



Administrative Office of the Courts

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Justice Michael E. Vigil becomes Chief Justice of New Mexico Supreme Court

SANTA FE – Justice Michael E. Vigil was sworn in today as Chief Justice of the New Mexico Supreme Court.

He was elected to the position by his colleagues on the five-member court and will serve a term ending in April 2022. He succeeds Justice Judith K. Nakamura, who had served as Chief Justice since 2017.

“I am honored and humbled by the confidence my colleagues have placed in me to lead the Judiciary during the midst of a deadly pandemic,” Chief Justice Vigil said. “There is much to be done, but my first priority is to continue the work we have started to keep our courts open for business, and at the same time, endeavor to protect the health and safety of everyone entering our courts — employees, jurors, judges, attorneys, parties, witnesses, and members of the public. In this way, we will be doing our part as the third branch of our government to protect constitutional rights and administer justice in a safe manner.”

Chief Justice Vigil added, “I am thankful for Justice Nakamura’s many contributions to the Judiciary and wish her well with her remaining time on the Court and, when it happens, a well-deserved retirement.”



The Chief Justice performs both court and administrative duties. In addition to presiding over Supreme Court hearings and conferences, the Chief Justice serves as the administrative authority over personnel, budgets and general operations of all state courts and acts as an advocate for the Judiciary on legislative, budget and other matters.

Chief Justice Vigil joined the state’s highest court on Dec. 31, 2018, after serving on the state Court of Appeals since 2003. He was chief judge on the Court of Appeals from 2015 to 2017, and wrote more than 1,000 opinions as a member of the court.

Before his appointment to the Court of Appeals, Chief Justice Vigil had a career as a private practice lawyer litigating civil, criminal and administrative cases in state and federal courts. He worked from 1976 to 1979 as a staff attorney for the Court of Appeals pre-hearing division.

The justice graduated from Santa Fe High School in 1969 and received an undergraduate degree from the College of Santa Fe in 1973, with a major in political science and a minor in history. He earned his law degree in 1976 from the Georgetown University Law Center, where he was an editor on the Georgetown Law Journal.

Chief Justice Vigil enjoys reading, movies and, in his words, “hacking around a golf course” in his spare time.

The new Chief Justice took the oath of office during a remotely conducted online ceremony attended by other members of the Court, judges from across the state and judicial employees. He was in Albuquerque with his wife, Terry, and outgoing Chief Justice Nakamura administered the oath from her chambers in the Supreme Court building in Santa Fe.

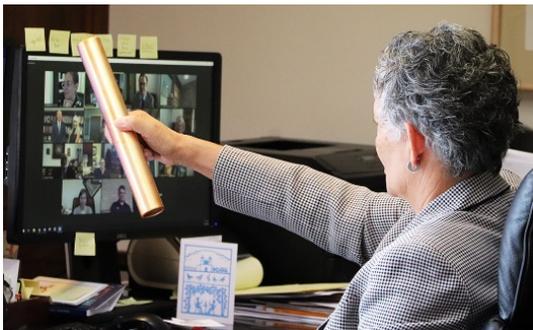


At the conclusion of the ceremony, Justice Nakamura virtually passed a runner’s baton to Chief Justice Vigil. “For us at the Supreme Court, this symbolizes the orderly collegial passing of responsibility from the current Chief Justice to our new Chief Justice,” said Justice Nakamura.

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Chief Justice Vigil takes the oath of office.
(Shown on the monitor with his wife, Terry).



Passing of the baton to the new Chief Justice.
(Photos courtesy of the New Mexico Supreme Court and the Administrative Office of the Courts.)