

An accomplished attorney and Judge, Elaine M. O'Neal, a Durham, NC native, is the fifth and youngest child born to Reuben (Duke) and Nekoda (Polly) O'Neal. She is the mother of Koren O. Lee, Gregory J. Lee, Sr., Jeanna Joint, and Macklin Bushfan as well as the energetic grandmother of Jaylen Davis and Gregory Lee, Jr.

She is a member of First Calvary Baptist Church where she sings in the choir and volunteers with the Kitchen Committee. She is also affiliated with and has close ties to Morehead Avenue Baptist Church, Union Baptist, Mount Zoar Missionary Baptist and Life International Church.

Elaine was educated at Lyon Park, Morehead Elementary, Rogers-Herr Jr. High and the great Hillside High School where she graduated in the class of 1980 with honors. She fondly claims that her position as a Flag Girl in the Hillside Marching Band was her first leadership role and one of the highlights of her life. She attended North Carolina Central University, pledged Delta Sigma Theta while there, and graduated Cum Laude with a BS in Math in 1984. She went on to earn her Juris Doctor from the NCCU Law School.

After three years in solo practice, Elaine was elected to the bench as a District Court Judge where she served for the next 17 years. She served as the first female Chief District Court Judge for the last eight years of her tenure. She went on to be elected to serve as the first female Superior Court Judge in Durham County. She retired from the bench in 2018 to serve her Law School as Interim Dean, where she encountered a number of challenges posed by the American Bar Association accreditation process. When she retired from the Law School after 20 months, the challenges had been met and the Law School was accredited for the next 10 years.

While on the bench, Judge O'Neal implemented specialty courts to steer citizens of Durham County away from the criminal justice system. She was trained in Advanced Special Court Jurisdiction at the Judicial College in Reno, Nevada and she was a Certified Juvenile Judge. She presided over Family and Adult and Juvenile Drug Treatment Court and she wrote a grant which funded New Life Court. Some of her extensive continuing education includes classes at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, The National Judicial College, the National Judicial Institute on Domestic Violence, and the North Carolina Drug Treatment Court Program.

She has an extremely long list of honors and awards and her community involvement is well documented. Most recently, at former Mayor Schewel's request, she chaired the Durham County Racial Equity Task Force.

Elaine has the heart of a public servant and a deep abiding love for her hometown. There is no question that Elaine O'Neal has the training, skills, abilities and experience required to step into the role of the Mayor of Durham at this pivotal time in our history.