

2021 Texas Indian Child Welfare Act Summit

Speaker Bios

Justice Eva Guzman

Justice | Supreme Court of Texas - Place 9

Chair | Children's Commission

Justice Eva Guzman has served at three levels of the Texas judiciary. She began her judicial service on the 309th District Court in Harris County, following an appointment by former Governor George W. Bush. After ascending to the Houston-based Fourteenth Court of Appeals, Justice Guzman ruled on thousands of complex civil and criminal cases and authored hundreds of opinions in nearly a decade of service as an intermediate appellate court judge. In 2009, former Governor Rick Perry appointed Justice Guzman to fill a vacancy on the Supreme Court of Texas. When she was elected to a full term in November 2010, she became the first Hispanic woman elected to statewide office in Texas. Six years later, she made history twice more: she received the most votes ever in a Texas Republican Party primary with 1.27 million votes and won re-election that November with a record-setting 4.88 million votes—the highest vote total for any office in Texas election history. With more than 20 years of service on the bench, Justice Guzman has consistently received high marks in judicial evaluation polls.

Justice Guzman's commitment to legal excellence has been recognized by national, state, and local organizations. The John Ben Shepperd Public Leadership Institute honored her with the Outstanding Texas Leader award during the 2015 Texas Leadership Forum, and she was named Appellate Judge of the Year in 2016 by the Texas Association of Civil Trial and Appellate Specialists. Her dedication to mentorship and women's rights has been recognized with the Sara T. Hughes Lawyers of Achievement award and the Association of Women Attorneys' Premier Women in the Law Modern Trailblazer award. Justice Guzman also holds Pathfinder awards from both the Texas Women Lawyers and the Travis County Women Lawyers Association, and she was an early recipient of the Texas Executive Women Women on the Move® award. In 2016, the Hispanic Bar Association of Houston honored Justice Guzman with a Lifetime Achievement award, and before that, the National Hispanic Bar Association honored her as Latina Judge of the Year. Justice Guzman's significant career accomplishments and community leadership have been commended with several honors, including the 2014 Alumni Impact award from her alma mater, South Texas College of Law.

Judicial work is the beginning, but certainly not the end of Justice Guzman's public service. In 2016, she organized the inaugural Beyond the Bench: Law, Justice, and Communities Summit, a first-of-its-kind assembly of judges, law-enforcement officers, public servants, and national, state, and community leaders with a mission to strengthen trust and confidence in our justice system by addressing issues of unconscious bias. As Chair of the Supreme Court of Texas Permanent Judicial Commission for Children, Youth and Families, Justice Guzman has also worked with leaders across the state for more than a decade to foster the well-being , and an LL.M. from Duke University School of Law of Texas's most vulnerable children and families and to improve safety and permanency outcomes. As adjuncts to those efforts, she helped found the Texas Judicial Commission on Mental Health and collaborated with a consortium led by U.C. Berkeley's

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Goldman School of Public Policy to create resources to better prepare Texas judges for Hague Convention cases involving domestic violence. As a Senior Fellow of the American Leadership Forum, Justice Guzman has a long track record of community service and has devoted many volunteer hours to organizations committed to children, including service on the boards of Texas Court Appointed Special Advocates, The Escape Center, Wesley Community Center, and the Houston Area Chapter of the American Red Cross. Since 2013, Justice Guzman has also been the Supreme Court of Texas liaison to the Texas Access to Justice Commission, an organization dedicated to expanding legal access in civil legal matters for low-income Texans.

Among other engagements, Justice Guzman serves as Chair for the prestigious Appellate Judges Education Institute's 2021 Summit. She is also a member of the Board of Trustees for The Center for American and International Law; the Board of Trustees for South Texas College of Law; and the Board of Visitors for Duke University School of Law. Since 2005, she has been a member of the American Law Institute and is a former board member for the Garland Walker American Inns of Court.

Before taking the bench, Justice Guzman enjoyed a successful ten-year litigation career in Houston. She holds a B.B.A. from the University of Houston, a J.D. from South Texas College of Law.

