority.

Judge Honeywell closed her remarks by sharing her conviction that "there is no doubt that Judge Julie will navigate complex legal issues with wisdom, balance the scales of justice with care, approach each case with an open mind, and exemplify the highest standards of judicial conduct." Judge Honeywell spoke of Ecclesiastes 3:1 and its teaching that everything on the earth has its own time and season. Judge Honeywell described this as "the right time for Judge Julie's appointment to the district court" because she "will assist the district judges here in the Middle District of Florida as we work to restore that public trust and confidence [in the courts] and strive for a system of justice that reflects the very best of our society." In a closing prayer, Judge Honeywell asked that Judge Sneed "continue to make the most of the 60 seconds in your minutes of life and that God will give you the wisdom of Solomon, the patience of Job, and the strength of Samson as you embark on this next chapter of your career."

Chief Judge Corrigan then introduced Attorney Anitra Clement as president of the Tampa Chapter

of the Federal Bar Association for some remarks about her mentor, Judge Sneed. Ms. Clement began by recounting her first meeting of Judge Sneed in 2015 and that to Judge Sneed, "nothing is too small for her to do when there's service for the community at hand." Ms. Clement remembered Judge Sneed as a mentor and guidepost for young attorneys on not only how to be excellent lawyers, but also how to be true professionals in the field. Ms. Clement recalled Judge Sneed's reminder to her in dealing with opposing counsel to "[f]ocus on your case. Focus on who you are. Be yourself. Focus on your client and your task at hand." Judge Sneed is a pillar in the legal community, and Ms. Clement recalled her impact on not only young attorneys and colleagues, but also high school students in running the high school summer camp through the Tampa Chapter of the Federal Bar Association. Several students had approached Ms. Clement after the program and shared "the impact that Judge Sneed specifically has had on them and the thoughts that they have for their future because of her." In closing, Ms. Clement thanked Judge Sneed for the opportunity

to stand on her shoulders and see further, an opportunity that Judge Sneed has given and continues to give to so many.

Chief Judge Corrigan then read remarks from Phil Brest, special assistant to President Joseph R. Biden and senior counsel within the Office of White House Counsel. On behalf of the President, Mr. Brest extended his congratulations to Judge Sneed on her investiture and recognized that he can "think of no one better suited to help" with the caseload in the Middle District of Florida than Judge Sneed. According to Mr. Brest, Judge Sneed "captures everything one could possibly want in a jurist. She is driven yet humble, probing yet patient. She understands both the gravity of the role and its constitutionally prescribed limitations. Most importantly, she is in this for the right reasons: a commitment to the fair and efficient administration of justice and to upholding the rule of law." Mr. Brest concluded that Judge Sneed "will make a lasting contribution to the Middle District and those who call it home."

David Karp of Carlton Fields, P.A. was then introduced to read Judge Sneed's commission. Karp described the arduous process leading to Judge Sneed's nomination, confirmation, and appointment as a district judge on the federal bench as "a little bit like walking at night with a blindfold on through a labyrinth that's filled with trap doors, and if you're lucky enough to get through that process, the reward is you get to appear before the Senate Judiciary Committee hearing." In contrast to what is typically seen on individuals working their way through the process, Karp described Judge Sneed in her Senate Judiciary Committee hearing as having a "radiant smile" that "puts forth [her] finest qualities of compassion, of empathy, and

of really an incredible positivity." Before reading her commission, Karp explained his hope that someday, "in the very distant, distant future, many years from now," at Judge Sneed's portrait ceremony celebrating her taking senior status, that she would still have that same radiant smile and unflinching positive attitude and effect on everyone around her. With that, Mr. Karp read Judge Sneed's commission from President Biden appointing her as a United States District Judge for the Middle District of Florida.

The Honorable James D. Whittemore, for whom Judge Sneed had the honor of clerking for as a young attorney, then administered the oath of office to Judge Sneed. After the oath, Judge Sneed's husband, Dr. Kevin Sneed, and children, Ryan and Asha, enrobed Judge Sneed in her judicial robes. Chief Judge Corrigan then officially welcomed Judge Sneed to the bench by noting her previous service with distinction as a Magistrate Judge and assuring that he is "confident that Judge Sneed will serve with equal distinction as a United States District Judge." On behalf of the court, Chief Judge Corrigan welcomed Judge Sneed in her new role and wished her "Godspeed in all of [her] undertakings."

The attendees then had the pleasure of hearing from Judge Sneed herself, who, in her well-known humble and gracious fashion, took nearly the entirety of her remarks to thank those in attendance and those that made her appointment possible. To Judge Sneed, her appointment felt "like a miracle" and she expressed her conviction that she "could not have gotten to this place alone." Among those that received Judge Sneed's gratitude were

President Biden and Senators Marco Rubio and Rick Scott. To her husband, Dr. Kevin Sneed, Judge Sneed expressed that there "was not a moment that you did not encourage me, uplift me, and reassure me and support me," and that she was so proud of their children. Judge Sneed was further grateful for the love and support of her sister, Sonja, her brothers, Darryl and John, and her entire extended family that had travelled from across the state to be with her at the ceremony. Of her extended family, Judge Sneed recalled her great grandmother, who "instilled in [her] family a culture of hard work, determination, and hope" and whose values carried through to her grandmother and mother (and most certainly on to Judge Sneed herself).

Judge Sneed then thanked each presenter as well as the litany of individuals who made her confirmation possible, including the Federal Judicial Nominating Conference, David Karp, Florida state Senator Arthenia Joyner, Yolanda Cash Jackson, and Florida Supreme Court Justice Peggy Quince. Judge Sneed further expressed her gratitude to her family at St. James House of Prayer Episcopal Church, The Links, Incorporated, Alpha Kappa Sorority, Incorporated, the Athena Society, Akerman LLP, Fowler White Boggs, Trenam Law, the members of her various Inns of Court, members of the Florida Women's Lawyers Association, the National Bar Association, and the Federal Bar Association. Judge Sneed also thanked the distinguished judges of the Middle District of Florida and the Merit Selection Panel for the "honor of serving as a United States Magistrate Judge for almost nine years." Judge Sneed further recognized her law clerks

and courtroom deputy clerks for their "commitment to excellence" and expressed her gratitude to her district judge colleagues that have been "welcoming, helpful, and extremely collegial." Judge Sneed then thanked the entirety of the court staff for making the investiture ceremony possible and their tireless work in ensuring the ceremony's overwhelming success. In conclusion and in her well-known gracious manner, Judge Sneed reiterated that "it is truly an honor to serve" in her new role and promised that she "will work every day to be worthy of the great trust that you-all have placed in me."

The ceremony concluded with a benediction by Deidre Joseph of St. James House of Prayer Episcopal Church, who asked that the "work of [Judge Sneed's] hands . . . help and not hinder those she serves so that she rules with favor, goodness, kindness and mercy." Chief Judge Corrigan then closed the proceedings by inviting all those in attendance to a reception spanning three floors of the Orlando courthouse and further epitomizing the high esteem within which Judge Sneed is held. Judge Sneed's investiture ceremony characterized the myriad accomplishments in her career thus far, and the well-wishes and convictions of so many that Judge Sneed will continue as a giant in the legal community in the next steps of her journey.

Drew Domina is an attorney in the White Collar Crime & Government Investigations group in the Tampa Office of Carlton Fields, P.A. and served as a term law clerk to Judge Sneed from 2022 to 2024.