

**STATEMENT OF INTEREST
FOR THE OFFICE OF CHIEF JUDGE OF
THE SUPERIOR COURT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

SUBMITTED TO

THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA JUDICIAL NOMINATION COMMISSION

ON

APRIL 29, 2016

**HIRAM PUIG-LUGO
ASSOCIATE JUDGE**

I am honored to submit my application to serve the District of Columbia and the Courts as Chief Judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia. I am grateful for the opportunity to describe my professional experience and background consistent with the five qualifications listed in the Application Instructions for the Office of Chief Judge.

1. Interest in Court Administration:

My interest in court administration arises from an understanding of the role that we the Courts play in society, and the impact that administrators can have in fulfilling our mission. My interest is rooted in the conviction that we are public servants tasked with a central, essential and critical responsibility. Our mission must remain paramount at all times, because the Court as an institution is greater than any one of us as individuals.

Courts make serious decisions affecting the lives of people on a daily basis. We resolve conflicts and disputes using legal frameworks defined through legislation, court rules and appellate guidance. We ensure fairness in the judicial system, maintain access to legal relief and protect the rights afforded to all. It is imperative that we approach our work with solemnity and with full awareness of the impact that we have on our community.

Court administrators are the judges and managers who guide the Court to fulfill its responsibilities. We are responsible for solving problems, developing strategies and promoting trust in the judicial system. We must be creative, transparent and accountable in our work. We should weigh and balance the needs of the institution with the needs of the individuals within the institution, and the needs of the community at large. We must undertake our tasks as stewards of public resources and protectors of public confidence. Along the way, we need to engage collaboratively with DC Government, professional organizations and community groups.

The Chief Judge plays a central role in court administration. He or she sets the tone for interpersonal dynamics and for morale within the courthouse. He or she represents the Court and serves to humanize the Court before the community at large. As Chief Judge, I would find it imperative to build bridges, treat everyone with respect and lead by example.

2. Administrative and Management Ability:

I have served as Presiding Judge of the Family Court since January 2014. This experience has given me an opportunity to learn about administrative matters and provides new management lessons every day. In my capacity, I strive to learn from daily interactions with a wide range of people, and from observing Chief Judge Satterfield and other Presiding Judges perform their work. I am fully aware that I have much more to learn, but provide some examples below of creative approaches that I have used during my tenure.

Family Court did not have a full complement of judges for the first two years that I served as Presiding Judge. The shortage arose from retirements and from a backlog in the Senate confirmation process. This situation forced us to modify our work in a couple of ways.

First, Judge Epstein, Judge DiToro, Deputy Presiding Judge Dalton and I teamed to cover an unassigned domestic relations calendar in addition to our regular work. We handled the calendar one week every fourth week on a staggered basis. This arrangement allowed us to staff the calendar full time, and to resolve remaining cases until we were able to wind down the calendar.

Second, we noticed that delinquency filings had decreased and asked the judges assigned to juvenile calendars for assistance with domestic relations matters. Judge Dayson, Judge Pan, Judge Pasichow, and Judge Raffinan kindly agreed to each stagger domestic relations cases for one week every fourth week in addition to their juvenile work.

These strategies, along with the commitment and hard work of the remaining Domestic Relations judges, Abuse and Neglect Judges, PINS and Paternity and Support Judges allowed us to perform at a rate comparable to our numbers when we were fully staffed. Our joint effort led to the Family Court being fully staffed when assignments issued for January 2016, before the Senate addressed pending judicial confirmations.

My administrative and management experience is not limited to matters in Superior Court. I was elected Chair of the Hispanic Bar Association of the District of Columbia Judicial Council for three terms ending in January 2015. While serving as Chair, the Council developed a relationship with Bancroft Elementary School to bring third grade students to the courthouse for a scripted Spanish language mock trial every year. We also created a successful summer judicial internship program for law students under the leadership of Judge Demeo and Judge Seoane-López.

I am also completing my third and final year on the Board of Directors of the Capital City Public Charter School (CCPCS). I have served on the Governance Committee and as Board Secretary. This experience has helped me learn about governance issues, such as maintaining institutional accountability and developing succession plans. It has also allowed me to be part of conversations discussing administrative, academic performance and financial issues.

