



2024 Alumni Professional Achievement Award The Honorable DeAndrea Gist Benjamin, Class of 1994

The Alumni Professional Achievement Award recognizes significant contributions alumni have made to their fields while exemplifying high moral and professional ethics.

The Honorable DeAndrea Gist Benjamin is being honored with the 2024 Alumni Professional Achievement Award for her outstanding accomplishments in law.

A lifelong Columbia native, Judge Benjamin attended public schools in Richland County, graduating from Columbia High School in 1990. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology with a minor in political science from Winthrop University in 1994 and graduated from the University of South Carolina School of Law in 1997.

Judge Benjamin serves as a United States Circuit Judge for the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit. Confirmed to the court on Feb. 9, 2023, to a seat vacated by the Honorable Henry F. Floyd, Judge Benjamin is the second African-American woman and the first person of color from South Carolina to serve on the Fourth Circuit.

After law school, Judge Benjamin served as a law clerk for the Honorable L. Casey Manning, Resident Judge for the Fifth Judicial Circuit, in Columbia. Following her clerkship, she served as an assistant solicitor in the Fifth Circuit Solicitor's Office and as an assistant attorney general and as lead Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) prosecutor for the South Carolina Office of the Attorney General.

In 2001, she joined the Gist Law Firm. While in private practice, Judge Benjamin was a member of the South Carolina Board of Juvenile Parole from 2001-2004, serving as vice-chair from 2002-2003, and served as a municipal court judge for the City of Columbia from 2004- 2011. In 2011, Judge Benjamin was elected by the South Carolina General Assembly as a Resident Judge for the Fifth Judicial Circuit covering Richland and Kershaw counties.

Throughout her tenure on the bench, Judge Benjamin has received several awards, including The State newspaper/Columbia Business Journal "20 under 40" in 2007, the National Judicial College Making the World a More Just Place Award in 2023, American Board of Trial Advocates of South Carolina Jurist of the Year Award in 2022, the 2024 South Carolina Women Lawyers Association Jean Galloway Bissell Award, the Capital City Club Phenomenal Women's Award, the Capital City Classic Award, Richland County School District 2 Black History Month Honoree Award, and the South Carolina Black Lawyers Association Matthew J. Perry Distinguished Service Award, and the Girl Scouts Women of Distinction Award.



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Judge Benjamin has been active in local and national bar associations and other professional organizations, including the South Carolina Bar Board of Governors, American Bar Association, South Carolina Bar, Richland County Bar Association, South Carolina Black Lawyers Association, South Carolina Bar House of Delegates, John Belton O'Neall Inn of Court, Federal Judges Association, Fellows of the American Bar Foundation, and South Carolina Women Lawyers Association. She has served as the District Representative for South Carolina and the U.S. Virgin Islands for the American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division and chaired multiple committees in the South Carolina Bar, including the Young Lawyers Division and the Children's Law Committee.

She is engaged in community service, including serving as president of the Columbia Chapter of the Links, Incorporated (2018-2022), parliamentarian for the Columbia Chapter of Jack & Jill of America, Inc. (2014-2018), board member for Congaree Girl Scouts (2004-2007), and board member of Pathways to Healing (1999-2001).

Judge Benjamin resides in Columbia with her husband, Steve Benjamin, a former mayor of Columbia and current senior advisor to President Biden and director of the Office of Public Engagement for the Biden administration, and her two daughters.