

# Tennessee Supreme Court



*As required by the state Constitution, the five members of the Tennessee Supreme Court normally hear cases in Nashville, Jackson and Knoxville. Pictured in the courtroom at the Supreme Court building in Nashville are (from left to right) Justice Janice M. Holder, Justice William C. Koch, Jr., Chief Justice Cornelia A. Clark (seated), Justice Gary R. Wade, and Justice Sharon G. Lee. The Supreme Court sits “en banc,” or as a whole, rather than in smaller panels.*

The **TENNESSEE SUPREME COURT** is the state’s highest court and the court of last resort. The five justices review civil and criminal cases appealed from lower state courts. They interpret the laws and constitutions of Tennessee and the United States.

The justices are appointed by the governor and then elected every eight years on a “yes-no” retention vote. They represent each of the state’s grand divisions – West, Middle and East Tennessee.

By constitutional mandate, the court normally meets in Nashville, Jackson and Memphis.

Under the 1992 Appellate Court Improvements Act, the Supreme Court may assume jurisdiction over undecided cases in the state Court of Appeals or Court of Criminal Appeals when there is a special need for a speedy decision.

The court also has appellate jurisdiction in cases involving state taxes, the right to hold public office and issues of constitutional law.

If requested, attorneys may present oral arguments before the Supreme Court. Unlike trials in lower courts, there are no witnesses, juries or testimony.

After the justices have heard oral arguments and reviewed the attorneys’ written materials, or *briefs*, they issue written decisions, known as *opinions*.

Tennessee Supreme Court opinions on federal constitutional issues can be appealed only to the United States Supreme Court, which may or may not agree to consider the appeal.

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**“The judicial power of this state shall be vested in one Supreme Court and in such Circuit, Chancery and other inferior courts as the Legislature shall from time to time ordain and establish....”**

*Article VI, Section I, Tennessee Constitution*



### **Chief Justice Cornelia A. Clark**

Born September 15, 1950, Franklin, TN; B.A. Vanderbilt University, 1971; M.A.T. Harvard University, 1972; J.D. Vanderbilt School of Law, 1979; Director, Tennessee Administrative Office of the Courts, May 1999-September 2005; Circuit Judge, 21st Judicial District, 1989-1999; private practice, Farris, Warfield & Kanaday 1979-1989; Former member, Board of Directors, Lawyers Association for Women, Marion Griffin Chapter; Tennessee Lawyers' Association for Women; Second Vice President, Nashville Bar Association; 2004-05 member ABA Commission on the American Jury; faculty member, American Institute for Justice, Inc.; former adjunct professor, Vanderbilt University School of Law; member, Williamson County, Tennessee and American Bar Associations, American Judicature Society; Fellow of the Tennessee (former Board chair), American and Nashville Bar Foundations; United Methodist Publishing House Board; Vanderbilt Law School National Council; 2005 Liberty Bell Award recipient by the Williamson County Bar Association; named 2010 Appellate Judge of the Year by Tennessee Chapter of the American Board of Trial Advocates; 2010 inductee of Nashville YWCA Academy for Women of Achievement. Appointed to Supreme Court September 2005; Became Chief Justice September 1, 2010.

### **Justice Janice M. Holder**

Born August 29, 1949, Canonsburg, PA; B.S. summa cum laude University of Pittsburgh 1971; J.D. Duquesne University School of Law 1975 and Recent Decisions Editor Duquesne Law Review 1974-75; senior law clerk to Herbert P. Sorg, Chief Judge, U.S. District Court, Western District of Pennsylvania 1975-77; practiced law 1977-90; editor Memphis Bar Forum 1987-91; chair Tennessee Bar Association Commission on Women and Minorities 1994-96; trustee Tennessee Bar Foundation 1995-97; Master of the Bench, Leo Bearman, Sr. American Inn of Court 1995-97, Emeritus 2005-present; recipient of Memphis Bar Association's Sam A. Myar Award for Outstanding Service to the Legal Profession and the Community 1990, Charles O. Rond Outstanding Jurist Award 1992, Divorce and Family Law Section Judge of the Year Award 1992, Association for Women Attorneys Marion Griffin-Frances Loring Award 1999, and was honored by the National Association of Women Judges as one of the Women Leaders of State Courts 2007; member American, Tennessee, and Memphis Bar Associations and founding member Tennessee Lawyers' Association for Women; elected Circuit Court judge for the 30<sup>th</sup> Judicial District in Memphis 1990; appointed to Supreme Court of Tennessee December 1996; elected August 1998 and 2006.

