



16th Circuit Judicial Court
Jackson County, Missouri

For Immediate Release:
January 9, 2022

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News Release

New Presiding Judge is an Historic Selection

With the New Year, comes a new Presiding Judge of the 16th Circuit Judicial Court in Jackson County whose selection is a milestone for the Court. Judge Jalilah Otto of Division 15 is beginning her two-year term as the administrative judge of the Court.

“In the 16th Circuit’s nearly 200-year history, Judge Otto is the first African American Judge to be elected to the position of Presiding Judge. For that matter, she is only the fourth woman to serve in this important role,” said Judge J. Dale Youngs. “We are proud to welcome and support our colleague and friend as she begins her historic term as our Presiding Judge.”

Otto was elected to the position by her judicial colleagues at a meeting of the Court en Banc in December 2021, and has served this past year as the Presiding Judge-Elect. Her term of office is from January 1, 2023 through December 31, 2024. She follows Youngs in the role.

The Presiding Judge oversees the administrative functions of the Court such as its budget, but does not supervise their judicial colleagues who act independently to serve justice within their own courtrooms.

“Representation matters, and today, young black girls across our community will see that they too can break the glass ceiling in whatever they strive to do,” said Jackson County Executive Frank White, Jr. “I am thrilled to congratulate Presiding Judge Jalilah Otto on her historic appointment, to which she brings extensive knowledge, character and integrity that will ensure effective administration of the Court and fair treatment of those seeking justice. I look forward to working with her and continuing our collaborative effort with the Courts to build a better and more equitable Jackson County.”

Otto was appointed as an Associate Circuit Judge by Democratic Governor Jay Nixon in 2014, and as a Circuit Judge by Republican Governor Eric Greitens in 2017. Prior to that she served as a federal and state prosecutor.

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Note: The pronunciation of Presiding Judge Jalilah Otto’s first name rhymes with vanilla.