

SUPREME COURT OF VIRGINIA

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S. BERNARD GOODWYN

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Press Release – August 26, 2025

The Honorable Cleo E. Powell Elected Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Virginia, Effective January 1, 2026

Today, the Justices of the Supreme Court of Virginia unanimously elected Justice Cleo E. Powell as Chief Justice-elect. Chief Justice-elect Powell, who will become the first African American woman to serve as Chief Justice in the Court's history, will succeed Chief Justice S. Bernard Goodwyn. Chief Justice Goodwyn has served as Chief Justice since January 1, 2022, and has announced his retirement effective January 1, 2026.

Chief Justice-elect Powell will assume office on January 1, 2026. She was first elected by the General Assembly to the Supreme Court of Virginia in 2011 and re-elected in 2023. Previously, she served as a judge of the Court of Appeals of Virginia. Earlier in her judicial career, she served as a judge of the 12th Judicial Circuit Court and the Chesterfield General District Court.

Chief Justice-elect Powell earned her undergraduate degree, with distinction, from the University of Virginia and her Juris Doctor from the University of Virginia School of Law.

Before joining the bench, she practiced labor and employment law, served as corporate counsel and director of employee services for an energy company, and worked as a Senior Assistant Attorney General in the Office of the Attorney General of Virginia.

She chairs the Judicial Performance Evaluation Committee and serves on the Executive Committee of the Judicial Conference of Virginia. Her prior service includes the Model Jury Instructions Committee, the Judicial Inquiry and Review Commission, and the Ad Hoc Committee for the Study of Canons of Judicial Conduct. She has been recognized with numerous professional and civic honors, including the Virginia State Bar Young Lawyers Conference Jurist of the Year Award, the YMCA of Greater Richmond's Martin Luther King, Jr. Service Award for Legacy, and the Virginia State Bar's Clarence M. Dunnaville Jr. Achievement Award.

Chief Justice-elect Powell also contributes to legal education as a faculty member on New York University's Institute of Judicial Administration's Appellate Judges Seminar. She is the Diversity Mentor, Distinguished Visiting Professor of Law, and The L. Anthony Sutin Endowed Lecturer at the Appalachian School of Law. Current Chief Justice Goodwyn remarked that "Chief Justice-elect Powell is a dedicated jurist who exemplifies integrity, civility and professionalism, and I am confident that she will serve the Court as Chief Justice with the highest distinction."

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