



## Kristin H. Ruth

### PARTNER

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919.250.2111

#### AREAS OF PRACTICE

- Family Law
- Mediation & Arbitration
- Alienation of Affection
- Alimony
- Child Custody
- Child Support
- Divorce & Separation
- Prenuptial Agreements
- Property Division

#### GET IN TOUCH

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#### Raleigh

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#### MY PROFILE

Kristin Ruth embodies a level of empathy and compassion that compels her to action. With grace and an absolute dedication to her clients' best interests, Kristin has devoted her career to helping families involved in difficult child custody cases navigate the legal process as painlessly as possible. She continues to raise the bar on what it means to provide excellent client service. Clients feel heard and important when they are with Kristin; ever the professional, she gives them her full and guiding attention. She endeavors to be present, easy to talk to, and their guiding advocate toward a just solution. Patient and candid, warm yet firm, Kristin helps each client feel cared for with a blend of professionalism and passion for what she does.

Kristin represents clients in all aspects of family law, including divorce, child custody, child support, and equitable property distribution. In particular, Kristin handles matters involving grandparent visitation and domestic violence, as well as family law disputes between same-sex couples. Certified in both Superior Court and Family Financial Mediation, she aims to help families settle disputes without going to court—though, with more than 29 years of courtroom and mediation experience, she's more than up to the challenge.

Kristin served as a District Court judge for 13 years before establishing a private law practice and later joining Smith Debnam. As a family court judge, she concentrated the majority of her time presiding in the courtroom designated for child support enforcement—one of the most challenging in Wake County. Kristin voluntarily took on this courtroom when other judges had declined. This experience also equipped her with the ability to navigate the often messy overlap of criminal and civil law.

Still today, Kristin is driven by a heartfelt sense of responsibility to realize what is in the best interest of the children involved in these cases. "They are the ones truly affected...I do the best I can for them," she says. And she does—when going to court, she says her standard is to know the case so well that there's not a question to which she could not provide a complete and thoughtful answer.

Kristin frequently serves as a pro bono child advocate, representing children at the center of divorce and separation proceedings, ascertaining the child's wishes and speaking in court on their behalf.

She has been commended for her service to children by, among other recognitions, the North Carolina Child Support Council's Distinguished Service of Excellence Award. She also participates in 'problem-solving courts' that address the underlying problems contributing to criminal behavior. Through these courts, Kristin works to find alternatives to incarceration to resolve family issues and break negative cycles for those at risk.

Kristin's understanding and expertise in the fields of family law and child support are widely appreciated and sought out. She's given frequent presentations on child support and ethics issues at national and international events, and she has authored and contributed to a number of writings. One thing you'll learn about Kristin from reading her articles is that she is always finding opportunities to learn. Her writing displays both her heart for her clients and a certain humility that allows her to find joy in the learning process.

## **GET TO KNOW KRISTIN**

### **What do you enjoy outside of work?**

"Riding horses is the one true passion that I have had for as long as I can remember. My dad bought me a pony for my sixth birthday, and I have been actively riding and caring for horses ever since. Riding is great exercise, but more importantly, spending time with my horse provides me an opportunity to enjoy the company of my "friend" and the great outdoors."

### **What was your very first job?**

"My very first "real" job was as a flight attendant for American Airlines. After graduating from Kansas State University, I traveled to Texas to teach horseback riding at a girl's camp for the summer. One of the camp counselors from Dallas introduced me to her mother, who was a former flight attendant. She encouraged me to apply at the end of summer. By chance, I called American Airlines, they interviewed me, and I was hired. I retired from American in 1996 with 17 years! Because of the flexible scheduling, I was able to attend law school while flying for American Airlines."

### **What do you enjoy most about your job?**

"It is personally rewarding and a privilege to be able to counsel and advocate for my clients as we navigate together through the complexities of the legal system while making difficult decisions that affect not only them but their families."

