



Supreme Court of Kentucky

Chambers, State Capitol
Frankfort, Kentucky 40601
502-564-4162

John D. Minton, Jr.
Chief Justice of Kentucky

www.courts.ky.gov

Contact: Jamie Neal, Public Information Specialist, Administrative Office of the Courts
502-573-2350, ext. 50033, jamieneal@kycourts.net

For Immediate Release

Debra Hembree Lambert formally sworn in as Supreme Court justice Feb. 4 at Capitol



FRANKFORT, Ky., Feb. 6, 2019 – [Justice Debra Hembree Lambert](#) was formally sworn in as a justice of the Supreme Court of Kentucky at a ceremony Monday at the state Capitol in Frankfort. Chief Justice of Kentucky John D. Minton Jr. administered the oath of office to the court's newest justice, who was elected in November to serve the 27 counties of the [3rd Supreme Court District](#).

Justice Lambert is the first woman from the 3rd District to serve on the Supreme Court and on the Court of Appeals, where she was a judge for four years before being elected to the

Supreme Court. She is also the first justice to have served as a Family Court judge.

“I am pleased that a person of Justice Lambert’s capability is joining this court,” Chief Justice Minton said at the investiture. “All of Kentucky – all of us – will benefit from her practical experience in Kentucky’s courtrooms and her pioneering spirit as she joins this court in a pivotal time, as we have the challenge of leading the Judicial Branch through the changing realities of American law. I am looking forward to the contributions you will make as a member of this court.”

Justice Lambert said she was a “proud, authentic mountain girl” and that her upbringing in the small Eastern Kentucky town of Greasy Creek made her passionate about justice and a level playing field for all people.

“I know each case file is more than just a number,” she said. “It contains the livelihood, and perhaps liberty, of real people.”

During the ceremony, Justice Lambert’s fellow justices offered advice and encouragement, with several complimenting her compassion and commenting that it would be positive to have the experience of a Family Court judge on the Supreme Court bench.

“Justice Lambert, you have earned your place on this court,” said Justice Daniel J. Venters (ret.), who Justice Lambert succeeded on the court following his retirement. “You have won the confidence, trust and affection of the people in our region.”

Justice Lambert was surrounded by friends and family at the event, including husband Joseph Sharpe, sons Joseph and John Lambert, and stepdaughter Chelsea Sharpe Woolums and her husband, Evan Woolums. Joseph Patrick Lambert, who is an attorney, made the motion for her to take the oath of office and John held the Bible for his mother as she took the oath. The justice was initially sworn in prior to taking office Jan. 7.

Other speakers at the ceremony were Court of Appeals Judge Sara Walter Combs and attorney Stephen C. Cawood of Pineville. The Rev. David Gambrel, who is the Lincoln County property valuation administrator, provided the invocation, and Aden Amburgey, a Rockcastle County High School student, sang “My Old Kentucky Home.”

Justice Lambert

Debra Hembree Lambert was elected to the Supreme Court of Kentucky in November 2018. She serves the 3rd Supreme Court District, which is composed of 27 counties.

Justice Lambert came to the Supreme Court after four years on the Kentucky Court of Appeals. Her election to the 3rd Appellate District, Division 1, in November 2014 made her the first woman from the 3rd District to serve on the Court of Appeals. Likewise, Justice Lambert is the first woman to serve on the Supreme Court from the 3rd District.

Prior to taking the appellate bench, Justice Lambert was a circuit judge/Family Court division for the 28th Judicial Circuit, composed of Lincoln, Pulaski and Rockcastle counties. She was appointed to that seat in 1999 by then-Governor Paul E. Patton. While a Family Court judge,

she created the first Drug Court in the area. She was recognized for her efforts in 2002 when the National Association of Drug Court Professionals inducted her into the Stanley M. Goldstein Drug Court Hall of Fame. She also volunteered in area middle schools, working 10 weeks each semester with at-risk children and families in an effort to help them avoid truancy charges. Justice Lambert volunteers as a certified suicide prevention trainer, training others to properly intervene to prevent suicide.

Justice Lambert grew up in Bell County. She earned a bachelor's degree from Eastern Kentucky University, where she graduated with distinction. She went on to graduate from the University of Kentucky College of Law in 1989. After completing a juris doctor, Justice Lambert practiced law in Mount Vernon. During that time, she also served as an assistant commonwealth's attorney and city attorney for the city of Mount Vernon. In 2007, Justice Lambert resumed her private practice of law in Mount Vernon until her election to the Court of Appeals in 2014.

Justice Lambert and her husband, Joseph Sharpe, reside on Lake Cumberland in Burnside in Pulaski County. She is the mother of two sons, Joseph Patrick Lambert and John Ryan Lambert, and two stepdaughters, Jessica Sharpe and Chelsea Sharpe Woolums. She is also the nonna of Sam Stringer.

Supreme Court of Kentucky

The Supreme Court is the state court of last resort and the final interpreter of Kentucky law. [Seven justices](#) sit on the Supreme Court and all seven justices rule on appeals that come before the court. The justices are elected from seven appellate districts and serve eight-year terms. A chief justice, chosen for a four-year term by fellow justices, is the administrative head of the state's court system and is responsible for its operation. The Supreme Court may order a ruling or opinion to be published, which means that the ruling becomes the case law governing all similar cases in the future in Kentucky.

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