Commissioner Jaime Masters

[Commissioner | Department of Family and Protective Services](#)

Jaime Masters is the Commissioner of the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS). She was appointed by Governor Greg Abbott effective December 2, 2019, for a term set to expire September 1, 2021.

"The Department of Family Protective Services is one of our most important state agencies and needs a leader who has the experience to build upon its recent successes and improve care for all Texas families," said Governor Abbott. "Jaime is that leader and I am confident in her ability to keep Texas families, children and vulnerable adults safe from neglect and abuse. I am proud to appoint her as the new DFPS Commissioner and will work with her to create an even brighter future for the Lone Star State."

Previously, Jaime Masters served as the Chief of Health Services and Acting Chief of Operations for Jackson County Missouri. She also served as the Deputy Secretary of Family Services and as the Director of Economic and Employment Services for the Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF).

Prior to her service with the Kansas DCF, Ms. Masters served as the Director of Procurement and Contract Compliance for the Unified Government of Wyandotte County, Kansas City, Kansas and as a Mental Health Program Manager for the Wyandotte County Sheriff's Office. Additionally, she served as a member of the Kansas Sentencing Commission and the Kansas Board of Indigent Defense.

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Masters received a Bachelor of Science in human resource management and a Master of Science in marriage and family therapy from Friends University in Wichita, Kansas.

Councilman Rafael Gomez, Jr.

[Councilman | Ysleta del Sur Pueblo](#)

Mr. Gomez is a Councilman with the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo in El Paso, Texas. The Ysleta del Sur Pueblo Tribal Council is the duly constituted traditional governing body of the Pueblo exercising all inherent governmental power, fiscal authority and tribal sovereignty as recognized in sections 101 and 104 of the Act of August 18, 1987 (the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo Restoration Act), 101 Stat. 666, Public Law No. 100-89. Elected tribal officials—such as the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Alguacil (Traditional Sheriff), and four Council members—serve annual terms. As a Councilman, Mr. Gomez directs and approves the strategic and legislative affairs of the Pueblo.

Sheldon Spotted Elk

[Director of Tribal Justice Relations | National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges](#)

Sheldon Spotted Elk works as the Director of Tribal Justice Relations at the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. He has a background and presents regularly on tribal law, child welfare and the ICWA. He is currently a judge on the Ute Indian Tribe Court of Appeals (Fort Duchesne, Utah) in a jurisdiction he once represented children in child welfare and juvenile delinquency matters. He has worked as an adjunct professor teaching a law school course on Family Law in Indian Country.

He was recognized as a *NCAIED 40 Under 40* recipient, a prestigious award which recognizes 40 emerging American Indian leaders from across Indian Country. He has published an influential law review article on tribal constitutional reform and has authored articles on the ICWA. Sheldon is a graduate from University of New Mexico School of Law and received the Certificate in Federal Indian Law. He completed his undergraduate degree from University of Utah College of Social Work. And he and his two sons are members of the Northern Cheyenne Tribe.

Judge Cheryl Demmert Fairbanks

[Senior Policy Advisor | Native American Budget and Policy Institute](#)

Cheryl Demmert Fairbanks (Tlingit-Tsimshian) directs the Native American Budget and Policy Institute, which conducts research, budget and policy analysis, social justice advocacy, and litigation to empower Native American communities to create self-determined and systematic change that will improve their health, education, and economic well-being. Ms. Fairbanks has had a long career in Indian law as an attorney and tribal court of appeals justice.

Formerly a Partner at Cuddy McCarthy LLP, she had a general practice in Indian law, including tribal-state relations, personnel, tribal courts, peacemaking and family conferencing, mediation, family, school, education, and indigenous law. She recently was in Oregon serving as the Walter R. Echo-Hawk Distinguished Visiting Professor of Law at Lewis and Clark and was a visiting

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Professor of Law at the University of New Mexico's Southwest Indian Law Clinic. Ms. Fairbanks was also a partner with the law firm of Roth, VanAmberg, Rogers, Ortiz, Fairbanks & Yepa, LLP, where she specialized in Indian law. She worked as a senior policy analyst with the New Mexico Office of Indian Affairs in the area of state-tribal relations. There, she was instrumental in establishing the Indian Child Welfare Desk, New Mexico Office of Indian Tourism, the University of New Mexico Indian Law Clinic, and the passage of the New Mexico Indian Arts and Crafts Act.

