

CHIEF JUDGE BERNADETTE D'SOUZA was elected as the first Family Court Judge of Civil District Court for the Parish of Orleans on February 1, 2012 and was re-elected in 2014 and 2020. On January 1, 2021, she became the Chief Judge of Orleans Parish Civil District Court. Judge D'Souza previously was a practicing attorney, who dedicated her legal career to public interest law representing indigent clients in family law, housing, and domestic violence for over 18 years, many as Managing Attorney of Southeast Louisiana Legal Services.

Judge D'Souza received her Juris Doctor degree from Tulane University School of Law in 1992. After graduation, she spent over a decade promoting awareness to domestic violence issues by devoting time to educating and supervising law students. Judge D'Souza was an adjunct law professor at Tulane Law School and has been a frequent guest lecturer at Loyola University College of Law. She currently serves on the Faculty of the National Judicial Institute on Domestic Violence of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. In addition, Judge D'Souza participates in numerous other speaking engagements including continuing legal education programs for the Louisiana State Bar and New Orleans Bar Associations.

Judge D'Souza is a member of the Louisiana State, New Orleans and the American Bar Associations; the A.P. Tureaud Inn of Court; Martinet Legal Society and the Association for Women Attorneys. She is a Fellow of the American Bar and the Louisiana Bar Foundations. Judge D'Souza was appointed by the Louisiana Supreme Court to the Committee on Bar Admissions and on the Self-Represented Litigants Task Force.

Judge D'Souza served on many community and professional boards. She is the former President of Greater New Orleans YWCA, Tulane University Women's Association and the Auxiliary to the American Academy of Neurology; Chairman of the Board of the WRBH - Radio for the Blind and board member of the Institute for Mental Hygiene.

She currently serves as a Mayoral appointee on the Board of Total Community Action, and as President of the St. Thomas More Catholic Lawyer's Association.

As a member of the National Association of Women Judges (NAWJ), Judge D'Souza was elected to the Board of NAWJ as District Director and in 2017 served as its Secretary, Chair of the Personnel Committee and Co-chair of the Executive Director Search Committee. In October of 2019, she was elected President of NAWJ.

On an international level, Judge D'Souza was invited by the U.S. State Department INL Office, to be a speaker at the "Role of Women in Justice" Conference, in Yerevan, Armenia. She also presented at a panel discussion on "Integrated Domestic Violence Courts" at the United Nations Convention on Status of Women in New York. More recently, at the invitation from His Holiness Pope Francis, Judge D'Souza presented on Equal Access to Justice at the First Pan-American Judges Summit, at the Vatican, in Rome.

Judge D'Souza is the recipient of several prominent awards for her professional and personal commitment to the community, including recognition as one of the City Business 2011 Women of the Year, the St. Mark Missionary Baptist Church Humanitarian Award, YWCA Role Model Award, Citizen Hero Award from Victims and Citizens Against Crime and the Louisiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence Into Action Award. She received the Association for Women Attorneys Professionalism Award and the Louisiana State Bar Association 2008 Career Public Interest Award in recognition of her career commitment and outstanding contribution of legal services to Louisiana's indigent. Additionally, Judge D'Souza received the Public Service and Leadership Award from Black Law Students Association of Loyola University College of Law, and the Distinguished Jurist Award from the New Orleans Pro Bono Project. In 2018, Judge D'Souza received the City Business Icon Award to mark New Orleans' 300th

Anniversary honoring 20 leaders for their energy, innovative ideas, achievements and commitment to excellence to move the community forward. For her outstanding leadership in promoting the vision, core values and mission of NAWJ, Judge D'Souza received the NAWJ Justice Vaino Spencer Leadership Award.

Judge D'Souza is the widow of the late Dr. Terence D'Souza, a neurologist at Ochsner Clinic. They were married for 41 years, proud parents of Lloyd, Vanessa and Christine, and grandparents to three grandsons.