Finally, I serve on the Board of Directors of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) and chair its Diversity Committee. Our committee has launched an assertive and focused effort to promote diversity on the national family court bench. We are contacting professional and advocacy organizations which share our commitment to diversity and developing lines of communication with them. We have proposed to leadership that NCJFCJ devote a conference to exploring how diversity impacts the different types of work that we see in family courts. We hope that representatives from the organizations we contact agree to serve on panels at the conference, and/or submit papers expanding on topics related to diversity. We envision dedicating an issue of the NCJFCJ journal to supplement the diversity discussion taking place at the conference.

3. Promoting Collaboration and Collegiality:

The best way to promote collaboration and collegiality is to treat others with decency and with respect. This concept applies to every interaction, from agency directors and judicial officers, to frontline staff and the general public. It is an approach that has guided my work as Presiding Judge of the Family Court as reflected in the examples discussed below.

For the past three years, Family Court has worked extremely hard to actualize rules which had become dated, and to develop rules in areas where rules do not exist. This process required us to seek and to consider input from institutional litigants and from the Bar. At this time, we are finalizing updated rules for Domestic Relations proceedings and proposed rules for Paternity and Support and Legal Guardianship cases. Also, we are in the process of updating rules for Juvenile Delinquency matters. We hope to submit draft rules in most or all of these areas to the Superior Court Rules Committee before the end of the calendar year.

Family Court has worked closely with juvenile justice stakeholders to improve operations in JM-15, the courtroom where juvenile respondents enter the court system. This dialogue includes representatives from Family Court, Office of the Attorney General, Public Defender Service, Georgetown University Law Center Criminal Justice Clinic, United States Marshal Service, Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services, Metropolitan Police Department, and Court Social Services. Our conversation, which began in October 2014 under the steady hand of Judge Howze, has improved the communication, efficiency and collaboration needed to expedite processing detained youth. Currently, we are monitoring a draft protocol detailing the collaboration, and will soon provide the Chief Judge with an administrative order to memorialize the process.

In addition, Family Court has convened a working group with public sector and non-governmental stakeholders to coordinate our systemic response to situations where children have endured, or are at risk of enduring commercial sexual exploitation. The effort involves Family Court, Office of the Attorney General, Metropolitan Police Department, Child and Family Services Agency, Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services, Court Social Services, Department of Behavioral Health, and community based organizations. Our collaboration has contributed to the Court Social Services Child Guidance Clinic developing an assessment to identify youth at risk of sexual exploitation, inspired a multi-disciplinary team meeting convened monthly at the Safe Shores Child Advocacy Center to coordinate services, and produced a draft protocol defining collaboration between agencies and providers working with youth at risk of sexual exploitation.

My experience in promoting collaboration and collegiality extends to international projects. I am one of four judges representing the United States in the Hague Judicial Network. Our task is to provide support for judges in the United States when they receive applications for return under the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. We also interact with colleagues from other countries to cultivate the trust and communication needed to fully implement the Convention. In fact, I have contributed to separate bilateral conversations between the United States and Spain, México and Japan to facilitate collaboration under the Convention.

I would be remiss if I did not recognize that these efforts to promote collaboration and collegiality would not have succeeded without the commitment and support that Deputy Presiding Judge Dalton, former and current Family Court Judges, Court managers and staff, and Court stakeholders have generously provided.

4. Promoting Confidence in the Courts and Judicial System:

Confidence in the Courts is essential for the community to trust the legal system and for litigants to comply with court orders. It is important for residents to know about the Courts and for people to understand how we work. Over time, I have worked to promote this confidence in a variety of ways.

Family Court conducts regular Bench-Bar sessions with lawyers who practice in our diverse subject matter areas. We hold these sessions with the abuse and neglect bar, and the domestic relations bar through the DC Bar Family Law Section. We hope to conduct a Bench-Bar session with the juvenile delinquency bar in the near future.

I speak at these events and interact with individual attorneys both before and after the group conversation. I am grateful to have developed respectful and cordial communication with

the various bars, and to have received an award last year from the DC Bar Family Law Section for my service and leadership on the Family Court.

Moreover, I have contributed to various community events discussing the operation of the Court system. I have spoken about our work at local schools, public forums and media, and discussed a variety of legal issues on Spanish-language media in the District area and in New York City. These events are essential for people to get to know us, to trust the decisions that we make and to know that we are here to serve them.

