

## Standout Lawyers and Judges

[FINAL Edition]

The Washington Post - Washington, D.C.

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Date:Jan 5, 2000

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With more than its share of high-profile criminal and civil cases, Prince George's County is a showcase for lawyers and judges.

There are far too many in the county to recognize individually; what follows is a less than comprehensive list of lawyers to watch in 2000:

### Criminal defense attorneys:

Long known as one of the best criminal defense attorneys in the county, Riverdale lawyer Douglas J. Wood had one of his best years in 1999, winning outright acquittals in four murder trials in Prince George's Circuit Court. Last year, Wood also persuaded judges to suppress evidence of drugs found in eight county police searches that the judges had found to be illegally conducted.

Wood's associate, Nikki Lotze, 32, is considered one of the best young defense attorneys in the county. In November, she defended Jeffrey Williams, who was charged with first-degree felony murder, second-degree murder and other charges.

Lotze persuaded Circuit Court Judge Joseph S. Casula to acquit Williams of everything except involuntary manslaughter. The jury deadlocked on that charge, 9 to 3 for conviction. Lotze aggressively cross-examined county homicide detective Troy Harding about his failure to find one witness and about statements he made about another witness.

Greenbelt lawyer Robert C. Bonsib, 51, has long been considered a stalwart in the county's criminal defense bar.

Bonsib lived up to his reputation in July, when he got a police officer client off on perjury charges, even though federal prosecutors already had gotten the officer to say that he lied on the witness stand.

Cpl. Rickey Rodriguez Davis was charged with perjury in connection with testimony he gave in the trial of Peter Peluso, a Bowie man who was beaten by another police officer. At Peluso's assault trial, Davis had testified that Officer Timothy J. Moran did not hit Peluso in 1994. Early last year, Davis told federal prosecutors that Moran did hit Peluso. (In 1998, Moran pleaded guilty in U.S. District Court in Greenbelt to beating the handcuffed Peluso).

Among the other criminal defense lawyers who are widely respected for their work are county Public Defender Joseph M. Niland, Greenbelt lawyer David M. Simpson, Suitland lawyer Theresa Moore, Suitland lawyer James N. Papirmeister and Upper Marlboro lawyer William C. Brennan.

### Prosecutors:

Assistant State's Attorneys John Maloney and Tara Harrison earned praise from courtroom observers in June for their successful prosecution of Trone Tyrone Ashford, 27, who was convicted of two counts of first-degree murder and other crimes for the Oct. 15, 1998, shotgun murders of two Dunkin' Donuts employees.

Known for excellent pretrial preparation, Maloney, 36, cross-examined a friend of Ashford's and got him to testify that the defendant, who claimed a back ailment would have made it difficult for him to commit the murders, had no trouble casting his line while fishing.

Harrison, 29, who has quickly developed a reputation as a top-notch trial lawyer and courtroom orator, presented a riveting closing argument, imploring jurors to grant justice to the victims.

On the federal side, Maryland U.S. Attorney Lynne A. Battaglia has earned high marks for prosecution of white-collar criminals, violators of environmental laws and gun scofflaws. Appointed by President Clinton, Battaglia, 53, is viewed by some political insiders as a possible future candidate for statewide office.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Deborah Ann Johnston, 46, long known as an excellent trial lawyer, was appointed by Battaglia last spring as chief of the Southern Division, which includes Prince George's, Montgomery, Charles, Calvert and St. Mary's counties. Attorney General Janet Reno recognized Johnston for her successful prosecution of a drug trafficking organization that brought more than 150 kilograms of cocaine and heroin from Colombia into the Washington area, primarily Prince George's County. Legal insiders view Johnston as a possible future judge.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Steven M. Dettelbach, appointed as Johnston's deputy in May, has won a number of high-profile cases since Battaglia hired him from the civil rights division of main Justice in 1997. In 1998, he obtained a guilty plea from a former Prince George's County police officer who said he had beaten a Bowie man with his nightstick. It was the first time a Prince George's officer had been found guilty of federal civil rights violations.

Other federal prosecutors who have drawn praise are Bryan Edwin Foreman, who prosecutes Internet child exploitation and pornography cases, and Sandra Wilkinson, who in 1998 unraveled a complicated murder mystery by obtaining two guilty pleas to murder charges from George Kalomeris, who is now serving a 395-year federal prison sentence.

Judges:

Prince George's Circuit Court Judge Sherrie L. Krauser, 49, was among three finalists last year for an opening on the state Court of Special Appeals, Maryland's second highest court. Though she was not tapped that time, Krauser, known for her judicial independence, is widely expected to rise to a higher court.

William D. Missouri, chief administrative judge of the Prince George's Circuit Court, is widely praised for his fairness and accessibility.

On the federal side, U.S. District Judge Peter Messitte is known for his legal acumen, independence and courage. U.S. Magistrate Judge William Connelly, also assigned to U.S. District Court in Greenbelt, is widely viewed as being in line for an appointment as a U.S. district judge.

### **[Illustration]**

Caption: Douglas J. Wood Nikki Lotze Sherrie L. Krauser Robert C. Bonsib is considered a stalwart in the county's criminal defense bar.

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