



**Robert L. Wilkins**  
**Nominee for the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit**

On June 4, 2013, President Obama nominated Robert L. Wilkins to the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. Judge Wilkins currently serves as a district judge for the United States District Court for the District of Columbia, a position he has held since 2011. Upon his nomination, President Obama said that “throughout his career, Robert has distinguished himself as a principled attorney of the utmost integrity.”<sup>1</sup>

**Biography**

Robert L. Wilkins was born in Muncie, Indiana in 1963. He received his B.S., *cum laude*, from the Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology in 1986 and his J.D. in 1989 from Harvard Law School, where he was an Executive Editor of the Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review. After graduating, Wilkins clerked for Judge Earl Gilliam of the United States District Court for the Southern District of California. Following his clerkship, he returned to Indiana to practice law briefly before joining the Public Defender Service in Washington, D.C. as a staff attorney in 1990. In 1995, he was named chief of special litigation, a position he held until 2000, when he began splitting his time between the Public Defender Service and Curry & Wilbourn. He then joined Venable LLP in 2002 as a partner. Wilkins was unanimously confirmed by the Senate as a district judge in 2011.

**Legal Experience**

As an attorney with the Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia, the bulk of Wilkins’s practice was devoted to representing indigent clients. He began by serving as counsel for interlocutory appeals and became lead counsel on juvenile matters. Later, he served as lead trial counsel for serious offenses such as murder and armed robbery. During his tenure with PDS, Wilkins tried hundreds of cases before the Superior Court of the District of Columbia. He also argued before the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals.

In addition to his work as an advocate, Wilkins has also fought for Americans’ civil rights as a victim himself of racial profiling by law enforcement. As he returned from his grandfather’s funeral in Chicago, Wilkins and his family were stopped and subjected to a drug-sniffing dog search by the Maryland State Police. He was the lead plaintiff and co-counsel in *Wilkins, et al. v. State of Maryland*, which revealed explicitly discriminatory police policies and led to a successful settlement requiring statistical tracking of police stops, improved training of officers, and new police policies to combat racial discrimination.

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<sup>1</sup> The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, Remarks by the President on the Nominations to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, (June 4, 2013), available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/06/04/remarks-president-nominations-us-court-appeals-district-columbia-circuit>.

While at Venable, Wilkins's practice largely consisted of white collar criminal defense, intellectual property litigation, and complex commercial litigation. In this capacity, he represented companies in patent and other disputes both as plaintiffs and as defendants. Wilkins maintained an active *pro bono* practice at Venable, devoting over 1,000 hours to clients in civil rights, child custody, asylum, social security benefits, and other cases.

Since he began his service as a District Judge, Wilkins has presided over hundreds of civil and criminal cases. Because of the nature of the D.C. District Court, Judge Wilkins has heard cases that implicate the federal government and national policy, including cases touching on matters of administrative, environmental, securities, campaign finance, and election law. Judge Wilkins sat on a three-judge panel in *McCutcheon v. Federal Election Commission*,<sup>2</sup> joining in an opinion written by conservative D.C. Circuit Judge Janice Rogers Brown that dismissed a challenge to limits on aggregate campaign contributions. *McCutcheon* is currently pending before the U.S. Supreme Court. He also sat on a three-judge panel in *Texas v. Holder*, which rejected Texas' proposed voter ID law under Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act.<sup>3</sup>

The American Bar Association gave Judge Wilkins its highest rating of unanimously well qualified to serve as a federal appellate judge.

### **Professional and Community Activities**

In addition to his experience practicing law, Judge Wilkins has been a community and national leader on a number of significant legal policy matters. While at PDS, he served on the District of Columbia Truth in Sentencing Commission and the Advisory Committee on Sentencing, both of which were formed to make recommendations to the D.C. City Council. Judge Wilkins helped draft bipartisan legislation establishing the National Museum of African American History and Culture. He was appointed by the Senate to serve on the Museum's Presidential Commission, and played an integral role in bringing the Museum to the National Mall. Throughout his career Judge Wilkins, a recognized expert in racial discrimination and sentencing laws, has spoken and testified many times before Congress and a number of other institutions and organizations.

Wilkins was admitted to the Massachusetts Bar in 1990 and the District of Columbia Bar in 1991. He is currently admitted to practice before the Supreme Court of the United States, the United States Courts of Appeals for the District of Columbia, Federal, and Second Circuits, and the United States District Courts for the Eastern District of Wisconsin, District of Maryland, and the District of Columbia.

Wilkins has been the Court Liaison of the Standing Committee on *Pro Bono* Legal Services of the Judicial Conference of the District of Columbia Circuit since 2011. He is a member of the American Bar Association, the National Bar Association, and numerous sentencing and juvenile justice related associations. He was named *Pro Bono* Attorney of the Year in 2001 by the ACLU of Maryland, one of the 40 most successful litigators under 40 by the National Law Journal, and one of the 90 Greatest Washington Lawyers of the Last 30 Years in 2008 by Legal Times.

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<sup>2</sup> *McCutcheon v. Federal Election Comm'n*, 2012 WL 4466482 (D.D.C. Sept. 28, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> *Texas v. Holder*, 888 F. Supp. 2d 113 (D.D.C. 2012).