Christy Chapman

Attorney | Native American Budget and Policy Institute

Guardian ad Litem | Pegasus Legal Services for Children

Christy Chapman (Pueblo of Zuni) is a contract attorney who works with the Native American Budget and Policy Institute. She serves as a Guardian ad Litem with Pegasus Legal Services for Children for the Second Judicial District Children's newly developed ICWA Court. She also holds a degree in nursing from the University of New Mexico and has worked in her pueblo as a registered nurse. She is elated to be a Peacemaker who values the use of indigenous knowledge and dispute resolution to resolve issues.

Amanda Martinez

Person with Lived Experience

Ms. Martinez is a person with lived experience as a parent in child welfare services. She successfully completed her case while working with the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo Department of Behavioral Health and seeks to help other parents build safe, healthy relationships with their children.

Teresa Nord

Parent Mentor | The ICWA Law Center

Teresa Nord is a Parent Mentor at the ICWA Law Center with the Indian Advocacy Team. She works with Indian families who currently have open child protection cases. As a Parent Mentor she helps native families to navigate their case plans in such a way that they can be more successful in reunification with their children. Teresa is unique to the position because she has lived experience as a Native woman in recovery who at one time had an open child protection case. Not only does Teresa work as a parent mentor, she is also an emergent leader for the National Council of Juvenile and Family Judges. She continues to advocate for families as she works to bridge the gap of domestic and sexual violence and the child welfare system.

Lastly, Teresa is also a Liaison for the American Indian Prison Project Working Group. As one of her many passions, she strives to continue her work of healing with the native women who are incarcerated and have been released. She currently facilitates a post release talking circle for women in need of mentorship in their reentry back into society. Her future plans are to bring a

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Native-specific parenting cohort in to MCF-Shakopee as a way to bring healing and education to the mothers who strive to be mothers.

Leah Lopez

[Social Services Coordinator | Ysleta del Sur Pueblo's Department of Behavioral Health](#)

Leah Lopez is the Social Services Coordinator for Ysleta del Sur Pueblo's Department of Behavioral Health. She studied at Texas Woman's University where she obtained her BSW and continued her studies at the University of Texas at El Paso earning her MSW.

She is licensed in the state of Texas with her LMSW. She began working for Ysleta del Sur Pueblo as an intern while in grad school and began employment right after graduation. She has served the Pueblo for over nine years; five of which have been in a supervisory role. She is non-tribal but has enjoyed working in such a close-knit community learning about culture, tradition, and helping those in need. She has a passion for domestic violence advocacy, ending violence against women, trauma informed care, raising awareness and the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). She is a member of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA), the Coalition to Stop Violence Against Native Women (CSVANW), and the New Mexico Tribal Indian Children Welfare Consortium (NMTIC) since May 2017. Ms. Lopez also serves on the Children's Commission's Statewide Collaborative on Trauma-Informed Care Implementation Task Force.

John L. Williams

[Attorney | John L. Williams Law](#)

John L. Williams has been a licensed attorney for 30 years. He is an El Paso native and an alumnus of the University of Texas at El Paso where he graduated with highest honors and was named to the Top Ten Seniors of 1987. In 1990, he graduated from the University of Texas School of Law where he was Editor-in-Chief of the American Journal of Criminal Law. He began his law practice in El Paso working for a large law firm before becoming an assistant district attorney and trying over 25 felony jury trials.

Since opening his own practice in 1995, he has helped over a thousand families adopt children. He has tried numerous felony jury trials, including four murders. Mr. Williams is an adoptive parent and is committed to helping others through the adoption process. He also practices child welfare law, criminal law, juvenile defense, and family law.

