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United States Courts for the Ninth Circuit
Office of the Circuit Executive · 95 7th Street, San Francisco, CA 94103 · (415) 355-8800 · (415) 355-8901 Fax

NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: David Madden, (415) 355-8800

Ninth Circuit Announces Appointment of First Director of Workplace Relations

SAN FRANCISCO – Chief Judge Sidney R. Thomas of the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit announced today the appointment of attorney Yohance Claude Edwards as the Ninth Circuit’s first director of workplace relations.

In his new position, the first of its kind in the federal judiciary, Mr. Edwards will help lead the Ninth Circuit’s ongoing effort to address issues related to preventing and resolving workplace harassment, and to fostering a positive working environment in the federal courts of the western states.

“The Ninth Circuit is committed to ensuring a healthy and productive workplace. We are extremely pleased to have Mr. Edwards fill a critical leadership role in this effort,” Chief Judge Thomas said.

Mr. Edwards currently serves as the associate director and deputy Title IX officer in the Office for the Prevention of Harassment and Discrimination at the University of California, Berkeley. The office is responsible for ensuring the university provides an environment for faculty, staff and students that is free from discrimination and harassment. Mr. Edwards oversees the process of resolving complaints of discrimination and harassment based on race, color, national origin, gender, age, sexual orientation and gender identity, including allegations of sexual harassment.

Scheduled to assume his new duties on January 7, 2019, Mr. Edwards will work within the Office of the Circuit Executive, which provides services and support to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals along with the federal trial and bankruptcy courts and associated court units within the 15 judicial districts that make up the Ninth Circuit. He will be available to assist all judges and court staff and will oversee the development and implementation of discrimination and sexual harassment training.

The hiring of a director of workplace relations was foremost among the recommendations put forth earlier this year by the Workplace Environment Committee, an ad hoc panel appointed by

Chief Judge Thomas to review policies and procedures aimed at maintaining a healthy working environment. The committee based its proposals on input received from more than 4,000 current and former law clerks and other court staff who responded to a wide-ranging workplace questionnaire.

“We are answering one of the most frequent concerns expressed by employees,” noted Ninth Circuit Judge M. Margaret McKeown, who chairs the committee. “They felt it very important to have a trained, professional contact to whom they can turn for information and advice about a range of workplace issues.”

Mr. Edwards joined the UC Berkeley administration in 2016. In addition to managing a staff of six complaint resolution officers and a data coordinator, he meets frequently with diverse campus stakeholders to advise them on discrimination and harassment issues and processes. He has conducted numerous trainings on the university’s harassment and nondiscrimination policies and procedures. He also helps coordinate campus compliance with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which prohibits sex discrimination in educational programs and activities.

Prior to UC Berkeley, Mr. Edwards served as an attorney in the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights in San Francisco from 2012 to 2016. He was responsible for enforcing federal civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination at educational institutions receiving funds from the U.S. Department of Education. He also led technical assistance trainings for educators and organizations on Title IX, Title IV, and Section 504.

Mr. Edwards served as a staff attorney in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals from 2011 to 2012. He began his law career in 2004 as an associate in the San Francisco office of Munger, Tolles & Olson from 2004 to 2010. While with the firm, he worked as a volunteer attorney in the San Francisco District Attorney’s Office.

“I am thrilled to return to the Ninth Circuit in this new role. I look forward to working with judges and staff throughout the circuit on these important workplace issues.” Mr. Edwards said.

Mr. Edwards received his B.A. in 1996 from Brown University, where he served as a minority peer counselor to first-year students and played for four years on the school’s NCAA Division I soccer team. He received his J.D. in 2003 from New York University School of Law, graduating magna cum laude and Order of the Coif. He served as an associate editor of the New York University Law Review and co-chaired the law review’s Diversity Committee. After law school, he served as a law clerk to Judge McKeown from 2003 to 2004.

A resident of El Cerrito, California, Mr. Edwards is active in community service. He currently serves on the Board of Trustees of Prospect Sierra School in El Cerrito, is an advisory trustee of enGender, a non-profit group supporting gender diverse youth, and is a former board member of BUILD Oakland, an entrepreneurship and college preparatory program for young people.

In addition to the hiring of Mr. Edwards, the Ninth Circuit’s comprehensive response to workplace harassment issues has included revised Employment Dispute Resolution and

Confidentiality policies and a series of educational presentations to judges and court staff. The overall goal is to provide multiple avenues for employees to seek informal advice on workplace issues and to assist in the resolution of workplace disputes, including through coordinated dispute resolution and voluntary mediation.

The U.S. Courts for the Ninth Circuit consists of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, and the federal trial and bankruptcy courts and related court units in Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, the U.S. Territory of Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

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