Chief Justice Paul Newby Appoints Melissa Owens Lassiter as Chief Administrative Law Judge of the North Carolina Office of Administrative Hearings

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Chief Justice Paul Newby Appoints Melissa Owens Lassiter as Chief Administrative Law Judge of the North Carolina Office of Administrative Hearings

RALEIGH — Supreme Court of North Carolina Chief Justice Paul Newby has announced the appointment of Administrative Law Judge Melissa Owens Lassiter as the next Chief Administrative Law Judge of the North Carolina Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH). Judge Lassiter will assume her new role on July 1, 2025, succeeding Dr. Donald R. van der Vaart, who has served in that position since 2021.

Judge Lassiter brings over 25 years of distinguished service as an Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) at OAH, where she has presided over hundreds of contested case hearings and authored final and proposed decisions across a wide range of subject areas, including occupational licensing, health care, special education, and state employee appeals. Her leadership experience within the Office includes mentoring legal staff, drafting and revising administrative rules, and contributing to regulatory improvements across divisions.

"Judge Lassiter is a seasoned and highly respected ALJ who brings a wealth of institutional knowledge, legal acumen, and a deep commitment to fairness and accountability," said Chief Justice Paul Newby. "Her long-standing service to the people of North Carolina and her thoughtful approach to the law make her exceptionally qualified to lead the Office of Administrative Hearings."

Prior to her appointment as an ALJ in 1998, Lassiter served as Assistant Legal Counsel to the North Carolina Alcoholic Beverage Control Commission, where she prosecuted permit violations and advised the Commission on licensing matters.

"It is an honor to be appointed Chief Administrative Law Judge, and I am deeply grateful for the confidence Chief Justice Newby has placed in me," said Lassiter. "I look forward to continuing the Office's tradition of impartiality and excellence, and in supporting the important work of our administrative judges across the state."

Judge Lassiter holds a law degree from Campbell University and has dedicated her career to upholding the principles of due process and administrative fairness in North Carolina's quasi-judicial system.

The Office of Administrative Hearings is an independent agency within the executive branch that provides a neutral forum for resolving disputes between citizens and state agencies. The Chief Administrative Law Judge oversees the agency's judicial and administrative functions, ensuring efficiency, transparency, and adherence to the North Carolina Administrative Procedure Act.

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About North Carolina Judicial Branch
The North Carolina Judicial Branch is an equal and distinctively separate branch and core function of government. The 7,600 Judicial Branch employees statewide administer justice in courthouses in North Carolina's 100 counties. The Judicial Branch budget for FY 2023–24 was $750.7M, 90.9% of which is used to pay salaries and 9.1% is used for operations. The Judicial Branch receives 2.53% of the overall State budget.

About North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts
The North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts (NCAOC) is the administrative agency for the North Carolina Judicial Branch, providing administrative services to help the North Carolina court system operate more efficiently and effectively, taking into account each courthouse's diverse needs, caseloads, and available resources.

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