

Carla E. Barnes was appointed to the position of Circuit Court Judge for the 11th Judicial Circuit in 2021. Previously, she held the position of Chief Public Defender of McLean County. Carla is the first African-American judge in the circuit and was the first African-American administrator for McLean County. Ms. Barnes graduated from Illinois State University in 1993 with a Bachelor's Degree in Criminal Justice. She enrolled in The John Marshall Law School and graduated in 1998.

Ms. Barnes was employed in private practice after graduation for a brief time, until she accepted a position with the Cook County State's Attorney's Office in their Child Support Division. After several years, Carla returned to McLean County, where she became a member of the McLean County State's Attorney's Office. In 2021 Judge Barnes-Wheeler was hired as an Assistant Public Defender in the McLean County Public Defender's Office.

Throughout Judge Barnes-Wheeler's career she served on many boards, including the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council and the Juvenile Justice Council. Judge Barnes-Wheeler served as Treasurer for the Illinois Council of Chief Defenders. Carla was an active member of the McLean County Truancy Committee, the McLean County Veterans Court of the 11th Judicial Circuit, as well as the McLean County Drug Court. She served as a board member of the Great Plains Life Foundation as well as a board member of the Illinois State University Foundation Board, and also served as a board member of the Children's Discovery Museum. Additionally, Governor Bruce Rauner appointed Carla to the Illinois Criminal Justice Coordinating Council.