

from THE BOLCH JUDICIAL INSTITUTE

## Judge Kimberly J. Mueller to serve as next director of the Bolch Judicial Institute

Senior District Judge Kimberly J. Mueller of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of California will serve as the next David F. Levi Professor of the Practice of Law and Director of the Bolch Judicial Institute after she retires from the bench in January 2026.

Mueller served 15 years as a U.S. district court judge and nearly eight years as a U.S. magistrate judge in the Eastern District of California. She was chief judge of the Eastern District from 2020 to 2024 and took senior status in September of 2024. A 2025 graduate of Duke Law's Master of Judicial Studies program, Mueller succeeds Paul W. Grimm, who is stepping down after serving three years as director.

"Judge Mueller is an exceptional judge and leader within the federal judiciary," said Kerry Abrams, dean of Duke Law School. "She brings deep knowledge of the federal courts and the judicial role as well as a unique perspective on the challenges courts face developed through her service as chief judge. Our students and faculty will benefit tremendously from her knowledge and experience, and we very much look forward to welcoming her to Duke."

In addition to her time as a student in the Master of Judicial Studies program, Mueller has served as a member of the Bolch Judicial Institute Leadership Council and participated in its Defending the Judiciary and civics education initiatives.

"I can't think of a better person to lead the next phase of the Bolch Institute's important work," said Grimm. "Judge Mueller is known as a



wise and thoughtful leader across the federal judiciary and has already been engaged with many of our programs. She is deeply committed to the Bolch mission to advance and protect the rule of law, to strengthen judicial independence, and to improve public outreach to better educate the public about the role of the judicial branch. And she is a wonderful person who I know will be a terrific colleague and partner for everyone involved with the Bolch Judicial Institute."

### A CAREER IN PUBLIC SERVICE

Mueller began her career with the California Department of Conservation and the California Firefighter Foundation. She was appointed to serve on the Sacramento City Toxics Commission in 1985 and was elected in 1987 to a seat on the Sacramento City Council. In 1989 she served as vice mayor.

In 1992, she enrolled in law school at Stanford University, where she served as symposium editor for the *Stanford Law & Policy Review* and was a judicial extern for Judge David F. Levi of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of California. She would later follow in Judge Levi's footsteps to serve as chief judge of the Eastern District and now will assume a professorship and directorship named in honor of his tenure as the founding director of the Bolch Judicial Institute.

After law school, she practiced at the law firm of Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP in Sacramento and, in 2000, formed her own law practice focused on intellectual property, internet, and art law matters.

She was appointed by the Eastern District of California to serve as a U.S. magistrate judge in 2003. In 2010, she was nominated and unanimously

confirmed as a U.S. district judge. Her judicial tenure included several notable cases, including some of the earliest First Step Act cases, which provided for compassionate release of some incarcerated individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic, and a decades-long class action case that has mandated the provision of constitutionally adequate mental health care in California prisons. She served as chief judge of the Eastern District of California from 2020 to 2024, steering the court through challenges created by the pandemic and one of the highest caseloads in the country.

“As a leader, Judge Mueller has an innate ability to collaborate with people, whether they be judges, lawyers, staff members, or community leaders and stakeholders,” said Chief Judge Mary H. Murguia of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. “She embodies an untethered commitment to the rule of law, to public service, and to the institution of justice, and is the ideal person to serve as director of the Bolch Judicial Institute.”

### AT HOME IN THE CLASSROOM

Mueller has extensive teaching experience and most recently created and taught a seminar on the rule of law for students at the University of California–Davis School of Law. She also has taught at McGeorge School of Law and was part of a small leadership team that delivered training for new chief judges for the Federal Judicial Center in 2024.

“In addition to being a distinguished judge, Judge Mueller has distinguished herself in the classroom for over 20

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— CHIEF JUDGE MARY MURGUIA

years,” said Marin K. Levy, professor of law and faculty director of the Bolch Judicial Institute. “We are so fortunate that she is bringing that experience to the Law School, to the benefit of the students and the faculty.”

Mueller’s many publications include a *Federal Bench and Bar Media Handbook* developed by Eastern District lawyers; a tribute to Justice Anthony M. Kennedy in the *UC Davis Law Review*; and “*Kennedy v. Bremerton: A Replay Review with Lessons for a Better Pluralism Playbook*,” her thesis for the Master of Judicial Studies program at Duke Law.

“I am thrilled that Kim has accepted the position of our next director,” said Levy, who is now an emeritus member of the Bolch Judicial Institute

Advisory Board and president of the American Law Institute. “I’ve known her for many years, as a city councilwoman, a law clerk, a lawyer, and a judicial colleague. She is a highly respected judge nationwide both for her work on the bench and for her work on civic education. She will be a wonderful director and professor of the practice.”

Mueller is an elected member of the American Law Institute, a former board member of the Federal Judicial Center, a founding board member and judicial advisor to the Justice Anthony M. Kennedy Library and Learning Center, and a member and former director of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of California Historical Society.

“I am thrilled to join the incredible team at the Bolch Judicial Institute and the Duke Law School community,” said Mueller. “The Institute’s team, with the prior inspired guidance of David Levi and Paul Grimm, has developed a portfolio of excellent programs that are delivering powerfully on the Bolch mission of bettering humankind through the promotion of the rule of law. I pledge to do all I can to ensure that, together, we maintain momentum and keep building on this terrific foundation.”

— MELINDA MYERS VAUGHN is deputy director of the Bolch Judicial Institute.

**EDITORS’ NOTE:** We were saddened to learn of the passing of Carl Bolch Jr., founder of the Bolch Judicial Institute, just before this edition of *Judicature* went to press. Visit [judicialstudies.duke.edu](http://judicialstudies.duke.edu) for a full tribute.