

Charleston Regional Meeting Presenter Bios

J. Zak Ritchie

Zak's practice focuses on complex commercial and government litigation. He also frequently handles appeals in state and federal courts. Zak founded the firm after working in private practice and as assistant solicitor general in the Office of the West Virginia Attorney General. As an assistant solicitor general, Zak concentrated on federal regulatory challenges in the energy and environmental sectors, defended state laws from constitutional challenge, and frequently appeared before the state's highest court. In litigation over federal rulemaking before the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit, Zak coordinated the state's legal strategy with an array of national trade groups, including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Federation of Independent Business, and the National Mining Association, among others. Since joining the private practice, Zak has also developed a growing commercial and appellate practice concerning disputes over corporate governance, shareholder derivative law, and insurance coverage, as well as the defense of matters involving lawyers and their firms.

A native of the Mid-Ohio Valley, Zak graduated from West Virginia Wesleyan College and West Virginia University College of Law. Following law school, Zak served as a law clerk to the Hon. John T. Copenhaver of the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of West Virginia and the Hon. Stephanie D. Thacker of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit.

Renee N. Frymyer

Renee N. Frymyer is a lawyer disciplinary counsel for the West Virginia Office of Lawyer Disciplinary Counsel. An arm of the Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia, the Office of Lawyer Disciplinary Counsel is primarily tasked with screening and investigating complaints made against lawyers who practice law in West Virginia. The ODC is also responsible for prosecuting those lawyers who have either committed ethical misconduct or are suffering from a physical or mental condition which adversely affects their ability to serve the public. Prior to joining the ODC in 2008, she was an Assistant Prosecuting Attorney for Marion County, West Virginia, worked in Civil Litigation in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and was Law Clerk for the honorable Jennifer Bailey, Circuit Court Judge for Kanawha County. Renee earned her JD from the West Virginia College of Law in 2002, and her BS in journalism from WVU in 1999. She is a member of the National Organization of Bar Counsel, the American Bar Association, Kappa Kappa Gamma Fraternity, and a lifetime member of the West Virginia University Alumni Association.

Judge Maryclaire Akers, Thirteenth Judicial District

Judge Akers is a Kanawha County native and 1992 graduate of George Washington High School. She has a 1995 bachelor's degree in Journalism from West Virginia University. She graduated from the West Virginia University College of Law in 1999.

Judge Akers practiced law in Kanawha County for over twenty years, most of that time in the Kanawha County Prosecuting Attorney's Office where she served as Chief of Staff, Special Assistant United States Attorney and a Senior Assistant Prosecutor. Judge Akers also worked as a private attorney, has served as General Counsel to the West Virginia Ethics Commission, and as a West Virginia Assistant Attorney General.

Judge Akers has served on the community boards of Daymark, Charleston Area Medical Center and Harmony Health. She has also served on the board of the West Virginia Prosecuting Attorneys Association, the West Virginians Against Violence Committee and the West Virginia Center for Children's Justice. Judge Akers was a Commissioner for the West Virginia State Elections Commission from 2020 to 2021. She has also given multiple presentations for West Virginia Handle with Care and other agencies.

Judge Akers was named a West Virginia Rising Star by Virginia & West Virginia Super Lawyers Magazine, 2009. She was awarded a United States Attorney Award for Distinguished Service, United States Attorney, SDWV, 2011 and was named as one of West Virginia's Lawyers & Leaders by West Virginia Executive Magazine and West Virginia University College of Law in 2020.

Judge Akers is licensed to practice in the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals, United States District Court, SDWV and the Supreme Court of the United States of America.

Judge Dave Hardy, Thirteenth Judicial District

Judge Dave Hardy was sworn in as a judge in the Thirteenth Judicial Circuit (Kanawha County) on January 12, 2024. Governor Jim Justice appointed Judge Hardy to the bench to replace Judge Joanna Tabit, who passed away September 29.

Judge Hardy is a native of Pratt in Kanawha County. He has two bachelor's degrees: one in history and government and another in accounting from West Virginia University Institute of Technology. He has a law degree from the University of Tennessee College of Law. He is also a certified public accountant.

Judge Hardy was a member of Charleston City Council (1995-2001), a Kanawha County Commissioner (2001-2017), and Cabinet Secretary of the West Virginia Department of Revenue

(2017-2023). While a cabinet secretary, he was also the governor's designee on the Municipal Home Rule Board, Investment Management Board, and the Board of Treasury Investments.

He has more than 33 years of experience in the private practice of law. He became a partner at Jackson Kelly in 1993 and, in 2012, he formed the Hardy Pence law firm. He has been named a "Best Lawyer in America" in energy law, as well as a "Top Lawyer" in West Virginia. He has lectured throughout the United States on occupational and mine health and safety law and, at the time of his appointment to the bench, he taught graduate classes on public budgeting and contract management at West Virginia State University.

Judge Carrie L. Webster, Thirteenth Judicial District

Judge Carrie Webster is a native of Hardy County, West Virginia and a 1984 graduate of Moorefield High School. She attended West Virginia University, where she served the student body as Student Body Vice President, and obtained a Bachelor's Degree in Political Science in 1988. Judge Webster is a 1997 graduate of the WVU College of Law and earned distinctions as a member of the National Moot Court Team and the Order of the Barristers.

Judge Webster was twice selected as the Public Interest Advocate Fellow by the WVU Fund for Law in the Public Interest and awarded paid summer internships with WV Legal Services and the Kanawha County Public Defender's Office. Following law school graduation, Judge Webster worked as an assistant public defender for Kanawha County for three years before joining the Charleston law firm Bucci, Bailey and Javins as an Associate in the fall of 2000, where she practiced primarily in the area of civil law until her judicial appointment in 2009.

In November 2000, Judge Webster was elected to the West Virginia House of Delegates for the 31st Delegate District. She was re-elected in 2002, 2004, 2006, and 2008. In 2007, Judge Webster was appointed House Judiciary Chair by Speaker of the House, Richard Thompson. She was the first and only female in state history to hold that title. She served in that position until December 2009, when she was appointed by then Governor, Joe Manchin III, to fill the judicial seat vacated by Judge Irene Berger in the Thirteenth Judicial District (Kanawha County). In 2010 she was elected to fill the unexpired term and was re-elected in 2016 to an eight year term.

Judge Tera L. Salango, Thirteenth Judicial District

Judge Tera L. Salango was elected on November 6, 2018, to the Thirteenth Judicial Circuit to fill the unexpired term of Judge James C. Stucky, who retired. She took office on November 16, 2018

Judge Salango is a native of Nitro, West Virginia, and has a 1999 bachelor's degree in criminal justice from West Virginia State University, where she graduated Magna Cum Laude and was

recognized for earning the highest grade-point average in her major. In 2003, Judge Salango graduated in the top 20 percent of her class from West Virginia University College of Law, where she was a member of the Order of the Barristers and a finalist in the WVU Mock Trial Competition. She also received the Best Brief Award in the Baker Cup appellate advocacy competition.

Upon graduation, Judge Salango worked for the law firm of Spilman, Thomas & Battle and focused primarily on defense litigation. In 2005, she joined the Kanawha County Prosecuting Attorney's office and spent more than a decade handling a wide range of cases including violent felonies, misdemeanors, and juvenile matters.

In late 2016, Judge Salango joined her husband's civil litigation law firm, Preston and Salango, where she handled a wide range of civil cases.

In August 2018, Judge Salango received the Lawyers and Leaders Award from West Virginia University College of Law and West Virginia Executive Magazine recognizing her distinguished legal career. She was previously recognized as a Generation Next: 40 Under 40 professional by The State Journal.