

December 8, 2023

Ms. Cynthia Dasté
Snohomish County Bar Association
PO Box 5429
Everett, WA 98206
director@snoabar.org

Re: Nomination for SCBA 2023 Judge of the Year: Judge Edirin Okoloko's Exemplary Service in Juvenile Dependency Rotation

Dear Ms. Dasté and Snohomish County Bar Association

I am writing to nominate Judge Edirin Okoloko for consideration as Judge of the Year within the Snohomish County Bar Association. Judge Okoloko's work, especially in the Juvenile Dependency rotation at Denney Juvenile Justice Center, merits praise because of his respect for parties, his careful application of the law, and his empathy towards the families he served during his rotation.

Before Judge Okoloko even began his rotation, he proactively and deliberately acquainted himself with juvenile dependency. Though he lacked experience in dependency from his prior practice before assuming the bench, he quickly showed a commitment to being well-prepared for the rotation. This became evident to attorneys immediately, as it was clear he possessed an understanding of the black-letter law, not merely the norms of practice in the court. He took things further than study, however, demonstrating a commitment to preparedness by observing court from the gallery before his rotation even began.

Once his rotation started, Judge Okoloko consistently displayed respect for all parties involved, including attorneys, parents, children, and caregivers. He ensured that everyone felt heard, regardless of the final outcome of their case. His commitment to attentive listening contributed to a courtroom atmosphere built on trust. There are numerous instances of Judge Okoloko taking time – even during busy days – to ensure that all parties have the opportunity to feel heard. He did not shy away from a lengthy, last-minute set hearing if he knew it would benefit the case, the parties, and most importantly, the children.

Judge Okoloko's careful consideration of the law, especially given recent changes, also demonstrated his commitment to the values of the judiciary. Dependency case law, statutory law, and practice have gone through significant shifts in the past few years. Judge Okoloko carefully considered changes in the law when making his decision, focusing on an application of the law to the facts rather than focusing on the result alone. Judge Okoloko also took time from his busy schedule to attend the state Children's Justice Conference. It was immediately apparent from his decisions and demeanor that he took away fresh information and perspectives from the conference. In all of his decisions, he communicated his analysis transparently, applying the law to the facts and providing clear explanations for his rulings.

December 8, 2023

Above all, it is his understanding of the complexities of family dynamics, acknowledging that imperfection does not preclude safe parenting, that has made Judge Okoloko's tenure notable and successful. He recognized the enduring love between children and their parents, even in imperfect circumstances. When asked about his approach, he opined that individuals appearing in front of him navigate life 'with the cards they have been dealt.'

This understanding and empathy led parents to trust and respect his decision-making, even when it was unfavorable. A family I worked with was excited to speak with Judge Okoloko and talk about their progress as a family at our county's 'Reunification Picnic'. It was his empathetic and understanding approach that made families comfortable speaking directly to him and appearing before him.

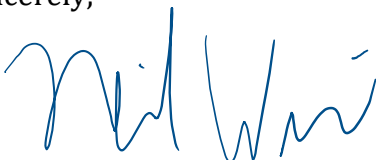
Even if things were not going well, Judge Okoloko had the ability to express disappointment without overwhelming shame and coupled criticism with encouragement for improvement. If a family was at their lowest, he acknowledged and genuinely believed they could walk back from the brink. His approach combined compassion, empathy, and a commitment to justice.

It is also worth noting that Judge Okoloko's welcoming approach was not exclusive to parents. Judge Okoloko was welcoming of new attorneys and helpful from the bench refining their practice. He engaged attorneys in discussions about the merits of the facts, law, and case without favoring any one side or position. The atmosphere made the courtroom receptive to all attorneys, most especially new attorneys still getting their feet under them in a fast-paced and complex role in litigation.

In conclusion, Judge Edirin Okoloko's performance during his time in the juvenile dependency rotation exceptionally qualifies him for the Snohomish County Bar Association Judge of the Year.

Thank you for considering this nomination.

Sincerely,



NEIL WEISS, WSBA #45923

Taila AyAy, *Partner*
Adam Ballout, *Partner*
Neil Weiss, *Partner*



Dana Halbert, *Esq.*
Connor O'Neil, *Esq.*
Atharshna Singarajah, *Esq.*
Channing Reeves, *Esq.*

December 8, 2023

Nomination also supported by the following Snohomish County Attorneys:

Melinda Drewing, WSBA #37854
Taila Ayay, WSBA #39160
Adam Ballout, WSBA #39298
Dana Halbert, WSBA #48035
Connor O'Neil, WSBA #56716
Atharshna Singarajah, WSBA #59519
Channing Reeves, WSBA #59898