Rebecca Safavi

[Appellate Attorney | Texas Department of Family and Protective Services](#)

Rebecca L. Safavi is employed by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services as an appellate attorney. Prior to the position of appellate attorney, Rebecca was engaged in private practice in Tennessee. Rebecca's practice emphasized family law, with a particular focus on

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juvenile custody. As an appellate attorney, Rebecca serves as an advisor and reference resource to regional attorneys, district attorneys, and county attorneys on a wide range of trial and appellate issues. She represents the Department in appellate proceedings before the Texas Supreme Court and all fourteen courts of appeals. Rebecca is a graduate of Saint Louis University School of Law, where she was a recipient of a full-tuition merit scholarship

Lisa Tatum

[President and Managing Partner | LM Tatum, PLLC](#)

Lisa Tatum was sworn in as President at the Texas Bar's Annual Meeting on June 21, 2013 and served as President of the State Bar of Texas from June 2013-2014. She was the first African American to serve in this capacity. Ms. Lisa Tatum, named a 2014 Super Lawyer and a 2007 Texas Rising Star by SuperLawyers, was admitted to the State Bar of Texas in 1995.

Featured in Texas Monthly's The Horse's Mouth in July 2012, Lisa Tatum is the proud owner of LM Tatum, PLLC, informally known as The Tatum Law Practice, established in 2011. Her firm focuses on public, private and nonprofit business, employment and public finance law. She also works with clients on simple estate and contingency planning.

She is a former Assistant Criminal District Attorney for Bexar County, Texas, who has prosecuted over 100 cases (misdemeanors and felonies) by jury and bench trials. Lisa is admitted to practice law before all courts of the state of Texas, the United States District Court of the Western District and the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit. She is a member of many law-related organizations. Lisa is one of the longest serving Board members of the State Bar, and currently serves as Chair of the Native American Law Section.

Lisa is also a Mediator and provides mediation services as part of her practice, which includes volunteering at the Bexar County Dispute Resolution Center since the summer of 2017

Jonelle Battise

[Program Director | ATI SNAKNI- Native Connections program with Alabama Coushatta Traditional Tribe of Texas](#)

Jonelle Battise, MSW, LBSW is currently the Program Director for the ATI SNAKNI- Native Connections program, working with youth ages 15-24 on suicide prevention and awareness, and mental health awareness. She has worked for the Alabama-Coushatta Social Services as an Indian Child Welfare Case worker and then as the Director of Social Services, where she advocated in the best interest of the children. Her past work in the social services field has helped her gain knowledge on ICWA and other issues pertaining to Native American children and youth. Jonelle has a bachelor's degree in Sociology and Social Work and a master's degree in Social Work.

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Lieutenant Governor Chris Gomez

Former Lieutenant Governor | Ysleta del Sur Pueblo

Christopher Gomez Sr. is an Enrolled Member of the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo and a life-long resident of the Pueblo. A graduate of the University of Texas El Paso, Chris has works for his Pueblo as their Progaming Coordinator where he curates the Pueblo's Radio Station KUEH 101.5 FM, the Pueblo's Website www.ysletadelsurpueblo.org and all of the Tribe's Social Media. He has been working for the Pueblo for the last 11 years in various capacities including a Planner for the Economic Development Department and The Tribal Empowerment Director where he developed programs for Tribal Members from Birth to Adulthood. He has served on Tribal Council as the Lt. Governor for 3 Terms and a Councilman for 4 Terms. Chris has been an advocate for Tribal Youth through his work with the Tribal Empowerment Department, Tigua Youth Council, and a former representative on the Tigua Youth Court.

Jamie Bernstein

Executive Director | Children's Commission

Jamie Bernstein joined the Supreme Court of Texas Permanent Judicial Commission for Children, Youth and Families in May 2014 and became the Executive Director in June 2020. Jamie began her legal career in New York where she represented children in child protection and delinquency proceedings. She has expertise in the areas of education, human trafficking, and the intersection of child welfare and juvenile justice. Jamie earned a Bachelor of Arts from Vanderbilt University and a Juris Doctorate from Brooklyn Law School.