

Faculty and Planning Committee Understanding and Applying ICWA:

Hon. Jamie Cork, District Court Judge, Dakota County



Judge Cork was appointed to the First Judicial District Bench in August 2016, where she presides over a variety of cases including criminal, civil, juvenile, probate, and family cases.

Judge Cork is a former Assistant Hennepin County Attorney where she worked for over 18 years in the Child Protection Division. She specialized in Indian Child Welfare Act cases, including: traditional child protection, long term foster care, educational neglect, runaway, sexually exploited youth, Rule 20 incompetent delinquent, and truancy cases. Judge Cork worked with Indian tribes and communities in an attempt to assure that families and children were able to obtain culturally appropriate education and services.

Judge Cork chairs the Dakota County Domestic Violence Coordinated Community Response Team and is a member of the DHS Child Trafficking Workgroup and the First District Equal Justice Committee. She previously served as a member of the Indian Child Welfare Act Education Day Committee, the Native American Attendance Initiative, the Minnesota Statewide Human Trafficking Taskforce, and the Gerald Vick Law Enforcement Trafficking Taskforce. She was an original member of the Safe Harbor committee that established Minnesota's "No Wrong Door" Policy and co-chaired the Statewide Model Protocol workgroup on Child Protection/Child Welfare. She has been a member of and consulted on several committees and collaborations regarding sexually exploited youth, including specialized groups focusing on Native American women and children who are missing and/or exploited.

Judge Cork was an adjunct professor for Hamline University School of Law and St. Thomas School of Law teaching Juvenile Justice and Children and the Law. She continues educating through local, state and national presentations to law enforcement, human services, advocates, public health workers, medical personnel and attorneys regarding the sexual exploitation of youth. Judge Cork received her Juris Doctor degree in 1998 from Hamline University School of Law with concentration in criminal law and has a Bachelor of Science degree in Criminal Justice.

Hon. Anne K. McKeig, Associate Justice, Minnesota Supreme Court



Justice McKeig is a former Assistant Hennepin County attorney, where she worked for over 16 years handling child protection cases and adoption matters with a specialty in cases involving the Indian Child Welfare Act.

Justice McKeig was appointed to the district court bench in 2008. She served as Presiding Judge in Family Court in the Fourth Judicial District in Hennepin County located in Minneapolis, Minnesota. During her tenure, she spearheaded the Family Court Enhancement Project, a demonstration project to improve outcomes for families facing issues of domestic violence. In September 2016, she was appointed to the Minnesota Supreme Court, becoming the first Native American female in the United States to be appointed to a state's highest court.

Justice McKeig is co-author of a law school curriculum entitled “Child Abuse and the Law,” which she currently teaches at Mitchell Hamline School of Law and St. Thomas School of Law as an Adjunct Professor.

She is currently a member of the Speakers Bureau for Gundersen Health National Child Protection Training Center, board member of MOFAS, Division of Indian Work, the Infinity Project, trustee for St. Catherine University, and a member of the Tribal Court State Court Forum.

Justice McKeig, White Earth Band of Ojibwe, is a native of Northern Minnesota, where she grew up on the Leech Lake reservation. She is a proud mother of five children.

Austin Needham, ICWA Liaison, Minnesota Guardian ad Litem Board (MNGALB)



Austin Needham has served as the ICWA Liaison with the MNGALB since November of 2018. In this role, he provides case consultations for Guardians ad Litem throughout the State of Minnesota. He is also tasked with creating an ICWA training curriculum to be implemented as a requirement for all Guardians ad Litem.

Prior to his current position, Mr. Needham served as Interim Administrator for the White Earth Nation’s Oshki Manidoo (The “New Spirit”) Center, located in Bemidji, MN. Oshki Manidoo Center is an in-patient residential treatment facility for women, pregnant women, and women with children. Mr. Needham has also previously served as a Probation Agent for the MN Department of Corrections (DOC), as a Residential Treatment Counselor for the Northwest MN Juvenile Detention Center, and as Associate Judge for the Red Lake Nation in which he presided over a variety of cases including criminal, civil, probate, family, and, primarily, child protection and juvenile delinquency cases.

Mr. Needham earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in American Indian Studies from Bemidji State University in 2010. He also earned a Master’s of Jurisprudence in Indian Law from the University of Tulsa, OK. Most recently, Mr. Needham earned his Juris Doctor degree from the Mitchell Hamline School of Law.

Mr. Needham is an enrolled member of the Red Lake Nation and currently lives in St. Paul, MN.

Judith C. Nord, Staff Attorney, Minnesota State Court Administrator’s Office



Judith Nord has served as a Staff Attorney with the Minnesota State Court Administrator’s Office since 1995. For the past 25 years, Ms. Nord’s primary focus has been on improving outcomes for abused and neglected children and their families.