For several years, I have hosted the Oyster School's eighth grade class for an annual visit to the courthouse. I spend about an hour discussing the types of cases that we resolve in Court and the work that we judges perform. I then conduct mock bail hearings with all students taking part as government or defense attorneys. When the class valedictorian spoke at her graduation last year, she mentioned that arguing a bail hearing in Spanish before a real Superior Court judge was one of her proudest moments at Oyster.

Lastly, I have played an active role in community initiatives dedicated to expanding legal representation and resources for indigent litigants. I served for six years on the Access to Justice Commission and last year was a member of the DC Bar Pro Bono Center's Strategic Assessment Task Force, which will receive the DC Bar's 2016 Frederick B. Abramson Award this June. At this moment, I am in my third year serving on the DC Bar Pro Bono Center Pro Bono Committee.

5. Providing Intellectual Leadership:

Intellectual leadership requires creativity and openness to seeing possibilities in every situation. It also involves monitoring trends, anticipating needs and identifying appropriate response strategies. I have provided this type of leadership in several ways.

I was assigned to the Persons in Need of Supervision (PINS) calendar for 2011 and 2012. As I moved through the assignment, I noticed an increase in cases involving youth who had been commercially sexually exploited. This concern led me to convene a working group to improve our collective effort to identify and to serve youth who have endured that experience. As mentioned above, the efforts of our working group have greatly improved our systemic response and increased collaboration between stakeholders.

Similarly, as previously discussed, I knew that Family Court rules were outdated and that some Family Court subject matter areas did not have rules. Our practice of convening advisory groups to update and develop rules often took years to navigate. After I became Presiding Judge, I consulted with colleagues, stakeholders and court managers on how to make the process more efficient. I proposed to Chief Judge Satterfield, and he agreed, to make changes that both expedite the process and afford stakeholders meaningful opportunities to provide input and feedback.

Family Court now invites stakeholder representatives to meet individually with a Family Court attorney advisor to propose updates or changes for specific sets of rules. We give stakeholders the opportunity to submit proposed changes in writing as well. We set deadlines for meetings to occur and for written submissions to be made. After receiving the input, the attorney advisors meet with a subcommittee of judges and court managers from the Family Court Rules Committee to review the proposals. The subcommittee considers the proposals and sends out a draft for stakeholders to provide further comments. The additional comments

will be presented to the Family Court Rules Committee before any proposed changes and updates are submitted to the Superior Court Rules Committee for consideration.

Last year, I noticed an increase in requests for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) predicate orders. These requests are part of a humanitarian remedy enacted in immigration law for unaccompanied immigrant minors. However, it is an unusual remedy because it requires applicants to secure factual findings from a family court before submitting an SIJS application to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services. This hybrid process created confusion about how to resolve applications and increased the workload for Domestic Relations calendars. In response, I suggested to Chief Judge Satterfield that he designate an SIJS calendar and assign it to me for the sake of uniformity and efficiency in resolving these requests. The SIJS requests are now part of my regular courtroom responsibilities.

Finally, I serve as co-chair of the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC) Juvenile Justice Committee with Deputy Mayor Brenda Donald. CJCC organizes a Juvenile Justice Summit every year. This year our topic will be Restorative Justice. I proposed the topic after conversations with judges assigned to juvenile calendars, the Office of the Attorney General and CJCC about the frequency with which we see delinquency referrals from the school system. It is our hope that promoting restorative justice practices in the community will reduce conflict overall, promote school attendance in particular, and improve the quality of life for District residents.

6. Conclusion:

I envision the Court as a living and evolving institution where we work with sincere care and concern for each other, yet hold ourselves accountable for fulfilling our mission and respecting our values.

I envision the Court as reaching out to the District community at large and developing collaborative efforts with the Executive Branch, the Legislative Branch, professional groups and community based-organizations, while protecting judicial neutrality and independence.

I am confident that my time on the Court has provided me with the professional, interpersonal and organizational skills needed to actualize this vision. I realize there is much for me to learn, should I be appointed Chief Judge, but I have always strived to do my best and to learn from my experiences.

More importantly, I know that I can count on my colleagues to share their guidance, advice and wisdom as we move forward - together.