



Hon. M. Bruce Smith, Ret.



Results Beyond DisputeSM

Following 18 years as a civil litigator and 25 years as a judge, Justice Smith brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to his role as a neutral at Judicate West. Justice Smith's distinguished legal career spans more than four decades. During his more than 10 years on the California Fifth District Court of Appeal, he published approximately 30 published opinions and handled complex matters involving antitrust, employment, real estate, insurance bad faith, and medical malpractice. Prior to his appellate appointment, he served on the Fresno County Superior Court for 14 years, where he held a variety of leadership roles, including Presiding Judge and Supervising Judge of the Unlimited Civil Division. Over the course of his judicial tenure, he presided over thousands of cases across every area of law. His career began in public service as a trial deputy with the Fresno County District Attorney's Office, followed by 12 years in private practice handling a broad spectrum of civil litigation. Justice Smith approaches every dispute with the goal of guiding parties toward a fair and thoughtful resolution. He sees his role as a neutral not just as a facilitator of settlement, but as a steward of meaningful negotiation. His deep understanding of the litigation and appellate processes, combined with his calm judicial temperament and unwavering preparation, make him particularly well suited for mediation, arbitration, and appellate neutral evaluations. Justice Smith is widely regarded in the legal community for his integrity, intelligence, and dedication.

LEGAL CAREER & PRIOR EXPERIENCE

- Full-time Neutral, Judicate West (2025-Present)
- Associate Justice, California Court of Appeal 5th District (2014-2025); Published approximately 30 opinions
- Judge, Fresno County Superior Court (2000-2014); Supervising Judge, Unlimited Civil (2012-2014); Trial Judge, Unlimited Civil (2011-2012); Presiding Judge (2009-2010); Assistant Presiding Judge (2007-2008); Trial Judge, Unlimited Civil (2004-2006); Presiding Judge, Juvenile Delinquency Division (2001-2004); Trial Judge, Juvenile Delinquency (2000-2001)
- Partner, Stammer McKnight Barnum & Bailey (1988-2000); Handled a variety of cases including but not limited to wrongful death, medical malpractice, and wrongful termination
- Trial Deputy, Fresno County District Attorney's Office (1983-1988); Assigned to felony trial team and handled more than 30 felony jury trials

EDUCATION & PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

- J.D., University of California, San Francisco/Previously Hastings College of the Law (1981)
- B.A., University of California, Santa Barbara (1978)
- Mediating the Litigated Case, Straus Institute for Dispute Resolution at Pepperdine (2025)
- Served on numerous court committees such as the Appellate Practice Curriculum Committee (2018-2025) and the Appellate Advisory Committee to the California Judicial Council (2015-2025)
- California Association of Black Lawyers (CABL) (2010-Present)
- California Judges Association, Member (2000-Present)

PRACTICE AREAS

Appellate Issues; Business Contractual; Civil Rights; Employment; Insurance; Medical Malpractice; Real Estate; Personal Injury

ACHIEVEMENTS & AWARDS

- Judicial Award of Excellence - California Association of Black Lawyers (CABL) (2021)
- Founders Day Award - Hugh Goodwin Bar Association (2015)
- Thinking Out of the Box Award - Fresno County Interagency Council (2004)

HOBBIES & INTERESTS

Justice Smith enjoys spending quality time with his family and their dog, Augie, and loves traveling the world with his wife, Nancy. His other interests include golf, reading and photography.

LOCATIONS

Orange County, All of California