

Pedro Williams’ Judicial Nomination Advances Unanimously From Rules Committee

Pedro Williams was unanimously approved by the Rules Committee for a judgeship in the St. Thomas–St. John Division of Superior Court, outlining four decades of legal experience and pledging fairness, integrity, and action to reduce case backlogs.

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Self-described “problem solver and decision maker” Pedro Williams has been approved by the Committee on Rules and Judiciary for the position of judge in the St. Thomas/St. John Division of the Superior Court of the Virgin Islands.

His nomination for the role is intended to fill gaps in the territory’s judicial system as judges retire and case backlogs grow. It is not the first time that Williams has been nominated for the position, but is the first time that he has agreed to take up the mantle. He described it as a way to “serve the

community that I love and respect.”

Williams appeared before the Committee on Thursday, the first meeting of the 36th Legislature for the year. He outlined his forty years of legal experience, including an early role as the legislative assistant in Washington, D.C. to the honorable Ron De Lugo, VI Delegate to Congress and later as his chief counsel and then as district manager of his congressional office in St Thomas. Williams later served as the legal counsel to the Coastal Zone Management Commission.

In his private legal practice, Mr. Williams has represented private and public entities, including the Departments of Education and Labor, the Virgin Islands Housing Authority, the St. Thomas East End Medical Center Corporation, and several trade unions. He informed lawmakers that his experience as an attorney has included both civil and criminal matters, handling matters like murder, divorce, medical malpractice, and probate.

The nomination to serve as judge is an “awesome responsibility,” Mr. Williams noted. “As a judge, I pledge to be fair, unbiased, respectful and empathetic,” he said. The nominee assured lawmakers that he must “be able to apply the law to the facts and understand how my judicial decisions will affect the persons appearing before me.”

Mr. Williams’ candidacy impressed lawmakers. Senator Angel Bolques commented that “his reputation speaks for itself.” Senator Novelle Francis agreed that he possessed the “fundamental traits” to be a good judge. Nonetheless, there were questions on how Mr. Williams would address the mounting backlog in the courts.

“I understand that Justice delayed is justice denied. The court must find and implement more meaningful ways to move its docket,” he said in his testimony. Potential strategies to reduce the backlog include “ruling on cases from the bench” and issuing “timely written decisions and opinions.”

Mr. Williams also commented on the tendency to issue continuances in matters before the courts. Though amenable to the reality that continuances can be necessary, stated that “a judge must know...whether they are being provided with legitimate reasons for continuance or counsel who has not done the work and prepared for trial.”

“Independence, integrity, impartiality” were offered by the nominee as some of his stellar traits.

He assured Senator Marvin Blyden that he is a “man of integrity” and “can’t be bought.” He also addressed questions from Senator Blyden on balancing individual rights with the government’s interests.

“We always have to take those things seriously and balance that in order to make sure that the government is not trampling upon the rights of individual,” Mr. Williams replied. He stressed the need to respect the Constitution and Revised Organic Act.

At the end of Thursday’s hearing, lawmakers were suitably satisfied that Mr. Williams would act ethically once appointed, setting aside any biases and working within the boundaries of the law to provide fair access to justice. All six committee members in attendance forwarded Mr. Williams’ nomination to the upcoming Legislative session.