

## Justice Patricia Guerrero confirmed to California Supreme Court

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MARIA DINZEO / March 22, 2022



*Justice Patricia Guerrero embraces her father, Jorge Guerrero, after being confirmed to the Supreme Court of California Tuesday, March 22, 2022, in San Francisco. At right is her husband, Joe Dyson. (AP Photo/Eric Risberg, Pool)*

SAN FRANCISCO (CN) — Lauded as a phenomenal and brilliant choice for the state’s highest court, Justice Patricia Guerrero glided through her confirmation hearing Tuesday to become the first Latina to sit on the California Supreme Court.

“I’m humbled to be here, recognizing the historical significance of this. I’m not here on my own. I stand on the shoulders of my grandparents and my parents who came to this country even though it would be a struggle for them,” Guerrero said. “Like so many immigrant families, they came here to work hard, to seek opportunities, and to give better lives to their children. I’m thankful for that.”

Guerrero joins the court from the San Diego-based Fourth Appellate District, where Administrative Presiding Justice Judith McConnell said she will be sorely missed. McConnell said Guerrero's name came immediately to mind as the perfect replacement for Associate Justice Mariano-Florentino Cuéllar, who stepped down last year to head the Washington think tank Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

McConnell said that when Cuéllar announced his resignation, she immediately wrote Governor Gavin Newsom's judicial appointments secretary Luis Cespedes to recommend Guerrero for the position.

"I told him I had the perfect candidate to succeed Justice Cuéllar and named Justice Patricia Guerrero. In recommending her of course I shot myself in the foot, because we're now about to lose her in our court. She is a treasure," McConnell said. "But the people of the state of California will be well served by this wonderful woman, who represents the best of our citizenry, and who will meet the heavy demands of our Supreme Court."

The daughter of immigrants from Mexico, Guerrero, 50, grew up in the small farming town of Imperial. After graduating from Imperial High School, she worked to put herself through the University of California, Berkeley, where her grades were among the top 4% in her class.

She earned her juris doctorate at Stanford Law School in 1997.

With tears in her eyes, Guerrero dedicated her nomination to her mother. "My mother recently passed away after a struggle with breast cancer. She taught us to be strong, compassionate and independent," Guerrero said. "She showed us the importance of family and to thank God for our blessings, and to help other people whenever we can. I hope this appointment in some way can serve as a tribute to her."

Guerrero also thanked her father Jorge, who sat beaming behind her in Supreme Court's courtroom, her husband Joe Dyson, and her teenage sons.

"This is not just about me or about my parents. It is about so many others just like us. This is a story of the American dream. The belief that with hard work perseverance and opportunities, anything is possible," Guerrero said.

Guerrero started her law career as an associate at Latham and Watkins LLP in 2003, becoming a partner in 2007.

"I would describe Trish as a pioneer," said her former law partner Robert Howard, who worked closely with her for over a decade. "She made equity partner after only seven years as an associate, which is unheard of nowadays at large firms. She was dauntless because she worked on our most demanding matters."

Governor Jerry Brown appointed Guerrero to the San Diego Superior Court bench in 2013 and then to the court of appeal. As a judge, Guerrero worked in the family court, a notoriously

fraught and difficult job. She nevertheless thrived and eventually ascended to supervising judge. “Those of us who have served in the family court now what a difficult challenge assignment it is. And yet, she received the highest honor from the San Diego family law bar, a bar which is known for ripping judges to shreds,” McConnell said.

Guerrero was also extolled for her work with the California Judicial Council’s Judges in the Classroom program, which she called “one of the highlights of what I do.”

The program is designed to teach students about the three branches of government, with a special focus on the judicial branch. Guerrero said she favors visiting fourth and fifth grade classrooms.

“What I really like to do is get in front of students, to talk to them and look them in the eye. I like to tell them that I am just like them, that I remember being in fifth grade in a public school and having wonderful teachers who were supportive of me,” she said. “I like to make that connection with them so they can also see that they can be whatever they want. I will continue to participate in that program.”

Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye, who has devoted her career to promoting civic learning and engagement, praised Guerrero’s involvement.

“That is the exact reason why we commit so much of our time to that program,” she said.

Testifying before the Commission on Judicial Appointments on Tuesday, Guerrero said that as a litigator she’s learned how difficult it is to argue and advocate before a judge. As a judge, she’s learned to listen.

“It’s important to have judicial officers who will listen to your arguments and hear you out and be fair,” she said. “On the appellate court, I learned how important it is to be collegial and work with others. You may have something to say, but it’s very important to hear others to, to be open to their views, to listen and work together with them.”

The commission comprised of Cantil-Sakauye, state Attorney General Rob Bonta and Fourth Appellate District Presiding Justice Manuel Ramirez voted 3-0 to approve her nomination.

As for the possible differences between her role on the appellate court and her new job, she joked, “One important thing is I will have to convince more people than I have had to before, so hopefully I’m up to that task.”