## **MY CREDENTIALS**

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### **Admissions**

- North Carolina State Bar
- Texas State Bar

## **Education**

- Kansas State University, Bachelor of Science, 1974 – 1978
- Norman Adrian Wiggins School of Law, Campbell University, *Juris Doctor*, 1987 – 1990

## **Certifications**

- Family Financial Mediation Certification (16 hours), 2013
- Superior Court Mediation Certification (40 hours), 2012

## **Professional Affiliations**

- NC Bar Association, Member
- Board of Governors, Vice-President of the North Carolina Bar Association (2009-2010)
- Member of the Wake County Bar Association
- Member of the 10th Judicial District Bar
- Member of the Federal Task Force on Child Support (2004-2010)
- Member of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) – 2000 – 2012
- Former Board Member for Carolina Correctional Services
- President, Carolina Dispute Settlement Services
- Current Board of Trustees for the Apex United Methodist Church
- Current Member of the Texas Bar Association (inactive status)
- Current Member of the North Carolina Association of Women Attorneys
- Member of the American Business Women's Association (1998-2008)
- Member of the Juvenile Justice Commission (2008-2009)
- 2005 President of the North Carolina Child Support Council

## **Awards & Recognition**

- Selected to participate in an *"Expert's meeting on the Draft Hague Convention on the International Recovery of Child Support and other forms of Family Maintenance"* April 20, 2006 in Washington, DC. By invitation from Mary Helen
- Selected to participate in *"Institutionalizing problem-solving practices in all courts: A Working Summit"*; Bureau of Justice and National Judicial College, Reno, Nevada, May 10-12, 2005.
- Presenter at the United Nations 11th Annual Crime Congress in Bangkok, Thailand (April 2005)
- Presenter at the *Annual International Conference* on Restorative Justice in Winchester, England (March 2004)
- Guest speaker on Voice of America (March 2003)

## **Civic Involvement**

- Vice-Chair, Board of Trustees, Apex United Methodist Church
- Mission service to Italy as a law student with a team of students who wrote appeals for 100 refugees who were denied refugee status to the United States.
- Guatemala Service project coordinator and organizer for a team of law students
- Mission trips to Dominican Republic, Bahamas, and Guatemala sponsored by the Apex United Methodist Church in Apex, NC.
- Appalachian Service Project (ASP)/Kentucky 2009
- Former Kiwanis Club member and past president

- Member of the Camelot Book Club, Raleigh, NC

### **Published Articles**

- [www.childsupportandthecourt.org](http://www.childsupportandthecourt.org)
- Ruth, Kristin (2008) *"Breaking the Cycle"* by using alternatives to incarceration, unpublished paper co-authored, Raleigh, NC.
- Ruth, Kristin and Dr. Rhonda Zingraff. (2007) *"New Research Shows Power of Problem-Solving Methods in Court."* Child Support Report Vol. XXIX, No. 4, April, Washington, D.C.: Office of Child Support Enforcement.
- Ruth, K. "Breaking the Cycle: Alternatives to incarceration lead to collections in Wake County, North Carolina, Child Support Report, Volume XXVIII, No. 1, January 2006, Washington, DC: Office of Child Support Enforcement. 38 (1) 2.
- Contributed to article, Ashton, J. (2006) *"Child support dockets benefit from uprising problem solving court principle"*. Juvenile and Family Justice Today, 14 (4), 19-21.
- Carlson Attorney-Advisor/Office of the Assistant Legal Advisor for Private International law under the US Department of State.
- Contributed chapter entitled, *"The Cookie"* in *"Rekindling the Human Spirit,"* an anthology on life lessons. (2003)
- Contributed chapter entitled, *"O' Yez! O' Yez! O' Yez!"* in, *"Life, Work and Money from A Woman's Perspective"* an anthology for women. (2002)
- Numerous speaking engagements, presentations and training (nationally and internationally) on problem-solving courts, alternatives to incarceration, mediation, ethics and child support. Details provided upon request. Classes are accredited for continuing legal and judicial legal education. (1998-present)

### **ARTICLES & INSIGHTS**

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November 28, 2018

[Family Law Mediation: When is a good time?](#)

January 19, 2018

[Table Talk...for the Rest of the Story](#)

### **NEWS**

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June 8, 2021

[Kristin Ruth Inducted Into North Carolina Pro Bono Honor Society for Second Consecutive Year](#)

November 1, 2019

[Smith Debnam Named in 2020 "Best Law Firms" by U.S. News & World Report and Best Lawyers®](#)

January 6, 2015

[Smith Debnam Welcomes Kristin Ruth as Partner](#)

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