### **Justice Gary R. Wade**

Born May 31, 1948, Knox County, TN. Married; three children; four grandchildren; Methodist; B.S. University of Tennessee, 1970; J. D. University of Tennessee College of Law, 1973; private practice of law 1973-87; University of Tennessee College of Law Dean's Circle; Tennessee Bar Association, past member House of Delegates and Board of Governors; American Bar Association, Convention Delegate; Tennessee Trial Lawyers Association; Tennessee Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers; American Inns of Court; fellow, Tennessee Bar Foundation; Tennessee Judicial Conference, past president; Eta South Province, Phi Delta Theta Fraternity, past president; Mountain Press Mover and Shaker of the Year 1983-85 and 1997; Gary R. Wade Boulevard, 1987; mayor, City of Sevierville, 1977-87; Friends of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, co-founder, past president, and chair emeritus; Citizen of the Year, Sevierville Chamber of Commerce, 2004; Appellate Judge of the Year, American Board of Trial Advocates, 2004; Legion of Honor, Phi Delta Theta International Fraternity, 2004; Judicial Excellence Award, Knoxville Bar Association, 2004; Garden Club of America Conservation Award, 2005; appointed to Tennessee Court of Criminal Appeals, 1987; elected 1988; reelected 1990 and 1998; served as presiding judge, 1998-2006; appointed to Supreme Court September 2006; Power100, Business TN, 2007-2008.

### **Justice William C. Koch, Jr.**

Born September 12, 1947, Honolulu, Hawaii; married; Episcopalian; B.A. Trinity College, 1969; J.D. Vanderbilt University School of Law, 1972; LL.M in Judicial Process University of Virginia School of Law, 1996; instructor in Constitutional Law, Nashville School of Law, 1997-present; adjunct instructor, Vanderbilt University School of Law, 1988-1995; Harry Phillips American Inn of Court, president 1990-1994 and 1995-present; American Inns of Court Foundation Board of Trustees, 2000-2008 board secretary, 2004-2008; American Bar Association, Appellate Judges Conference, Executive Committee, 2008-present; United Way of Metropolitan Nashville Board of Trustees, 1980-present; Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee Board of Trustees, 2005-present; Nashville, Tennessee, and American Bar Associations; Tennessee Appellate Judge of the Year, American Board of Trial Advocates, 2002; Nashville School of Law, Fourth-Year Instructor of the Year, 1998, 1999, 2001; Tennessee Supreme Court Advisory Commission on Technology, co-chair, 1997-2001; Tennessee Judicial Conference, Executive Committee, 1985-1988; Tennessee Judicial Conference, Committee on Compensation and Retirement, 1984-present, chair, 1990-2007; appointed by Governor Lamar Alexander to the Tennessee Court of Appeals, 1984; elected in 1984, 1988, 1990, 1998, and 2006; served as presiding judge of the Middle Section of the Tennessee Court of Appeals, 2004-2007; appointed by Governor Phil Bredesen to the Supreme Court of Tennessee June 2007.

### **Justice Sharon G. Lee**

Born December 8, 1953, Knoxville, TN; a life-long resident of Monroe County; has two daughters and serves on the Board of Directors of the Boys and Girls Club of Monroe County; attended Vanderbilt University; graduated from the UT College of Business with high honors and the UT College of Law; private practice, Madisonville, TN, 1978-2004; member of the Tennessee Bar Association, serving in the House of Delegates; formerly a member of the Tennessee Trial Lawyer's Association; member and Director of the Tennessee Lawyers Association for Women; President of the East Tennessee Lawyers Association for Women; fellow of the Tennessee Bar Foundation; member of the Alumni Advisory Council for the UT College of Law; formerly an adjunct faculty member of the UT College of Law; member of the Executive Committee of the Tennessee Judicial Conference; formerly served as attorney for Monroe County, the Cities of Madisonville and Vonore; City Judge for Madisonville; awarded the Spotlight Award from the National Association of Women Judges, 2005; first woman to serve as a Judge on the Eastern Section of the Tennessee Court of Appeals, appointed June 2004, elected August 2004, re-elected 2006; appointed to the Supreme Court October 2, 2008.