

## **SARAH DOYLE- GEORGIA COURT OF APPEALS**

Key findings include:

- **Long-Serving Incumbent:** Serving on the Georgia Court of Appeals since January 1, 2009, providing 15+ years of appellate judicial experience.
- **Professional Legal Background:** Former civil litigator and education law attorney; equity partner at Holland & Knight prior to election to the bench.
- **Mainstream Legal Credentials:** AV-rated by Martindale-Hubbell during private practice; career rooted in large firm and institutional client representation.
- **Low-Profile Political History:** Limited federal political activity; no evidence of significant campaign bundling, ideological activism, or overt partisan organizing.
- **Minor Republican-Aligned Contribution:** \$50 donation to WinRed in 2020 while serving as a judge; represents minimal dollar amount but reflects at least some Republican-aligned participation.
- **Corporate PAC Giving During Private Practice:** Contributions to Holland & Knight's PAC consistent with standard large-firm professional engagement; not inherently ideological.

The Georgia Court of Appeals is the intermediate appellate court for Georgia and hears most appeals that are not reserved to the Supreme Court of Georgia. The court has 15 judges who sit in five divisions of three judges each (with assignments made/changed pursuant to internal rules and statute) [[Georgia AOC](#), accessed, 2/18/2026].

Georgia's intermediate appellate judges are chosen through statewide, nonpartisan elections at the general primary in even-numbered years, with terms structured on a six-year cycle under state law [[Justia](#), accessed, 2/18/2026]. For the 2026 cycle, the Georgia Secretary of State has published a list of "Judges – Court of Appeals" offices appearing on the ballot in 2026 that includes "Sara Doyle," with a term end date shown as 12/31/2026 [[Georgia Secretary of State](#), accessed, 2/19/2026].

Demographically and politically, Georgia is a large and fast-growing state whose population is estimated by the U.S. Census Bureau at ~11.3M (July 1, 2025) and ~11.18M (July 1, 2024), with substantial metropolitan concentration and continued growth that has reshaped electoral and civic institutions [[United States Census](#), accessed, 2/19/2026]. The court's statewide jurisdiction means judges campaign (and are evaluated by voters) in a context that includes: (a) a competitive statewide political environment; (b) intense scrutiny around election rules and election litigation; and (c) high salience of criminal justice, protest-related prosecutions, and separation-of-powers disputes [[Georgia Court of Appeals](#), 12/19/2024].

### **BACKGROUND**

**1990: Doyle Earned Her Undergraduate Business Degree From The University Of Florida.** "Born in Dallas, Texas, Judge Doyle lived in several states before entering the University of Florida where she graduated in 1990 with a Bachelors degree in Business Administration." [[State Bar of Georgia](#), accessed, 2/24/2025]

**1994: Doyle Earned Her J.D From Mercer University’s Walter F. George School Of Law.** “In 1994, she graduated *cum laude* from Mercer University’s Walter F. George School of Law where she was a member of the Mercer Law Review.” [[State Bar of Georgia](#), accessed, 2/24/2025]

**1994: Doyle Was Admitted To The Georgia State Bar.** “Judge Doyle was admitted to the Georgia Bar in June 1994 and began her legal career as a civil litigator with Wilson, Strickland & Benson, P.C. Just prior to taking office, she was an equity partner with the national law firm of Holland & Knight, LLP where she practiced law with a focus on education issues since August 2000.” [[State Bar of Georgia](#), accessed, 2/24/2025]

**1994-2000: Doyle Worked As Civil Trial Attorney At Wilson, Strickland & Benson.** “Judge Doyle was admitted to the Georgia Bar in June 1994 and began her legal career as a civil litigator with Wilson, Strickland & Benson, P.C. Just prior to taking office, she was an equity partner with the national law firm of Holland & Knight, LLP where she practiced law with a focus on education issues since August 2000.” [[State Bar of Georgia](#), accessed, 2/24/2025]

**2000-2009: Doyle Worked As An Education Law And Government Litigation Attorney At Holland & Knight LLP.** “Judge Doyle was admitted to the Georgia Bar in June 1994 and began her legal career as a civil litigator with Wilson, Strickland & Benson, P.C. Just prior to taking office, she was an equity partner with the national law firm of Holland & Knight, LLP where she practiced law with a focus on education issues since August 2000.” [[State Bar of Georgia](#), accessed, 2/24/2025]

