



## PROFILE HONORABLE CYNTHIA Y. COBBS

**Justice Cynthia Y. Cobbs** was appointed by the Supreme Court of Illinois as a justice on the Illinois Appellate Court in January 2015. Prior to her appointment to the appellate court, Justice Cobbs was appointed as a circuit court judge in September 2011. Having been evaluated and found qualified by the Chicago Bar Association and the Alliance of Bar Associations, she was slated by the Cook County Democratic Party and won election to the circuit court seat in 2014. Early in her legal career, Justice Cobbs served as senior judicial law clerk to Supreme Court (Chief) Justice Charles E. Freeman, the first African American judge to serve on the state's Supreme Court. Justice Cobbs thus became the first African American to serve as a senior judicial law clerk on the state's highest court.

As senior clerk, Justice Cobbs reviewed all aspects of litigation for trial errors committed by attorneys in the trial of cases, as well as by the courts in ruling on pleadings, the admissibility of evidence and in rendering a final verdict or judgment in civil, criminal and juvenile cases, pending on appeal to the high court. On Justice Freeman's behalf, she drafted the written disposition in those cases, which provided the legal analysis and basis for the Supreme Court's final ruling, as well as concurring and dissenting opinions. Additionally, Justice Cobbs reviewed and made recommendations to Justice Freeman on the disposition of all filed motions, petitions for rehearing in previously disposed of cases and on petitions for leave to appeal to the Supreme Court. Justice Cobbs served as senior law clerk on the Supreme Court from 1990 to 1997, having also served as a judicial clerk to Justice Freeman during his tenure on the Illinois Appellate Court.

In December of 1997, Justice Cobbs joined the legal staff of the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts, the administrative arm of the Illinois Supreme Court. There, she worked as an attorney in the office's Executive Division and was subsequently promoted to Chief Legal Counsel. In March 2002, Justice Cobbs was appointed Director of the Illinois Courts, becoming the first woman and the first African American appointed by the Supreme Court to serve alongside the Court as its statewide director.

As a constitutional officer, then Director Cobbs assisted the Supreme Court in its mandate to oversee and administer every aspect of the Illinois judicial branch of government. In that capacity, Justice Cobbs frequently interfaced with members of the state legislature and with agencies within the executive branch of government, including the Secretary of State, State Attorney General, State Board of Elections, Office of the Auditor General and the Office of Management and Budget. Justice Cobbs developed the Supreme Court's administrative agendas and met regularly with the Supreme Court justices regarding the management of state's circuit and appellate courts, implementation of Supreme Court rules and policies, the development of new court committees and implementation of new court programs. Managing the five operational divisions of the Administrative Office, Justice Cobbs developed and managed the Supreme Court's nearly \$300 million annual budget, developed policies for the uniform delivery of Illinois' adult and juvenile probation services, oversaw the development of judicial education programs for all Illinois judges, enhanced the use of technology in the state courts, developed the first policies for implementation of e-filing and e-access in the trial courts and, facilitated the work of the Supreme Court's several committees. During her tenure as director, Justice Cobbs served as an ex-officio member of the Illinois Judicial Conference, the Supreme Court Legislative Committee, the Supreme Court Historic Preservation Commission, for which she had drafted the enabling legislation for its creation, secretary to the Illinois Courts Commission, as well as to the Conference of Chief Circuit Judges.

Justice Cobbs' assignments in the Circuit Court included presiding over traffic court, forcible entry and detainer, debt collection and small claims, the specialized *Pro Se* litigants court call, and civil jury trials. In the Appellate Court, Justice Cobbs has served as a member of the Executive Committee and as the presiding justice of the First District's Third Division.

**Achievements:** Early in her tenure as Director, Justice Cobbs secured one of three federal technical assistance grants from the National Institute of Corrections, which introduced evidence based sentencing practices in Illinois' trial courts. She developed and hosted Illinois' first statewide child welfare summit, bringing together national speakers, trial court judges, state's attorneys, prosecutors and child welfare practitioners, for the purpose of developing strategies to improve outcomes for children in the child welfare system. Major initiatives developed by Justice Cobbs, and adopted by the Supreme Court during her tenure as Director include: E-filing in Trial Courts; E-access to Trial Court Records; Performance and Accountability Strategies for Illinois Judges; and Emergency Preparedness Plans in Illinois Courts.