Ms. Nord serves as Staff Attorney for the Children’s Justice Initiative (CJI), a collaborative effort between the Minnesota Judicial Branch and Minnesota Department of Human Services designed to address systems change in the juvenile court process. Ms. Nord also has served as Staff Attorney to the Minnesota Supreme Court Juvenile Protection, Adoption, Guardian Ad Litem, and Child Support Rules Committees. She also has staffed numerous other Judicial Branch committees and task forces, including the Advisory Committee on the Expedited Child Support Process Rules, the Visitation and Child Support Enforcement Task Force, the Guardian Ad Litem Task Force, the Child Focused Parenting Time Guide Workgroup, the Pro Se Implementation Committee, and the Tribal Court State Court Forum. Ms. Nord provides training to state and national organizations on topics relating to children and families.

Prior to her work with the State Court Administrator’s Office, Ms. Nord practiced law as a public defender and represented adult and child clients in dissolution, paternity, child protection, and juvenile delinquency matters. She also served as a guardian ad litem and attorney in family court and juvenile court matters, as well as a court-appointed appellate attorney in the Dakota County Juvenile Court. She is a member of the American

Bar Association and the Minnesota State Bar Association, including past Chair of the MSBA Children and the Law Section.

Ms. Nord holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science from the University of Minnesota, and received her Juris Doctor degree from Hamline University School of Law in 1990 where she was on *Law Review* and served as Production Editor of the *Journal of Law and Politics*.

Hon. Jessica L. Ryan, Tribal Court Judge and Tribal Attorney



Judge Ryan was appointed to serve as the Chief Judge for the Lower Sioux Indian Community in 2016. She was appointed to serve on the Court of Appeals for the White Earth Nation in 2017.

In her private practice, she continues to represent Bands and Indian families, primarily in the areas of child welfare. She has centered her experience and her representation in private practice in the field of Federal Indian Law, working on behalf of American Indian Bands and Tribes. A large portion of her practice has focused on child welfare: seeking to support families in finding a sense of balance and harmony, so families remain together in a good way. Judge Ryan has extensive litigation experience in several tribal and state courts. She is active in policy analysis affecting Indian families; and she collaborates with tribes, counties, and states to develop policy and practice that better serve American

Indian families. She has been invited to speak locally, regionally, and nationally regarding implementation of the ICWA and related laws in a way that honors the letter, spirit, and intent of the law.

Since graduating from Hamline Law School in 1997, she clerked in District Court and two Tribal Courts; helped establish the Hennepin County ICWA Guardian ad litem panel and served as volunteer guardian ad litem for ICWA cases. She has drafted legislation for Tribes and States; was a key player in renegotiating the Tribal/State Agreement; and has sought to improve application of the law through rule revisions and creation of written materials to assist stakeholders in implementation in a good way over the years.

Most recently, she was re-appointed to the Juvenile Protection Rules Committee, and co-chairs the ICWA subcommittee. She has served on the Board of Directors for several American Indian non-profit organizations and is on the Site Council for the local school.

Judge Ryan is enrolled with the Brothertown Indian Nation and remains active with Tribal activities.

Shannon Smith, Executive Director, Indian Child Welfare Law Center



Shannon Smith has served as Executive Director of the ICWA Law Center since July 1, 2004. Ms. Smith has been with the ICWA Law Center since 2000. She has over 15 years of experience working in the field of Indian child welfare. She has provided direct legal representation to hundreds of families impacted by the child protection system in state and tribal courts. She has provided ICWA training to local and national audiences.

Ms. Smith is a graduate of the University of Minnesota Law School class of 1999, where she graduated with honors and earned the MJF Volunteer of the Year Award in 1999. Prior to joining the ICWA Law Center, Ms. Smith clerked for the Honorable Robert A. Blaeser of the Hennepin County Juvenile Court.

She is highly regarded as a leader in the field of Indian child welfare and has served on several committees impacting the interests of Indian children, their families, and their tribes, including the Supreme Court Juvenile Protection Rules Committee, the Legal Service Advisory Council Emerging Leaders and the Tribal / State Agreement drafting committee.

Maya Tester, Assistant County Attorney, Hennepin County



Maya Tester is an Assistant Hennepin County Attorney in the Child Protection Division, where she has been a trial attorney since 1993. Since 2010, Ms. Tester has handled exclusively cases that fall under the Indian Child Welfare Act, providing legal representation to the Human Services and Public Health Department, and working closely with representatives of Minnesota and out of state tribes. She has been a member of the Hennepin County Children’s Justice Initiative and, over the years, has provided numerous trainings on the impact of domestic violence on children, trial practice and procedure, and emerging issues in child protection.

