

SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON FOR PIERCE COUNTY

PRESS RELEASE

November 5, 2019

RE: Judge G. Helen Whitener 2019 APEX Award recipient

On Sept. 26, the Washington State Bar Association (WSBA) presented Pierce County Superior Court Judge G. Helen Whitener with the Justice Charles Z. Smith Excellence in Diversity Award at their APEX (Acknowledging Professional Excellence) Award ceremony. In 2017, Judge Whitener spearheaded the “Color of Justice” National Association of Women Judges (NAWJ) program in Pierce County, which gives girls and young women ages 10-19 the opportunity to meet and interact with female judges and attorneys. After the program’s success in Pierce County, the program expanded in partnership with the Superior Court Judges’ Association to support yearly three events throughout the state. This year the event was held in Yakima, Thurston and Whatcom counties. Judge G. Helen Whitener made history as the county’s first

immigrant-born judge and is Washington state’s first openly LGBTQ black judge. Judge Whitener has been a devoted advocate of human rights. Judge Whitener is quoted in a video created by WSBA saying, “Justice Smith was a giant, I’m not. It is my hope that at some time in my legal career that I can fill the shoes that he filled, and I thank you for giving me the space where my voice can be heard.”



You can watch the video created by the WSBA about Judge Whitener and her award [here](#).

About the Justice Charles Z. Smith Excellence in Diversity Award:

The award is presented to a lawyer, law firm, or law-related group that has made a significant contribution to diversity in the legal profession. Justice Charles Z. Smith served as a Washington State Supreme Court Justice from 1988 to 2002. He was the first person of color and the only African American to hold the position.

About Judge G. Helen Whitener:

Judge Whitener was appointed to the Pierce County Superior Court in 2015 by Governor Jay Inslee. Prior to her appointment Judge Whitener served as a judge on the Washington State Board of Industrial Insurance Appeals, and as a pro-tem judge in Pierce County District Court as well as the Tacoma Municipal Court. She had previously worked as a Prosecutor and a Defense Attorney.

Judge Whitener is also the 2019 recipient of the King County Washington Women Lawyers President Award; the Seattle University School of Law, 2019 Woman of the Year Award, the 2019 Tacoma-Pierce County Bar Association's Diversity Award. In 2018, Judge Whitener received the Pierce County Washington Women Lawyer's Woman of the Year Award.

In 2017, the Washington State Supreme Court appointed Judge Whitener to serve on the Washington State Minority and Justice Commission and on the Office of Civil Legal Aid Oversight Committee. She is a member of the International Association of Women Judges, the International Association of LGBTQ Judges and the National Association of Women Judges. Judge Whitener is a graduate of Baruch College, City University of New York, with a B.B.A. and holds a Juris Doctor from Seattle University School of Law.

About Pierce County Superior Court:

Pierce County Superior Court is the second largest superior court in the state of Washington and is proud to serve the citizens and visitors of Pierce County. The court is staffed with 22 judges and nine commissioners. There are three sites where court is held; the County City Building at 930 Tacoma Ave S., Tacoma, Remann Hall Juvenile Court at 5501 6th Ave, Tacoma, and Western State Hospital at 9601 Steilacoom Blvd SW, Lakewood. For more information, please visit our website at <http://www.piercecountywa.gov/superiorcourt>.

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