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Law School News: Melissa DuBose L'04 Confirmed to Federal District Court

Judge DuBose previously was an associate judge on the Rhode Island District Court, where she served beginning in 2019. She will replace Judge William Smith, who will be taking senior status as of January 1, 2025.

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Suzi Morales



An RWU Law alum, DuBose is the first person of color and first openly LGBTQ person to serve on the United States District Court for the District of Rhode Island. Image Credit: Official RI District Court photo

Melissa DuBose L'04 has been confirmed by the US Senate to fill a judicial opening in the United States District Court for the District of Rhode Island.

When she is sworn in, DuBose will become the first person of color and first openly LGBTQ person to serve on the court. She will replace Judge William Smith, who will be taking senior status as of January 1, 2025.

DuBose previously was an associate judge on the Rhode Island District Court, where she served beginning in 2019.

A lifelong Rhode Islander, DuBose earned her J.D. taking evening classes while teaching history and civics for Providence Public Schools, where she taught for nearly a decade. After graduation, she served as a prosecutor in the Rhode Island Attorney General's Office until 2008. She then was senior legal counsel for multinational energy management company Schneider Electric until her appointment to the state bench, specializing in corporate compliance, ethics, and fair trade.

"Judge DuBose is a true leader in the state of Rhode Island and the legal profession," said Roger Williams University School of Law Dean Gregory W. Bowman. "She served the state of Rhode Island superbly as a lawyer and state court judge, and she will be a federal judge of the highest caliber and integrity. Everyone at RWU Law is thrilled for Judge DuBose and proud that she is an alumna of our law school."

In January, President Joe Biden announced DuBose's nomination. During her February hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee, she was introduced by Rhode Island's Senators, Jack Reed and Sheldon Whitehouse. The committee voted in March to approve her nomination and send it to the full Senate for a vote.

Reed noted in his introductory remarks at the Judiciary Committee Hearing that DuBose "has proven herself to be someone who administers justice fairly and impartially and has led efforts to make the court system better for everyone it serves."

During the Judiciary Committee hearing, DuBose invoked the memory of her mother, Rev. Sheila DuBose, who DuBose credited with teaching her to respect the humanity of everyone she met. She also discussed her time as a teacher, noting that "meeting students where they were really has helped me to become an active listener but also someone who can empathize with the folks that I'm working with."

The Rhode Island Police Chiefs' Association, Rhode Island Attorney General's Office, all members of the Rhode Island Supreme Court, and all sitting judges of the U.S. District Court for the District of Rhode Island submitted letters to the Judiciary Committee in support of DuBose's nomination.

"Court workers and watchers routinely compliment her on her temperament, demeanor, professionalism, and empathy," said the letter from Rhode Island's federal judges. "She treats court users (the term she likes to use, rather than other possibly pejorative terms) equally and with extreme respect—from newly arrested individuals on the arraignment calendar, self-represented litigants on the civil calendar, and all attorneys and staff."

"Judge DuBose embodies the passion and commitment of a Roger Williams University alum who is using their education to make a meaningful difference in the world," RWU President Ioannis Miaoulis noted upon DuBose's confirmation. "She will serve Rhode Islanders with excellence and as inspiration for our graduates and future students of the School of Law."