**Doyle Received An AV Rating From Martindale-Hubbell.** “As a practicing attorney, Judge Doyle received an A.V. peer-reviewed rating from Martindale Hubbell.” [[State Bar of Georgia](#), accessed, 2/24/2025]

**Doyle Was “Selected As A Georgia Super Lawyer From 2004-2008.”** “She was selected as a Georgia Super Lawyer from 2004 to 2008, and in 2006 and 2008, was named one of the top 50 female attorneys in Georgia.” [[State Bar of Georgia](#), accessed, 2/24/2025]

**Doyle Was Named “Top 50 Female Attorneys In Georgia” In 2006 and 2008.** “She was selected as a Georgia Super Lawyer from 2004 to 2008, and in 2006 and 2008, was named one of the top 50 female attorneys in Georgia.” [[State Bar of Georgia](#), accessed, 2/24/2025]

### **Doyle Was Listed In Various Recognitions.**

As a practicing attorney, Judge Doyle received an A.V. peer-reviewed rating from Martindale Hubbell. She was selected as a Georgia Super Lawyer from 2004 to 2008, and in 2006 and 2008, was named one of the top 50 female attorneys in Georgia. She has also been recognized as one of Georgia’s legal elite by Georgia Trend Magazine. Additional honors include:

- Atlanta Bar Association Professionalism Award, 2013
- University of Florida Women’s Inaugural Leadership, 2011
- Honorary Member, Phi Alpha Delta Law Fraternity, 2009
- ABA Tort Trial and Insurance Practice Section Leadership Academy, 2006 to 2007
- Atlanta Regional Commission Leadership Institute, 2004
- Leadership Midtown, 1999

[[State Bar of Georgia](#), accessed, 2/24/2025]

**Doyle’s Professional Bio Lists Memberships With State Bar Of Georgia, American Bar Association, Atlanta Bar Association, Gate City Bar Association, And Georgia Association Of Black Women Attorneys.** “She is an active member of the State Bar of Georgia, the Judicial Council of Georgia, the American Bar Association, the Atlanta Bar Association, the National Association of

Women Judges, the Georgia Association of Women Lawyers (GAWL), the Gate City Bar Association, the Georgia Association of Black Women Attorneys (GABWA), and the Lawyers Club of Atlanta, where she held the position of President in 2012-2013 and was a member of the club’s executive committee from 2003 to July, 2013.” [[State Bar of Georgia](#), accessed, 2/24/2025]

**2015-2020: Doyle Served On Mercer University’s Board Of Trustees.**

**Mercer University**

- Board of Trustees, 2015 to 2020
- Search Committee for Dean of Walter F. George School of Law, 2017
- Board of Visitors, Walter F. George School of Law, 2012 to 2015

[[State Bar of Georgia](#), accesses, 2/24/2025]

*Campaign and political indicators*

**January 2026: The Georgia Secretary Of State Listed “Sara Doyle” Among Court Of Appeals Judgeships Appearing On The 2026 Ballot.**

Six Year Term Offices	
Office	Term Ends
United States Senator	01/03/2027
Judges – Supreme Court 1. Sarah Warren 2. Charlie Bethel 3. Benjamin Land	12/31/2026
Judges – Court of Appeals 1. Sara Doyle 2. E. Trenton Brown III 3. Elizabeth Gobeil 4. J. Wade Padgett 5. David Markle	

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[[Georgia Secretary of State](#), accessed, 2/19/2026]

**December 2008: Doyle Was Elected To Serve On The Georgia Court Of Appeals.** “Presiding Judge Sara L. Doyle was elected to the Georgia Court of Appeals in December, 2008 and took office on January 1, 2009. In 2014 and 2020, she was elected to her second and third six- year term. From July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2017, Judge Doyle was the Court’s Chief Judge where she was instrumental in implementing a historic jurisdiction shift of cases from the Supreme Court and the addition of a new fifth division adding three more judges to the Court, and funding” [[State Bar of Georgia](#), accessed, 2/24/2025]

**2008: Doyle Defeated Attorney Mike Sheffeild 51.8% To 48.2%.**

**Appeals Court Judge, Ruffin**  
100% of precincts reporting

Candidates	Party	Votes	% of Votes
Sara Doyle	Non-Partisan	888,191	51.8%
Mike Sheffield	Non-Partisan	827,825	48.2%
<b>Totals</b>		<b>1,716,016</b>	

