

2026 FPD-FBA FALL SEMINAR AGENDA

Course Title: Annual Fort Worth Federal Practice Seminar
Course Number: 174337951
Date: Thursday, November 5, 2026
Address: Eldon B. Mahon U.S. Courthouse
Room 316 – Jury Assembly Room
501 W. Tenth Street
Fort Worth, TX 76102
Presented by: The Office of the Federal Public Defender (N.D. Tex.)
The Federal Bar Association, Fort Worth Chapter

Overview

This year's joint FPD-FBA annual seminar will provide attendees with a series of practical lessons geared toward frequently recurring issues here in the Fort Worth division of the Northern District of Texas. For instance, will I get sanctioned for using generative AI? Also, why is everyone so concerned about the Commerce Clause these days? And how will recent opinions from the Fifth Circuit and Supreme Court affect our daily practice? We will cover all that and more.

The seminar will take place in the Jury Assembly Room on the third floor at the Eldon B. Mahon U.S. Courthouse in downtown Fort Worth. The courthouse is located at 501 W. Tenth Street. The public entrance to the courthouse is near the corner of W. Tenth Street and Lamar Street across from St. Andrew's Anglican Church. There is no free on-site parking at the courthouse, but there are many nearby pay lots and garages.

We have requested approval from the State Bar of Texas for a total of 6.00 hours of CLE credit. This includes 2.5 hours of ethics credit. We hope you can attend the entire seminar, but if not, the Texas Bar will allow you to report partial credit for the presentations you are able to attend.

Although the seminar is free, advanced registration is required. You may register at the FPD's website (<https://txn.fd.org/>) beginning Monday, September 28. Registration will close on Monday, November 2. We will post CLE materials (PowerPoints, handouts, *et cetera*) to the FPD website on Tuesday, November 3.

If you have any questions about the seminar, you may contact Charnese M. Toro at (214) 767-2746 or Charnese_Toro@fd.org. You may also contact T.W. Brown at (817) 978-2753 or Taylor_W_Brown@fd.org.

THURSDAY, NOV. 5, 2026
ELDON B. MAHON U.S. COURTHOUSE – ROOM 316
THIRD-FLOOR JURY ASSEMBLY ROOM

9:30 am – 10:00 am	Early Arrival & Sign-in Period Before the seminar begins, please sign in to register your attendance before finding a seat in the Jury Assembly Room on the third floor of the Eldon B. Mahon U.S. Courthouse.
10:00 am – 10:15 am	Mentoring Minute: Finding Mentees (0.25 hours) <i>Presenter: T.W. Brown, Ass't Federal Public Defender (Fort Worth)</i> The seminar will begin with a brief presentation from the FPD's Director of Education & Training. Our office has close relationships with each of the law schools in the DFW Metroplex and has consistently leveraged those relationships to create an intern-to-AFPD pipeline. T.W. Brown will describe how to establish and maintain similar relationships for yourself.
10:15 am – 11:45 am	The Ethical Dangers of Using Generative AI in Federal Criminal Practice (1.5 hours – ethics credit) <i>Presenter: Matthew Wright, Ass't Federal Public Defenders (Amarillo)</i> These days, it's difficult to perform <i>any</i> task involving a computer or technology without being interrupted by an invitation to utilize some sort of generative AI. Some of the better products are capable of instantly composing a professional-sounding memorandum or brief, complete with citations. Lawyers and judges differ wildly in their willingness to try the technology. In this session, we will discuss the dangers and pitfalls of using generative AI in federal criminal litigation. We will cover issues of confidentiality, privilege, and professional competence. We will discuss just a few of the many stories of lawyers who found themselves in serious trouble after filing briefs or pleadings written by AI, complete with citations to or quotations from imaginary cases. Finally, we will talk about procrastination and the power of temptation.
11:45 am– 12:00 noon	Grab a Boxed Lunch To maximize CLE credit, we will provide boxed lunches for registered attendees and then continue our training. Please grab a boxed lunch from a table in the hallway and then return to your seats for more training.

12:00 pm – 12:30 pm	Revisiting the Commerce Clause (0.5 hours) <i>Presenter: T.W. Brown, Ass't Federal Public Defender (Fort Worth)</i> In <i>United States v. Squire</i> , the en banc Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals will consider whether 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(1)'s prohibition on the possession of a firearm by a felon exceeds Congress's authority under the Commerce Clause. Mr. Squire has advanced both facial and as-applied challenges in his en banc briefing, and the effects of a ruling in his favor on either argument would fundamentally reshape Commerce Clause litigation in the Fifth Circuit. In this presentation, T.W. Brown will address the current state of Commerce Clause authority in the Fifth Circuit and at the Supreme Court. The presentation will conclude with an assessment of the arguments before the Fifth Circuit in <i>Squire</i> and a forecast for where things may be headed.
12:30 pm – 1:30 pm	Caselaw Update (1.0 hour) <i>Presenter: Loui Itoh, Ass't Federal Public Defender (Fort Worth)</i> The last year has seen many significant criminal-law opinions from the Fifth Circuit and Supreme Court. In this presentation, Loui Itoh will review those opinions with an eye toward their effect on our day-to-day practice in the Northern District of Texas.
1:30 pm – 1:45 pm	Post-lunch Break & Clean-up Period Our friends at the courthouse allow us to use the Jury Assembly Room on the understanding that we will clean up after ourselves. Attendees can use this post-lunch break to throw away their trash and to get ready for the afternoon training sessions.
1:45 pm – 2:45 pm	Ethical Considerations in CJA Appointments & Billing (1.0 hour – ethics credit) <i>Presenter: Kim Schaefer, Attorney Advisor for the U.S. District Court (N.D. Tex.)</i> In this presentation, Kim Schaefer will discuss the general ethical obligations undertaken by attorneys who accept appointments under the Criminal Justice Act with a special emphasis on the ethics of billing for time and expenses.

