

Hon. Rita Noel has held many roles in Grayson County prior to her appointment as Justice of the Peace for Precinct 4. Judge Noel worked for the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles, the county health department, and most recently, the county sheriff's office as a Deputy Sheriff. Before that, she attended Grayson College in the 1980s where she met her husband, David.

It was in her role in the sheriff's office that she became interested in working as a Justice of the Peace.

"I worked with the JPs anyway, I was the interpreter for them. I handled the money from the jail, so . . . if we had any problems or anything, we would contact them," Judge Noel said. "I kind of helped them out that way and I knew them personally and so they got me started."



Judge Noel with JCMH staff at Grayson County SIM Mapping Workshop

When Judge Larry Ashley retired, Judge Noel was appointed to take his place on October 1, 2014. She was subsequently elected and is currently serving her second term. Even though she enjoyed the work, Judge Noel was wary of the political aspect of running for office.

"I didn't really want to run, I was kind of scared because I wasn't a politician," Judge Noel said. "When I finally got into it, in fact, I almost quit in the middle of it because I was like, 'I don't want to do this.' But I did it and I got elected."

Many of the cases Judge Noel hears concern truancy, debt claims, small claims, or evictions. However, her favorite part of the job is working with schools and kids. When youth are uninterested in school, she helps them realize the importance of education and speaks to their interests.

"A lot of them are gamers, and I told them that Austin College actually has a class that you can take that helps you invent your own [game]," Judge Noel said. "They just light up, like, 'What? You can actually go to college and there's actually a class that I can go to and programs?'" I said 'Yeah!'"



Judge Noel participating in 2022 Grayson County SIM Mapping Workshop

Another big part of Judge Noel's job is handling cases that involve mental illness. She signs emergency detention orders, oftentimes at the request of a family member who is concerned about their loved one. Noel also responds to calls to pronounce deaths, including deaths by suicide.

"Just two weeks ago, one of our JPs had five [deaths by] suicide in one week. In seven days, he had five [deaths by] suicide, and that's hard," Judge Noel said. "It's sad because you try everything you can to help them."

That is one reason Judge Noel encouraged 59th District Court Judge Larry Phillips to apply for the JCMH's [Community Diversion Coordinator Pilot Program](#) grant. The grant allowed the county to hire Elizabeth Groves, who works to help divert defendants with mental illness, who are charged with nonviolent misdemeanor offenses, out of the criminal justice system.

"When we got the grant, [Judge Phillips] called me and I cried. Finally, we can help Grayson County," Judge Noel said.

Noel is on the JCMH Collaborative Council, which she joined at the suggestion of Commissioner & Chief Attorney of the Collin County Mental Health Managed Counsel Program Alyse Ferguson after attending a mental health conference in Collin County. She has found the [Texas Mental Health and Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Law Bench Book](#) and its [juvenile counterpart](#) particularly useful, and said she keeps copies in the back of her car to easily transport them to attorneys who call her to ask for a copy.



*Judge Noel and JCMH Executive Director
Kristi Taylor in Denison, TX*

In addition to resources, Judge Noel appreciates the community that the JCMH creates.

“I had a young man from one of the local schools in my precinct. He [died by] suicide [at] 16 years old. So, I immediately . . . sent out an email to the Judicial Commission and said, ‘Does anybody have any resources for the school? I have nothing. What can you help me with?’” Judge Noel said. “And I’m telling you, I got more resources, and I was on the phone until 9:30 at night to make sure that we had enough resources for them . . . There were some counselors that had been contacted that were ready to help.”

At the end of 2022, Judge Noel will leave her position as a JP. She isn’t yet sure what her future holds, but she wants to keep working in the field of mental health and helping the schools.

Outside of her role serving Grayson County, she enjoys time with her family – husband David, sons Nicholas and Sean, daughter-in-law Tricia, and two grandkids. She loves to sew and do crafts, float on the river, and go hunting or fishing.