**Awards:** Justice Cobbs has been honored to receive the following awards: National Bar Association's Heman Sweatt Award (2018); Cook County Bar Association – Kenneth E. Wilson Award (2017); Sweet Holy Spirit – Justice of the Year Award (2016); Top Ladies of Distinction Crown Jewel Award (2016); Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity Crescent Moon Award (2015); Illinois Judicial Council Chairperson's Award (2012 & 2014); The Chicago Bar Association's Earl Burris Dickerson Award (2011); Cook County Bar Association Judicial Award (2012); Chicago-Kent College of Law Alumni Association Recognition Award (2006); Chicago-Kent College of Law Bar and Gavel Society Inductee (1988); and The Standish Willis Award (1988).

**Board of Directors:** Justice Cobbs currently serves on the following Boards: *Illinois Supreme Court Board of Trustees – Illinois Judicial College*, the governing body which oversees educational training and professional development for judges and employees in Illinois' Judicial Branch; Board of Directors for *South Suburban PADS*, a not for profit organization which delivers shelter, housing and rehabilitative services to South Suburban Cook County's homeless population, and *Lawyers Lend A Hand*, a not for profit organization which provides mentoring services to underprivileged youth in the Chicagoland area and the Executive Board of the Illinois Judicial Council. Previously, Justice Cobbs served on the Board of Directors for the *Center for Conflict Resolution*, a not for profit organization providing alternatives to legal dispute resolution; the *Council for Higher Education in Haiti*; the *Conference of State Court Administrators*; and, as Chairman of the Executive Board, *New Faith Baptist Church*.

**Committees/Associations:** During her legal career, Justice Cobbs has served on numerous committees and associations. Her current judicial committee appointments include the Illinois Supreme Court's Rules Committee and the Committee on Judicial Performance Evaluations. Previously, Justice Cobbs served on the following Supreme Court Committees: Committee on Judicial Conduct, Illinois Pattern Jury Instructions in Civil Cases, Illinois Judicial Conference Study Committee on Juvenile Justice, and the Committee on Alternative Dispute Resolution. Other Committees on which Justice Cobbs has served include the Conference of State Court Administrators (COSCA), a national organization comprised of the state court administrators from each of the 50 states and Guam; Illinois' Sentencing Policy Advisory Council; co-chair of the Conference of Chief Justices and State Court Administrators (CCJ/COSCA) Joint Committees, including: Access and Fairness in the Courts; Public Trust and Confidence in the Courts; and, as a committee member on the following committees: Courts, Children and Families; Security and Emergency Preparedness; and, Criminal Justice and Evidence Based Sentencing. Justice Cobbs also served as COSCA's Liaison to the National Consortium on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts.

**Other Activities:** Justice Cobbs has served as a co-presenter on the IJC/ISBA/CCBA sponsored Appellate Court Practice Seminar (March 2017); co-presenter on the IJC's hosted Common Trial Court Errors; panel moderator on a presentation entitled: "*Media and the Courts,*" at the 2011 Annual Meeting of Chief Justices and State Court Administrators; participated as a panelist/presenter at the Chicago Bar Association/Illinois Judges Association's program entitled, *The Judges' Eight O'clock Call: Managing the Pro Se Litigant*; is Co-author of "*The Journey to Evidence-Based Practices in Illinois Probation,*" ISBA Journal (March 2012); and, "*Pro Se Court*" (ISBA Bar & Gavel Newsletter (June 2012). In 2015, Justice Cobbs was the keynote speaker at the Region 4 UAW Women's Conference; and has served as a moderator and presenter of "*A Conversation with the Judges,*" a community service program of the Illinois Judicial Council. She regularly serves as a judge for the Appellate Lawyers Association's annual moot court competition. Under the auspices of Lawyers Lend a Hand to Youth, she serves as a weekly tutor for grade school students attending the Englewood Montessori School in Chicago.

**Bench and Bar Associations:** Justice Cobbs holds memberships in the National Bar Association, National Bar Association Judicial Council, National Association of Women Judges, Illinois Judges Association, Illinois Judicial Council, Illinois State Bar Association, Chicago Bar Association, Cook County Bar Association, Black Women Lawyers' Association and the Women's Bar Association of Illinois.

**Education:** She received her B.A. degree from Morgan State University, Baltimore, Maryland and she holds a Master's Degree in clinical social work (MSW) from the University of Maryland. A graduate of IIT-Chicago-Kent College of Law, Justice Cobbs was admitted to the Illinois bar in 1988.

Justice Cobbs is married to Austin L. Cobbs

**Last Updated:** October 23, 2018