

Chief Justice (ret.) Dori Contreras – short bio

After serving twenty-two years on the 13th Court of Appeals, Chief Justice Dori Contreras retired on December 31, 2024. She was first elected as a Justice to the 13th Court of Appeals in 2002 and was re-elected in 2008 and 2014. She was elected chief justice in 2018 and served in the position through 2024. It was her honor to be the first woman Chief Justice of the 13th Court of Appeals and, at the time of her election, only the second Latina chief justice to serve statewide.

Contreras was raised as the youngest of four children. Her parents were first generation Mexican American. Both sets of grandparents immigrated from Mexico in the early 1900's. Contreras was often told by her father, a hard-working man who proudly had a 35-year career with the Texas Department of Highways and Public Transportation, that his one regret in life was not obtaining a college education. Taking this to heart, after graduating from high school, Contreras attended the University of Texas at Austin from which she received a Bachelor of Business Administration in Accounting in December of 1980. She was the first in her family to graduate from college. Contreras moved to Houston, Texas and worked as an accountant for several years before applying to law school. In 1987, as a wife and mother of two daughters, she began law school in the night program at the University of Houston Law Center and continued working full-time. After a year and one-half, she transferred to the full-time program. She was admitted to the Bar in November of 1990.

Throughout her career, Contreras has been very active in professional and community organizations which has resulted in several special recognitions:

- 2025, Lifetime Achievement Award, Judicial Section of the State Bar of Texas
- 2025, Lifetime Achievement Award, Hidalgo County Bar Association
- 2025, Lawyer of the Year, Coastal Bend Women Lawyers Association
- 2024, Women in History Month award, Vanguard Academy Charter School,
- 2023, Portrait hung on Hispanic Heritage Classroom Wall of Honor at University of Houston Law Center;
- 2023, Sarah T. Hughes Women Lawyers of Achievement Award, Women and the Law Section of the State Bar of Texas
- 2021, Hispanic Women Making History Award, Hispanic Women's Network Rio Grande Valley Chapter;
- 2019, Woman of Distinction, Texas Association of Mexican American Chambers of Commerce;
- 2019, Latina Trailblazer, Hispanic Women's Network of Texas;
- 2019, President's Award, NAACP Corpus Christi Chapter;
- 2016, Judge of the Year, Hispanic Issues Section of the State Bar of Texas;
- 2014, Woman of Distinction, Rio Grande Valley Hispanic Chamber of Commerce;
- 2014, Good Samaritan Award, Good Samaritan Community Services-RGV, a non-profit organization that provided an after-school and summer program for at-risk youth in the Pharr community.