

Candace Jackson-Akiwumi

Judge Candace Jackson-Akiwumi was confirmed to the United States Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit by the U.S. Senate on June 24, 2021. Judge Jackson-Akiwumi is the second Black woman to ever serve on the Seventh Circuit and the only person of color on the court today. She previously spent a decade with the Federal Defender Program for the Northern District of Illinois, Inc. At the time of her confirmation, Judge Jackson-Akiwumi was only the third federal appellate judge to have spent a majority of their career as a public defender.

Biography

Judge Jackson-Akiwumi was born in Norfolk, Virginia, in 1979. She received her A.B. with honors from Princeton University in 2000. In 2005, Judge Jackson-Akiwumi graduated from Yale Law School, where she served as a Senior Editor on the Yale Law Journal and was a NAACP LDF Earl Warren Legal Scholar. During law school, she was part of a [legal team](#) led by future Solicitor General Don Verrilli Jr. that challenged a death row inmate's sentence all the way to the Supreme Court, [ultimately prevailing](#) on an ineffective assistance of counsel claim. After receiving her law degree, Judge Jackson-Akiwumi clerked for Judge David H. Coar of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois and Judge Roger Gregory of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit.

Confirmation and Judicial Service

The U.S. Senate confirmed Judge Jackson-Akiwumi to the Seventh Circuit with bipartisan support by a vote of 53-40 on June 24, 2021. Her nomination was widely supported in the legal community. She received letters of support from numerous civil rights organizations, as well as from 90- [former colleagues](#), 134 members of the Northern District of Illinois [Bar](#) and 41 [fellow law clerks](#) each of which included prosecutors, public defenders, judges, law firm partners, and corporate counsels. A [letter](#) written by young attorneys mentored by Judge Jackson-Akiwumi described her personal temperament and qualifications:

We admire Candace's unflinching integrity and have seen first-hand how foundational ethics guide her decisions. Her

sense of fairness, honesty, and grace infuse her professional conduct, whether dealing with clients, opposing counsel, or colleagues She is a highly effective communicator, sensitive to the needs of a wide range of people, from clients with little familiarity with the legal system, to students with minimal legal exposure, to judges before whom she appears. She moves through the world with kindness and wit. The unique gifts that made us choose Candace as a mentor would make her an exceptional judge, and a great credit to the federal bench.

Since joining the Seventh Circuit last summer, Judge Jackson-Akiwumi has heard over fifty appeals. She has already augmented the Seventh Circuit's jurisprudence with her considerable criminal law experience in cases involving the proper application of the First Step Act in [sentencing reduction](#) for crack-cocaine possession, ineffective assistance of counsel claims in a [criminal trial](#), and whether a court may consider evidence not publicly available when [sentencing a criminal defendant](#).

Legal Experience

Prior to taking the bench, Judge Jackson-Akiwumi spent the majority of her career serving indigent defendants accused of federal crimes. From 2010 to 2020, she was a Staff Attorney for the Federal Defender Program for the Northern District of Illinois, Inc. During her 10 years as a public defender in Chicago, she represented over 400 clients and gained extensive courtroom experience in all facets of litigation, including many jury trials. Judge Jackson-Akiwumi also briefed and argued multiple cases on behalf of clients before the Seventh Circuit, including cases related to immigration, sentencing, and the Fourth Amendment. In an [article](#) for Yale Law School's alumni directory, she noted that "...my job has meaning to me. I provide quality representation to people who would not be able to afford it, and I am there for clients at a most dreary and frightening juncture: when they are being judged for the worst day or days in their life."

Not only confined to criminal law, Judge Jackson-Akiwumi also has significant civil litigation experience. After her clerkships, she joined the Chicago office of Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP, where she litigated complex civil cases involving contracts, patents, securities, and tax disputes from 2007 to 2010. More recently, Judge Jackson-Akiwumi was a partner at the litigation firm of Zuckerman Spaeder LLP with a focus on complex civil litigation, investigations, and white-collar criminal defense.

Professional and Academic Activities

Judge Jackson-Akiwumi has served as an Adjunct Professor at Northwestern University Pritzker School of Law. She is a former board member of the Black Women Lawyers' Association of Greater Chicago and the Chicago Chapter of the Federal Bar Association.