2:45 pm – 3:30 pm	Trying (and Winning) Jury Trials in Fort Worth (0.75 hours) <i>Moderator: T.W. Brown, Ass't Federal Public Defender (Fort Worth)</i> <i>Presenters: Pia Lederman, Ass't Federal Public Defender (Fort Worth); Josh Rhodes, Ass't Federal Public Defender (Fort Worth); Christopher Weinbel, Ass't Federal Public Defender (Fort Worth)</i> Lawyers at the FPD's Fort Worth office are frequently in trial and have established a track record of great success over the past few years. During this panel discussion, a few of the division's busiest trial lawyers will discuss their recent wins and describe how to set yourself up for similar success at your next trial in Fort Worth.
3:30 pm – 3:45 pm	Final Break & Preparation for the Judge's Panel The seminar will conclude with a panel discussion from a few of the judges in the Fort Worth division. A final 15-minute break will allow time for the FPD and FBA hosts to set up the area and for our judges and their clerks to get comfortable.
3:45 pm – 4:45 pm	A View from the Bench: A Panel Discussion from the Fort Worth Judges (1.0 hour) <i>Moderator: Rachel Taft, Ass't Federal Public Defender (Fort Worth)</i> <i>Presenters: The Honorable Reed O'Connor, Chief District Court Judge; The Honorable Terry R. Means, Senior District Court Judge; The Honorable Jeffrey L. Cureton, Magistrate Judge; The Honorable Hal R. Ray, Jr., Magistrate Judge</i> Lawyers in Fort Worth are lucky to practice before judges willing to engage with local practitioners. The annual seminar will conclude with a panel discussion from a few of our judges. The panel will engage in an open discussion aimed at helping practitioners improve the level of practice in the Fort Worth division.

PRESENTER BIOGRAPHIES

T.W. Brown is an Assistant Federal Public Defender in the Northern District of Texas and works in the Fort Worth division. He graduated from the University of Arkansas School of Law in May 2013 and joined the FPD's office in January 2015. He spent a few years in the trial division and has been in appeals since May 2019. If you have any questions about his presentations (or tips for future CLE topics), you can reach T.W. at Taylor_W_Brown@fd.org.

The Honorable Jeffrey L. Cureton, U.S. Magistrate Judge, has been on the bench in Fort Worth since 2010. He graduated with a B.A. from Baylor University in 1990 and went on to graduate from Baylor University School of Law in 1993.

Judge Cureton began his career as a law clerk for the Honorable Eldon B. Mahon, United States District Judge for the Northern District of Texas, from 1993 to 1994 and again from 1997 to 2000. He served as an associate at Friedman, Young and Suder, PC, in Fort Worth from 1994 to 1995. He was Assistant District Attorney in Tarrant County from 1995 to 1997. He also served as an associate with Fillmore Law Firm in Fort Worth from 2000 to 2003 and was partner at Cureton & Gordon in Fort Worth from 2003 to 2010.

Loui Itoh joined the FPD's Fort Worth office as an Assistant Federal Public Defender in 2019. After working as a trial attorney, she moved to Appeals in 2022. Ms. Itoh received her undergraduate degree from Harvard University and her J.D. from New York University School of Law. After law school, she worked as an Associate at Sidley Austin, LLP, as a law clerk for U.S. District Judge Amit P. Mehta, and as an Assistant Federal Public Defender at the Office of the Federal Public Defender for the District of Columbia.

Pia Rebecca Lederman is an Assistant Federal Public Defender in the Northern District of Texas and works in the Fort Worth Division's trial section. She graduated from St. Mary's University School of Law in San Antonio, Texas, in 1995, and started her legal career as an Honor's Attorney with the Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Prisons in Washington, DC. She left Washington, DC, in 2000 and returned to Texas as an Assistant District Attorney in Tarrant County before starting her own law firm in 2001. Pia Rebecca officed in Tarrant County before joining the FPD's office in January 2023. During her short time in the FPD trial section she has obtained 4 not-guilty verdicts and one dismissal. If you have any questions about her presentation (or if you would like to talk to her about a trial or case), she can be reached at Pia_Lederman@fd.org.

