## NEWS RELEASE

December 1, 2021

Contact: William Cracraft mediarelease@ce9.uscourts.gov

## Gavel Passing Brings New Chief Judge to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals

**SAN FRANCISCO** –The elevation of United States Circuit Judge Mary H. Murguia of Phoenix, Arizona, to chief judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit takes place today. Judge Murguia is the first Latina to serve as chief judge of a federal appellate court. Judge Murguia is the Ninth Circuit's 12th chief judge, the first judge of Hispanic descent to serve as chief judge of the Ninth Circuit and the second woman to hold the position on the court.

Judge Murguia, 61, officially assumes her new duties as chief judge succeeding Chief Judge Emeritus Sidney R. Thomas of Billings, Montana, who has held the office since 2014.

Chief Judge Thomas steps down as chief judge after a seven-year term in which the court greatly expanded the use of technology to improve operations and make the judicial process more accessible to the public. He oversaw the improvement of overall court processing times, the onboarding of numerous new judges, the deaths of longtime colleagues, several government shutdowns and budget related crises, numerous natural disasters, the Ninth Circuit's response to COVID-19 and the effort to maintain the continuity of justice as the courts adapted to virtual proceedings. Judge Thomas will continue to serve the court as an active judge.

By law, selection of the chief judge of a federal circuit or district court is based on seniority and age. The most senior active judge under the age of 65 is eligible to serve as chief judge for a term of up to seven years.

As chief judge, Judge Murguia assumes a variety of administrative responsibilities. In addition to hearing cases, she will chair two judicial policy-making bodies, the Executive Committee of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals and the Judicial Council of the Ninth Circuit, and will represent the Ninth Circuit at biannual meetings of the Judicial Conference of the United States (JCUS), the judiciary's national governing body. The chief judge also presides when an 11-judge en banc court is convened to resolve cases posing intra-circuit legal conflicts or to consider other matters deemed to be of exceptional importance.



## Page 2 of 2

Nominated by President William J. Clinton for a new judgeship for the District of Arizona and confirmed in October 2000, Judge Murguia was elevated to the circuit court after nomination by President Barack Obama and confirmed by the Senate on Dec. 22, 2010. She maintains chambers in Phoenix but travels extensively for oral arguments and other court business. In addition to hearing cases, she has chaired the Court of Appeals Security Committee as well as the Court/Council Committee on Bankruptcy Appointments, served on the Judicial Council, Executive Committee, Space Committee Ad Hoc Committee on Conflicts Screening and the Public Information and Community Outreach Committee, and just concluded a term on the JCUS Judicial Codes of Conduct Committee.

A native of Kansas City, Kansas, Judge Murguia received bachelor's degrees in both art and science from the University of Kansas in 1982, and her Juris Doctor from the University of Kansas School of Law in 1985. Prior to coming onto the federal bench, Judge Murguia was an assistant district attorney for Wyandotte County, Kansas, from 1985 to 1990, and an assistant United States attorney for the District of Arizona, where she served as criminal deputy chief. She served in the Executive Office for U.S. Attorneys at the Department of Justice in Washington, D.C., from 1998 to 2000, and was the director of that office beginning in 1999.

The Ninth Circuit encompasses Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Washington state, the U.S. Territory of Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. It includes the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals and the federal trial and bankruptcy courts in the 15 judicial districts within the circuit. All told, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals accounts for roughly 20 percent of the entire federal appellate caseload in the nation.