[County Results](#)

[[Georgia Secretary of State](#), 12/2/2008]

**Doyle Was Re-Elected In 2014 And 2020 Running Unopposed.** “Presiding Judge Sara L. Doyle was elected to the Georgia Court of Appeals in December, 2008 and took office on January 1, 2009. In 2014 and 2020, she was elected to her second and third six- year term. From July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2017, Judge Doyle was the Court’s Chief Judge where she was instrumental in implementing a historic jurisdiction shift of cases from the Supreme Court and the addition of a new fifth division adding three more judges to the Court, and funding” [[State Bar of Georgia](#), accessed, 2/24/2025][[Georgia Election Results](#), accessed, 2/23/2026]

**2019:Doyle Announced She Was Running For An Open Seat On The State Supreme Court.**

“Justice Robert Benham (left) and Judge Sara Doyle. Georgia Justice Robert Benham said for the first time officially Friday that he will retire at the end of his current term, leaving his seat open in 2020. Also Friday, Georgia Court of Appeals Judge Sara Doyle said she plans to run for the job. ‘This is an opportunity that doesn’t come around very often—for there to be an open seat,’ Doyle told the Daily Report Friday.” [[Yahoo Finance](#), 4/25/2019]

**After Then-Justice Robert Benham Moved Up His Retirement To March 1, The Governor’s Authority To Fill The Vacancy Postponed The Contest For That Seat To A Later Cycle.** “State’s highest court, announced Thursday he will step down from the bench on March 1. Benham, 73, had been expected to retire when his current six-year term ends on Dec. 31, 2020. But by leaving more than nine months earlier, Benham gives Gov. Brian Kemp the chance to appoint his successor. It also upends an ongoing race with four contenders hoping to succeed Benham. The nonpartisan race had been scheduled to be held in May, but that won’t happen now. Under state law, the person Kemp appoints to succeed Benham will not have to run for election until 2022. Court of Appeals Judge Sara Doyle was the first to announce she was running for what was believed to be Benham’s upcoming open seat. Former U.S. Rep. John Barrow then joined the race, followed by former state lawmaker Beth Beskin and Superior Court Judge Horace Johnson, who presides over Newton and Walton counties. On Thursday, Doyle said she will be among those applying to the state Judicial Nominating Commission to get Benham’s seat in March. She also said that, if necessary, she will qualify for her Court of Appeals seat in March and run as an incumbent in hopes of retaining her judgeship. She’d face a crowded field because eight candidates have already announced plans to run for what they’d thought would be Doyle’s open seat.” [[AJC](#), 5/3/2019]

**January 2020: Doyle Dropped From The Supreme Court Race And Instead “Qualified To Run To Retain Her Seat On The Court Of Appeals Of Georgia.”**



Judge Sara Doyle for Court of Appeals

January 10, 2020 · 🌐



Hello all. As you hopefully know due to the early retirement of Justice Robert Benham, I am no longer running for an open seat on the Supreme Court but instead will qualify to run to retain my seat on the Court of Appeals of Georgia. We are getting this page modified to reflect the Court of Appeals campaign, so in the meantime, do not forget to vote for me on May 19, 2020!

👍 8

👍 Like

💬 Comment

➦ Share

[Facebook, 1/10/2020]

## **VULNERABILITIES & ADVERSE FINDINGS OF NOTE**

### *Political Contributions*

**2003-2008: While A Partner At Holland & Knight LLP, Made A Series Of Contributions Totaling \$650 To The Holland And Knight Committee For Effective Government.** [[Fec](#), accessed, 2/23/2026]

