

Beyond the Bio: Hon. Pamela Liston, Rowlett Municipal Court

Traveling is one of Judge Pam Liston's passions. She's been all over the world, citing Ireland, Japan, Italy, and Rome as some of her favorite destinations.

"Travel gives you insight into the human experience that is outside of the limitations of culture," Judge Liston said. "It's so important."

But Texas will always be home for the JCMH Commissioner & Rowlett Municipal Judge, and it has been for generations. Judge Liston is a 5th generation Texan. Her ancestor, Jacob Harrell, was the first settler of the Austin area. Her ancestors owned the land where the state Capitol sits now, then sold it and moved to Williamson County.

Judge Liston grew up in Lamb County, a small county outside of Lubbock. When she was young, she had two careers in mind.

"I wanted to be a teacher or a lawyer, and I've done both," Judge Liston said.

After she graduated from Texas Tech University with a degree in English and a minor in education, Judge Liston taught sophomore English at Floydada High School. She was planning to teach longer, but at the time, found life as a single parent on a teacher's income to be challenging. She followed her other interest and went to law school.

After graduating from Texas Tech University School of Law, Judge Liston worked at the Dallas County District Attorney's office, and then for the firm Cowles and Thompson. Judge Liston remarried, and after her fourth child was born, she left the firm to join her husband's law practice.



Judge Liston's swearing in ceremony for her first judicial appointment in 2011 with family

During this time, she also kept a few clients and was a part-time prosecutor in the city of Rowlett for more than 15 years. When the city's Presiding Judge retired after 26 years, Judge Liston took his place. She is a self-proclaimed municipal court nerd, and is thankful that her husband, who is also a municipal court judge, shares that interest.

"It's fantastic. It's so good. Because we really understand each other's stories," Judge Liston said. "We understand where the meat of the story is. It's just really easy to communicate and support each other."

Judge Liston's favorite dockets are alternative-means dockets. These are dockets where the litigants have a challenge in their lives that prevents them from being able to pay their fines or costs. Judge Liston takes the time to delve into each their lives and work through those challenges with them.

"That's where I'll order community service or...be creative about 'oh, you're taking this job training. Well, we're going to count that job training as community service hours because when you're stronger, we're all stronger. When you're equipped, we're all more equipped,'" Judge Liston said.

In these dockets, she is able to get back to her roots as an educator. Judge Liston takes time with each person individually and helps them determine what course of action will be best moving forward, the way teachers care for their students.



Judge Liston, husband, and daughters at the top of Mt. Elbert (the highest peak in Colorado) in Sept. 2021



“My goal is...greater education for people and how can I help them and assist them in being stronger? If there is a program I can send them to, an educational program, then I will order it,” Judge Liston said. “Or they may [already] be enrolled in an education program, and I’ll help facilitate them being a part of that program and in developing themselves.”

Judge Liston is on the Board of Texas Municipal Courts Education Center and Texas Municipal Courts Association. She has been a JCMH Commissioner since 2021, and her work on the commission intersects with her work as a municipal judge. She is always looking to engage in positive change that benefits the people in the court she presides over, particularly those with a mental illness.

“For example, I would like defense counsel to be appointed at the beginning when the arrest happens for people, rather than them waiting for days, weeks or months to get defense counsel in place because defense counsel can take up that mantle of serving the client if their client has mental illness,” Judge Liston said.

When she isn’t serving her community of 22 years on the bench, Judge Liston enjoys hiking, playing tennis, and of course, traveling. She is also an amateur photographer. She took a class in photography during her undergraduate studies and picked the hobby back up around 2000.



One of Judge Liston's photographs - Texas longhorns.