



Dena Coggins

NOMINEE

Nominee to the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of California

COURT

District Court

DATE NOMINATED

February 7, 2024

On February 7, 2024, [President Biden nominated](#) Dena M. Coggins to the United States District Court for the Eastern District of California. Coggins is currently the Presiding Judge of the Juvenile Court of the Superior Court of California, County of Sacramento. If confirmed, Coggins will be the first Black woman to serve as a federal judge in the Eastern District of California.

Biography

Dena Coggins was born in 1979 in Sacramento, California. She earned her B.S. from California State University in 2003 and studied abroad at the University of Technology in Sydney, Australia. She then earned her J.D. from University of the Pacific, McGeorge School of Law in 2006.

Legal Experience

After law school, Judge Coggins worked as a litigation association at Morrison & Foerster LLP from 2007 to 2012. In her role as an associate, Coggins litigated matters across diverse legal domains, encompassing securities, insurance, probate, immigration, and consumer class action. Her practice spanned both state and federal jurisdictions, covering a comprehensive spectrum of litigation responsibilities. This entailed drafting pleadings, engaging in discovery processes, authoring motions, conducting trials, and participating in arbitration proceedings.

Between 2012 and 2013, Coggins was an associate at Downey Brand LLP, where she focused on family law. Her work encompassed a range of responsibilities, including drafting pleadings, conducting discovery, participating in mediation, engaging in settlement conferences, handling motions, and trial proceedings.

Coggins then served as a deputy legal affairs secretary for former Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr. from 2013 to 2015. In this capacity, she briefed the Governor on individual cases concerning parole, correctional issues, and criminal law matters, and prepared legal documents for the Governor's review.

From 2017 to 2018, Coggins was a supervising attorney and hearing officer at the California Victim Compensation

Board. In this role, she had a broad range of supervisory responsibilities that came from managing 12 non-attorney staff members within the legal and appeals divisions. Her extra-managerial work included conducting administrative hearings regarding compensation claims for crime victims and advising the Chief Counsel and staff on matters pertaining to the Victim Compensation program. .

Judicial Experience

From 2015 to 2017 and 2018 to 2021, Coggins served as an administrative law judge for the State of California, Office of Administrative Hearings in the Special Education Division and General Jurisdiction Division, respectively. The Office of Administrative Hearings is a quasi-judicial tribunal conducting administrative hearings for more than 1,500 state and local government agencies. Administrative law judges preside over administrative hearings and issue written final and proposed decisions.

Since 2021, Coggins has served as a Superior Court Judge on the Superior Court of California, County of Sacramento. Between April 2021 and May 2021, she was assigned to the Criminal Division, presiding over preliminary hearings and the mental health calendar. In June 2021, she was assigned to the Juvenile Court, which is a court of limited jurisdiction, hearing cases under California Welfare and Institutions Code Section 300 (dependency) and Section 602 (juvenile justice). Coggins presided over cases involving allegations of child abuse and neglect brought against parents by the Sacramento County Department of Child, Family, and Adult Services. Her orders generally encompassed: (a) detaining and removing children from their parents' custody where there is substantial risk to the children's physical or emotional safety; (b) ordering family reunification services to provide parents with the tools needed to overcome the issues that led to removal; (c) adjudicating issues of child placement and parental visitation while children are in the foster care system; (d) terminating parental rights where reunification is not possible; and/or (e) approving adoptions or legal guardianships in appropriate circumstances.

The following cases are representative of Coggins's judicial career:

1. ***In the Matter of the Statement of Issues Against Stanislaus County Office of Education***, the issue was whether off salary schedule payments paid by the respondent to the California State Teachers' Retirement System (CalSTRS) was misreported as compensation creditable to the members' defined benefit account. CalSTRS argued that the reporting error would impact the current active members, who are near retirement, and the retirees within the audit's scope. Coggins presided over the administrative hearing in 2018 and issued a proposed decision. The decision affirmed CalSTRS' determination that the one and one-half percent one-time off salary schedule payments paid by respondent to the retirement system members were misreported as compensation creditable to the members' defined benefit account. Coggins's decision was designated as a Precedential Decision by the Teacher's' Retirement Board on April 2, 2019.
2. In the ***Matter of Oakland Unified School District v. Parent on Behalf of Student***, the issue was whether the school district's assistive technology assessment met all legal requirements such that the student was not

entitled to an independent educational evaluation at public expense. In 2016, Coggins presided over the administrative hearing and issued a final decision. Her decision held that the school district's assistive technology assessment did not meet all legal requirements and the student was entitled to an independent educational evaluation relating to assistive technology at public expense.

3. In the Matter of Parents on Behalf of Student v. San Mateo-Foster City School District, the issue was whether the school district denied the student a free appropriate public education by failing to find her eligible for special education and failing to meet its “child find obligation.” The student, as the petitioner, needed to prove her case with sufficient evidence. To identify a specific learning disability, a school district can use either the severe discrepancy method or the response to intervention method. The severe discrepancy method requires a significant gap between intellectual ability and academic achievement. In this case, a licensed educational psychologist administered tests to assess cognitive ability and academic achievement, but the student failed to demonstrate the necessary 22.5-point discrepancy. Coggins presided over the administrative hearing and issued a final decision. Bound by the law and the case's facts, Coggins held that the student did not establish her eligibility for special education during the contested time period. Despite finding procedural violations by the school district, Coggins determined that they did not result in a denial of a proper education, as the student hadn't proven eligibility for special education at the time of the violations.

Professional Activities and Accolades

Coggins has dedicated her career to public service. During her days in private practice, she held an extensive pro bono practice. Her commitment extended to representing clients in immigration and probate courts, particularly in trust dispute cases. Notably, Coggins actively participated in the McCullum Youth Court, a diversion and restorative justice program within the Alameda County Superior Court, focused on guiding nonviolent youth offenders away from the juvenile justice system. While her pro bono involvement diminished during her tenure with the State of California, Coggins remained engaged in fostering legal education and mentorship. Her active participation in the Anthony M. Kennedy American Inn of Court showcased her dedication to nurturing the aspirations of elementary, high school, college, and law school students pursuing careers in the legal field. Beyond her contributions to public service, Coggins received the Northern California Rising Stars award from Super Lawyers in 2013. This accolade is bestowed upon exceptional lawyers across over 70 practice areas who have garnered significant peer recognition and achieved notable professional success.