**2019: Doyle Made A \$7,000 Self Contribution.** [[Georgia Campaign Finance](#), accessed, 2/23/2026]

**November 2020: Doyle Contributed \$50 To Winred.** [[Fec](#), accessed, 2/23/2026]

### *Social Media Ethics Controversy (AJC Reporting)*

**2019: While Serving On The Georgia Court Of Appeals And Running For A Seat On The Georgia Supreme Court, Judge Doyle Posted On Facebook That She Went “To Decatur To Support Sherry Boston,” Referencing A Re-Election Campaign Event For DeKalb County District Attorney Sherry Boston.** “A judge running for a seat on the Georgia Supreme Court may have inadvertently run afoul of judicial ethics rules by expressing support for DeKalb County’s district attorney in a social media post. It happened when Judge Sara Doyle, a member of the Georgia Court of Appeals, described on Facebook a busy day on May 9 that began with dropping off her daughter at the school bus stop, then driving to Columbus for a Law Day function. After that, Doyle said, she went ‘to Decatur to support Sherry Boston.’” [[AJC](#), 5/23/2019]

**Georgia’s Judicial Canons Prohibit Judges From Publicly Endorsing Candidates For Public Office And Require Judges To Act At All Times In A Manner That Promotes Public Confidence In Judicial Impartiality.** “The Decatur stop was a reelection campaign event for District Attorney Sherry Boston, and Doyle also posted on her Facebook page a photo of one of Boston’s campaign posters. Georgia’s canons of conduct say judges cannot endorse a candidate running for public office. They also say judges should act at all times in a manner that promotes public confidence in the impartiality of the judiciary. As an appeals court judge, Doyle hears criminal cases from DeKalb. In an interview, Doyle said she was aware that judges cannot endorse candidates for public office. For this reason, she quickly amended her post when a fellow appeals court judge raised concerns about it. “I didn’t think about the word ‘support’ when I did it,” Doyle said. ‘I inadvertently used that word.’[...]“For example, judges cannot publicly endorse a candidate but they are allowed to attend campaign events for candidates. They can even give campaign contributions to candidates. Doyle said she substituted ‘support Sherry Boston’ with ‘see Sherry Boston’ to avoid any appearance of an official endorsement.

She also removed the photo of Boston's reelection poster after being asked about it by an Atlanta Journal-Constitution reporter. Marietta lawyer Robert Ingram, who once chaired Georgia's judicial watchdog commission, declined to comment on Doyle's post. But he said there's a good reason why state ethics rules prohibit judges and judicial candidates from endorsing someone running for public office. 'The rules are there not to infringe upon a judge's right to engage in the political process, but to avoid the appearance it creates,' Ingram said. 'That's because if a judge is endorsing a political candidate, and you have litigants coming before the judge and witnesses appearing in a case who supported the other candidate, it creates an impression that is not good for the judiciary.'" [AJC, 5/23/2019]

**Doyle Acknowledged She Was Aware Of The Judicial Prohibition On Endorsing Candidates But Said She "Inadvertently Used" The Word "Support."** "The Decatur stop was a reelection campaign event for District Attorney Sherry Boston, and Doyle also posted on her Facebook page a photo of one of Boston's campaign posters. Georgia's canons of conduct say judges cannot endorse a candidate running for public office. They also say judges should act at all times in a manner that promotes public confidence in the impartiality of the judiciary. As an appeals court judge, Doyle hears criminal cases from DeKalb. In an interview, Doyle said she was aware that judges cannot endorse candidates for public office. For this reason, she quickly amended her post when a fellow appeals court judge raised concerns about it. "I didn't think about the word 'support' when I did it,' Doyle said. 'I inadvertently used that word.'" [AJC, 5/23/2019]

**Doyle Amended The Facebook Post, Replacing The Phrase "Support Sherry Boston" With "See Sherry Boston."** "For example, judges cannot publicly endorse a candidate but they are allowed to attend campaign events for candidates. They can even give campaign contributions to candidates. Doyle said she substituted 'support Sherry Boston' with 'see Sherry Boston' to avoid any appearance of an official endorsement. She also removed the photo of Boston's reelection poster after being asked about it by an Atlanta Journal-Constitution reporter. Marietta lawyer Robert Ingram, who once chaired Georgia's judicial watchdog commission, declined to comment on Doyle's post. But he said there's a good reason why state ethics rules prohibit judges and judicial candidates from endorsing someone running for public office. 'The rules are there not to infringe upon a judge's right to engage in the political process, but to avoid the appearance it creates,' Ingram said. 'That's because if a judge is endorsing a political candidate, and you have litigants coming before the judge and witnesses appearing in a case who supported the other candidate, it creates an impression that is not good for the judiciary.'" [AJC, 5/23/2019]

## **SOCIAL MEDIA LINKS**

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