Ms. Tester has always had a passion for working with children in legal proceedings. She graduated with honors from Harvard Law School in 1991, where she focused her trial advocacy training and research on juvenile justice and poverty law issues. Prior to law school Ms. Tester obtained a Master’s Degree in Developmental Psychology from the University of Virginia in 1988. Her thesis and publications addressed resilience factors in victims of child neglect and abuse, and adolescent decision making in a legal context.

Ms. Tester is President of Proof Alliance and is engaged with many community programs working to educate women about the dangers of drinking during pregnancy.

Rebecca A. Vanden Hanen, Staff Attorney, Minnesota State Court Administrator’s Office



Rebecca (“Becca”) Vanden Hanen has worked with the Minnesota Judicial Branch for over 10 years. Ms. Vanden Hanen serves as a Staff Attorney for the Children’s Justice Initiative (CJI), a collaborative effort between the Minnesota Judicial Branch and the Minnesota Department of Human Services designed to address systems change in the juvenile court process. She staffs the Tribal Court State Court Forum and has contributed to the Child Focused Parenting Time Guide Workgroup.

Prior to her work with the State Court Administrator’s Office, Ms. Vanden Hanen was a staff attorney with the Minnesota Judicial Branch’s Self-Represented Litigant Program where she provided direct service to self-represented litigants in family court and juvenile court matters and worked closely with the bench and court administration in Hennepin County and throughout the State of Minnesota to improve access to justice for children and families.

Ms. Vanden Hanen holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in English and Political Science from the University of Wisconsin, and received her Juris Doctor degree from the University of St. Thomas School of Law in 2008.

Hon. Korey Wahwassuck, District Court Judge, Itasca County



Judge Wahwassuck served as a tribal court judge for the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Tribal Court from 2006 until 2013 when she was appointed by Governor Mark Dayton to serve as a Minnesota District Court Judge for the Ninth Judicial District. Previously, Judge Wahwassuck served as a Kansas Supreme Court Certified Mediator, and practiced law for 15 years, specializing in Indian law, child welfare, and juvenile delinquency.

Judge Wahwassuck was a founding member of the first Joint Tribal-State Jurisdiction Wellness Courts in the nation, and authored “The New Face of Justice: Joint Tribal-State Jurisdiction” for the Washburn Law Journal and “Building a Legacy of Hope: Perspectives on Joint Tribal-State Jurisdiction” for the William Mitchell Law Review. Judge Wahwassuck is also a member of Project T.E.A.M. (“Together Everyone Achieves More,”) helping other jurisdictions create tribal-state collaborative courts of their own.

Judge Wahwassuck served as a member of the Minnesota Supreme Court's Drug Court Initiative Advisory Committee, the Minnesota Supreme Court's Racial Fairness Committee, and the Safe Harbor Statewide Model Protocol Judges Workgroup, and currently serves on the Committee for Equality and Justice, Chairs the Ninth District Equal Justice Committee, and serves on the Children's Justice Initiative Lead Judges Workgroup and as a member of the Minnesota Tribal Court State Court Forum. Judge Wahwassuck also served as a member of the Board of Directors for the National Association of Drug Court Professionals, and was a member of Tribal Advisory Committee to the Indian Law and Order Commission. Judge Wahwassuck serves on the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges' (NCJFCJ) Tribal Leadership Forum, and previously served on the NCJFCJ's Tribal Court Committee and as an Advisory Member of NCJFCJ Diversity Committee.

Judge Wahwassuck earned her Bachelor's degree and Juris Doctor degree from the University of Missouri-Columbia. She has taught courses on Native American Spirituality and Sovereignty, Treaty Rights and Tribal Sovereignty, Tribal Court-State Issues, and Juvenile Delinquency Guidelines at Penn Valley Community College in Kansas City, Missouri, Leech Lake Tribal College, the National Judicial College, and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. Judge Wahwassuck also serves as a trainer for the state of Minnesota on subjects ranging from the Indian Child Welfare Act to creating trauma-responsive justice systems.

Victoria F. White, MSW, Trainer and Curriculum Developer, MN Department of Human Services



Victoria ("Vicki") White is a trainer and curriculum developer for the MN Dept. of Human Services, Child Safety and Permanency Training Unit. She holds a Master's degree in Social Work from the University of St. Thomas/St. Catherine University.

Ms. White has extensive experience in business, human service administration, and child protection. She has been a resource family provider for almost 20 years. Ms. White has provided leadership as the child welfare director for the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe and a guardian ad litem for the Leech Lake Tribal Court. Ms. White is an elected school board director for the Walker Hackensack Akeley/Onigum School District where she has served since 2001. She was appointed to the Judicial Commission in 2007 by Governor Pawlenty and held that appointment for four years.

Ms. White is a citizen of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe and lives in Onigum, a tribal community on the Leech Lake Reservation.