The Honorable Terry R. Means, Senior District Court Judge, was appointed as United States District Judge for the Northern District of Texas in 1991. Judge Means graduated from Southern Methodist University with a B.A. with Departmental Distinctions in 1971. He then graduated from Southern Methodist University Dedman School of Law in 1974.

Judge Means began his legal career as a partner at Means & Means in Corsicana, Texas, from 1974 to 1989. He served as a justice on the Tenth Court of Appeals in Texas from 1989 to 1991 before being appointed as a United States District Judge. Judge Means has received several awards for his judicial service including the Excellence in Justice Award from Texas A&M School of Law and the Silver Gavel Award for Outstanding Judicial Service from the Tarrant County Bar Association.

The Honorable Reed O'Connor, Chief District Court Judge, was appointed by President George W. Bush as United States District Judge for the Northern District of Texas on November 21, 2007. Judge O'Connor graduated from the University of Houston in 1986 with a B.S. degree. He then graduated *summa cum laude* from South Texas College of Law in 1989, where he was a member of the South Texas Law Review.

Judge O'Connor began his legal career in 1989 as an associate with Vinson & Elkins, LLP. He served as an Assistant District Attorney for the Tarrant County District Attorney's Office from 1994 to 1998. In 1998, he became an Assistant United States Attorney for the Northern District of Texas in the Fort Worth division. In 2003, the Department of Justice detailed Judge O'Connor to serve as Counsel to the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee in Washington, D.C. He advised then-Chairman Orrin Hatch on various criminal and constitutional policy issues. The Department of Justice detailed Judge O'Connor again in 2005 to serve as Chief Counsel to the Subcommittee on Immigration, Border Security, and Citizenship, where he served as counsel to Senator John Cornyn.

Judge O'Connor has been married to Tammy Herrin for over thirty years. They have two daughters.

The Honorable Hal R. Ray, Jr., U.S. Magistrate Judge, was appointed to serve the Northern District of Texas in 2016. Prior to his appointment, he was in private practice with the Fort Worth firm of Pope, Hardwicke, Christie, Schell, Kelly & Ray, LLP., from 1997 to 2016. He previously served as Chief of the Natural Resources Division from 1995 to 1997 and the Elder Law and Public Health Division of the Office of the Attorney General of Texas in 1995. Before that, he practiced with civil firms in Fort Worth, Wichita Falls, and Dallas. He was a law clerk to Hon. Halbert O. Woodward, Chief Judge of the Northern District, in Lubbock from 1984 to 1985. He graduated from college and law school at the University of Texas at Austin and earned an L.L.M. from the University of London. He is a member of the American Law Institute and is board-certified in Civil Trial Law by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization.

Josh Rhodes is an Assistant Federal Public Defender and works in the Fort Worth office's trial division. He graduated from the University of Mississippi School of Law in 2018 and joined the Federal Public Defender's office in 2022. Prior to joining the Federal Public Defender, he worked as an Assistant District Attorney in Denton County, Texas, in their trial and appellate divisions.

Kim Schaefer has worked for the Northern District of Texas since 2010. Since that time, she has assisted the court in CJA-related matters, including attorney appointments, the authorization of service providers, budgeting, and voucher payment processing. Kim is certified by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization in Criminal Appellate Law. She earned a B.S. with honors from the University of Houston in 1989 and a J.D. with honors from George Washington University's National Law Center in 1992.

Rachel Taft joined the FPD's office for the Northern District of Texas in 2019. She started out in the Dallas division and now works in Fort Worth as a trial attorney. She attended the University of North of Texas for her bachelor's degree and graduated from Texas A&M School of Law in 2016. Before joining the FPD, she was an Associate with Varghese Summersett in Fort Worth.

Christopher Weinbel commissioned into the U.S. Army in 2009. He served in units at Fort Sill, Oklahoma; Schweinfurt, Germany; and Fort Bragg, North Carolina. After serving as a Field Artillery Officer, he was selected to serve as a Civil Affairs Officer with U.S. Army Special Operations Command. During his active-duty service, he deployed many times in support of missions like Operation Enduring Freedom—Afghanistan, Operation Enduring Freedom—Andean Ridge, and Operation Enduring Freedom—Caribbean. In 2017, he transferred to the U.S. Army Reserves and attended law school at Texas A&M University School of Law in Fort Worth. Upon graduating, he became an Assistant District Attorney in Collin County where he worked until November 2022. That is when he accepted a job as an Assistant Federal Public Defender with the FPD's Fort Worth division. He currently serves in the reserves as a Lieutenant Colonel and continues to assist clients in the Northern District.

Matthew Wright is the Deputy Chief of the Appeals and Post-Conviction Section at the FPD's office for the Northern District of Texas. He has represented hundreds of clients in district court, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, and the U.S. Supreme Court. He graduated from the University of Arkansas School of Law in 2006.