



To set a case with  
Hon. Donald G. Wilkerson  
(Ret.),  
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[www.jamsadr.com/wilkerson](http://www.jamsadr.com/wilkerson)



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### Why did you choose to join JAMS after stepping down from the bench?

I chose to join JAMS because of the stellar reputation it has in the legal community. Additionally, I knew the quality of the people with whom I had served on the bench who joined JAMS as neutrals. These were jurists for whom I have great respect. The quality of the neutrals speaks volumes about JAMS as an organization.

### Tell us about your experience in public service.

I have been in public service most of my adult life. I was a public school teacher and athletic coach for 14 years. I taught every level between grades 4 and 12. I was an athletic coach of boys' and girls' sports for years. I was an assistant United States attorney for 10 years and a United States magistrate judge for 15 years. With the exception of two years of private practice as an attorney, my entire adult career has been in public service.

### What are some of the highlights of your career to date, whether in ADR or litigation?

I have tried lawsuits and I have taught trial skills at Washington University School of Law for more than 20 years. I have argued multiple cases before the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals, once *en banc*. I have mediated more than a thousand lawsuits, but the highlight of my career was being able to use my role as a lawyer or judge to help people reach a fair outcome. I believe that is as good as it gets—not to determine winners or losers, but to reach a fair outcome.

### Which practice areas are you particularly interested in developing at JAMS?

I, like most jurists in federal courts, have the most experience in cases involving employment issues, negligence and contractual disputes. I also have considerable experience in insurance disputes, FELA and Jones Act cases. I consider myself a generalist with experience in a myriad of areas.

### What would fellow attorneys and former clients say about your skills and abilities?

I would hope that my fellow attorneys and clients would say that I am thorough. I hope they would describe me as someone who leaves no stone unturned. I would hope that the litigants who appeared before me would say that I gave them a fair and impartial hearing even if they disagreed with the result.

### What achievement are you most proud of?

I was recently inducted into the Saint Louis University School of Law Order of the Fleur De Lis Hall of Fame. The fact that folks at my alma mater thought that my legal career warranted that honor is humbling, to say the least. Many of my former colleagues came out and helped me celebrate the honor. I am not big on honors, but it was a humbling experience because of the gratitude and admiration I have for that law school.

### **Why is diversity and inclusion in the ADR field so important to you?**

Diversity is key to the success of any process or organization. It is amazing that in 2020 we would still have to make that statement. The key ingredient of our legal system, including ADR, is people believing that they will be treated fairly. When participants do not see a representative cross-section of groups participating in the legal process, it gives them reason to believe that the entire process is unfair. I believe that in order for our system to survive, all groups must be included at every step of the process.

### **Fun Facts about Judge Wilkerson**

#### **What do you like to do when you're not working?**

I love to read and I enjoy spending time with my family. I have a new great-granddaughter, and I love to show people pictures of her. Additionally, I love to travel, and my hope is that the need for COVID-related restrictions will ease sometime soon.

#### **You used to be a teacher. Has a student of yours ever appeared before you in court?**

I have had students appear before me as attorneys. Most important, on multiple occasions, I have had the honor of performing marriage ceremonies for former students. I was honored that they thought enough of me to include me in such a monumental event in their lives.

#### **If you could time travel, where would you go?**

Well, I definitely wouldn't go back in time. We know how that turned out. I think my curiosity would take me forward about 100 years. I would like to know how our society is doing, how my family is doing. I would like to know if society improved, declined or stayed the same. My hope would be that society had changed for the better.

#### **What is your favorite family tradition?**

My favorite family tradition is Thanksgiving dinner. I have hosted my family at my house for the past 25 years, and I look forward to seeing everyone. It is a great time to catch up and enjoy your loved ones. Nothing is better than creating family memories.

### **If you could have dinner with anyone from history, who would it be?**

I would like to have dinner with [former Major League Baseball player] Curt Flood. I grew up watching him, from the cheap seats at Sportsman's Park, play center field for the St. Louis Cardinals. I wanted to be him, but I was too slow, couldn't throw and couldn't hit a curve ball. I would like to know, considering how much he sacrificed, if he thought challenging baseball's reserve clause was worth it.

### **What is your personal motto?**

Live your life so that when you are gone, people will say the world is better because you were in it.

### **What is the best piece of advice you have received?**

The best piece of advice I have received I got in Sunday school: Treat others the way you wish to be treated. That advice, I am confident, will not betray you.

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