

Governor Phil Murphy

Announcement of Intention to Nominate Fabiana Pierre-Louis As Associate Justice of the New Jersey Supreme Court

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Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

Good morning.

Before I begin, I wish to quickly acknowledge that today is Gun Violence Awareness Day, and, in solidarity with all victims of gun violence, and the surviving families of those we have lost, we are all wearing our orange. And, to them, we commit that New Jersey will continue to be a leader in the national fight to end senseless gun violence.

Today, it is my distinct honor to announce my intention to nominate Fabiana Pierre-Louis to serve as an Associate Justice of the New Jersey Supreme Court.

I will pause to recognize the family members who are here with us – starting with Fabiana’s husband, Robert Reeves, and sons Robbie and Marc; her parents, Joseph and Claire Pierre-Louis; her sister Véronique and her significant other, Randy; her brother Irving Saget and sister-in-law Enide, and their daughter, Fabiana’s niece, Alyssa.

Tomorrow, I will submit Fabiana’s name to the New Jersey State Bar Association’s Judicial and Prosecutorial Appointments Committee, and I look forward to their review, and upon their approval, to Fabiana’s formal nomination.

Upon confirmation by the state Senate, Fabiana would be the first Black woman to serve on our state’s highest court, and only its third Black jurist – and, the first in a decade.

I intend for Fabiana to assume the seat of Associate Justice Walter Timpone, who will reach the mandatory retirement age of 70 this November.

But, Fabiana would also assume the seat of former Justice John Wallace – our state’s second African American justice – for whom she clerked, who became one of her mentors as she embarked on her legal career, and who remains a mentor to this day.

Before I get to Fabiana’s qualifications, I want to make it clear where my values, and that of this administration, stand with regard to our justice system and, in particular, the Supreme Court.


Back
to top

First, our Supreme Court must be independent.

One of the hallmarks of our state's judicial system – and one of the reasons why, for the past 73 years, it has been held up as a national model for excellence – has been the recognition by the overwhelming number of past governors of the importance of the Supreme Court's independence.

This independence has allowed our Court to issue numerous landmark decisions – decisions that have protected and guaranteed the rights of our most-vulnerable residents. These decisions have been studied and emulated across the country.

And, precisely because of its independence, even in times when we may quibble with the Court's conclusions, we can have no argument with the way in which those decisions are made.

Ten years ago, when Justice Wallace – a justice widely recognized for his fair-minded decision making – was denied tenure, that independence was threatened.

This administration is committed to returning the Court to its rightful place – independent of politics, where decisions are made based on what is right rather than what is popular or what is needed to secure re-nomination and tenure from any particular governor.

That is why I was proud to restore the tradition of removing politics from this process when I re-nominated Associate Justice Anne Patterson for tenure in 2018 – a tradition I hope will once again endure through future Republican and Democratic administrations.

Second, our courts must reflect our state, in all its great diversity.

It wasn't until 1994 – 218 years since our state's founding and 47 years after our current Constitution took effect – that Associate Justice James Coleman took his seat as the Court's first Black jurist. It took only 16 years, when Justice Wallace was removed, before the African American experience and perspective was again absent.

Justice cannot be blind if those who sit on our highest and most powerful bench are not surrounded by colleagues who encompass the full range of the American experience, whether it be racially or generationally, or both.

And, so, today, we are making a powerful statement of where and how these values guide us.

Fabiana brings with her a sharp legal mind and a perspective which will be greatly beneficial to the proceedings of our Supreme Court.

Her parents, Joseph and Claire, came to this country from Haiti for the same reason generations of immigrants have looked to our shores – to make a better life for themselves, and for their children to be able to live the American Dream.

Raised largely in Irvington, Fabiana received her bachelor's degree from Rutgers University-New Brunswick, then proceeded to graduate from Rutgers Law School-Camden with high honors.

Fabiana currently is a partner in the Cherry Hill office of Montgomery, McCracken, Walker & Rhoads, where she worked as an associate in her first three years out of law school, until 2010, and where she returned to last year.

However, during the nine years in-between stints, Fabiana served with distinction in the United States Attorney's Office for the District of New Jersey. Over those nine years, she would work in each of the District's three offices, in Newark, Trenton, and Camden.

With practically every step, she broke new ground.

In 2016, she was appointed Attorney-in-Charge of the Trenton Office, the first woman of color to ever hold that position.

In 2018, she was appointed Attorney-in-Charge of the Camden Office, again the first woman of color to hold that position.

In addition to overseeing the work of the attorneys in Trenton and Camden, Fabiana investigated and prosecuted her own cases, including those dealing with public corruption, defense contracting fraud and national security, narcotics offenses, child sexual exploitation, and allegations of racial bias by law enforcement. And, in Trenton, she played a central role in the creation of the Trenton Reentry Court, which provides additional assistance to recently released federal offenders to further aid their reentry into society.

Among her many affiliations, Fabiana is a board member of the Rutgers Law School-Camden Alumni Association and a trustee with the Association of the Federal Bar of New Jersey. She is a prior board member of the Haitian American Lawyers Association of New Jersey, and a member of the Garden State Bar Association, and the Association of Black Women Lawyers of New Jersey, among others.

I have selected Fabiana after an exhaustive process. She has earned unanimous support and respect from her peers, from her colleagues, from our judicial advisory panel, and importantly, from the trailblazers who made today possible.

She has been described glowingly as both a “superstar” and “a unique blend of intellect and humility.” To a person, everyone with whom I or my team talked to about Fabiana spoke about her humanity, her empathy, and her character. They spoke about the kind of person she is – the kind of person who always seeks to serve others and always carries with her the pride and perspective of her own past.

There is simply no better set of traits that I could hope for in a nominee – especially one who has the potential to serve our residents for a generation, ensuring that the perspectives of those who our laws and courts too often ignore are given a voice on the most prominent court in our state.

I have not chosen Fabiana because of the current national discussion around race and systemic bias that is unfolding before our very eyes, and in our very streets. In fact, anyone who knows how these processes work knows that they begin many months, if not years, before an announcement is made.

However, given the challenges which are being brought to the forefront of our society, and the questions which will undoubtedly rise to reach our Supreme Court – core issues of socioeconomic equality and equity – there is no better meeting of an individual and the times.

And, with that, before I bring up Fabiana, I would like to invite Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver to say a few words.

Governor Phil Murphy

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[Economy & Jobs \(/governor/initiatives/#Economy\)](/governor/initiatives/#Economy)

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[Environment \(/governor/initiatives/#Environment\)](/governor/initiatives/#Environment)

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[Law & Justice \(/governor/initiatives/#Justice\)](/governor/initiatives/#Justice)

[Transportation \(/governor/initiatives/#Transportation\)](/governor/initiatives/#Transportation)

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[Advice and Consent Appointments \(/governor/news/acappointments\)](/governor/news/acappointments)

[Statements on Legislation](#)

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[Transition Reports \(/governor/news/reports/approved/reports_archive.shtml\)](/governor/news/reports/approved/reports_archive.shtml)

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