

# From the Courtroom to the Campaign Trail: Boies Schiller Partner Chairs Husband's Run for D.C. Council Seat

By Ross Todd

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If you were looking for **Boies Schiller Flexner** partner **Kenya Davis** on a Sunday this spring, you wouldn't have found her in the office or prepping for trial.

Since February, Davis has been out on the campaign trail as chair of her husband Dwight's run for an open, at-large seat on the D.C. Council. That's meant a ward-by-ward canvassing push across the district in what the campaign has dubbed "walk the wards Sundays." With June 16 election day closing in, the couple, their family and volunteers are heading into a weekend targeting Ward One, the last of the eight left to hit.

Davis has tried more than 50 cases and built a career helping juries make sense of complex issues, including handling human trafficking claims as a federal prosecutor earlier in her career. She said stepping into retail politics has been a pretty natural pivot, with the core of what she's doing on the campaign trail feeling strikingly familiar to her work in the courtroom.

Davis told me when we connected by phone yesterday that a good trial lawyer has to know



Courtesy photo

**Boies Schiller partner Kenya Davis (second from left) campaigning with her husband Dwight (sunglasses) who is running for an at-large seat on the D.C. Council, with sons Desmond (19), Daniel (17) and Isaiah (30) (l-to-r), and campaign manager Darlene Gamble (green hat).**

their jury and know their facts. "Speaking to the jury with your facts: That is what I'm doing pretty much every day," she said.

In court, her jury might be eight to 12 people in a civil trial or upwards of 16, including alternates, in a criminal case. On the campaign trail, the target audience is orders of magnitude larger—and more unpredictable.

“Now my panel is like 500,000 ... 400,000 if you count all the Democratic voters in D.C.,” she said.

That shift in scale has required adaptation, but not a reinvention. Davis built her reputation first as a federal prosecutor, including years leading Washington D.C.’s human trafficking task force, before joining Boies Schiller in 2022. Her work has often involved distilling complicated facts into narratives that resonate with lay decision-makers.

Those same instincts, she said, now guide her interactions with voters. “When I’m talking to voters or when I’m providing them with information or they’re asking questions and I’m giving them information, I feel like I’m doing the exact same thing,” she said.

That means listening first. It also means recognizing that, like jurors, voters come in with incomplete information and, often, skepticism.

“They need the information to be able to make the decision,” she said.

But there are some key differences. In court, the decision is often binary. The defendant is guilty or not guilty. You can side with the plaintiff or the defendant on claims in a civil case. In a crowded ranked-choice election in a Democratic primary with nine candidates, the persuasion challenge is significantly more complex when trying to get voters to put “Dwight Davis” at the top of their ballots.

“It’s a difficult decision to make,” Davis said of voters weighing multiple candidates.

### **A Campaign Built Like a Trial Team**

Davis was quick to note that she is *not* the campaign manager. “My job is chair,” she said, pointing out that the campaign has both a manager and deputy manager. But she described her role as campaign chair as ranging from hands-on fieldwork to high-level strategy.

In practice, that means everything from “putting up signs and canvassing to ... trying to figure out how to fundraise [and] how to message for voters.”

It also means being a “fill-in” for Dwight whenever needed, occasionally standing in for her husband at events. She said that “fill-in” role, perhaps more than anything, mirrors how she works in litigation.

“I assign tasks. I give people responsibilities. They certainly are working a thousand miles a minute to get those things done,” she said. “But ultimately, I’m the one on the docket. I’m the one that’s going to stand up before the court. It’s my case. So, I have to be aware of everything.”

That same mindset—total command of the facts, readiness to step into any role—has translated directly to campaign work.

“In that way, it’s very much like trying to shepherd a trial team through,” she said.

### **The Stakes—and the Audience—Are Different**

Sticking with the litigation analogy, Davis said the jury here is a particularly demanding one.

“D.C. is very diverse,” Davis said. “They are highly intelligent constituents. Their expectations are very high, too, of their elected officials.”

“Every ward, every door, you need to approach with that sense of humility.”

Voters, like jurors, she said, expect preparation, authenticity and clarity.

“You’re not going to be able to give them something that, one, is not true, two, not sincere, three, not well thought out,” she said.

The campaign’s strategy has reflected that reality. Each Sunday, the team has canvassed a different ward during the “walk the wards” effort. The goal has been direct engagement.

“Our goal was to knock on as many doors as we could,” Davis said, because “D.C. voters want to hear from the campaign directly.”

That kind of retail politics—face-to-face conversations, rapid-fire persuasion—has forced Davis into a different cadence than she'd use in the courtroom. And it's helped her develop something she admits has not come naturally to her as a longtime government lawyer: business development skills.

"Pitching does not come naturally, especially when it's in a short time frame," she said.

On the campaign trail, there is no avoiding the pitch, and no time to perfect it.

"You have no shorter time frame than when somebody opens their door," she said.

That constraint has translated into a crash course in efficiency and clarity.

"I have truly, truly honed my skills in the elevator pitch area," she said.

It's also changed how she thinks about audiences.

"Our constituents are our potential clients," Davis said.

The parallels between business development and campaigning are obvious: Identify needs, communicate value and build trust quickly.

"I'm quick with the referral," she said, when a legal matter isn't the right fit for her to handle.

In the campaign?

She's not so quick to give up on a potential vote. And with ranked choice, even when someone tells her that they've committed their vote to one of her husband's eight rivals, she

can still advocate for them to have Dwight somewhere further down their ballot.

All of this is happening while Davis continues to manage her legal practice, including work related to forced labor issues bubbling up in federal legislation and ongoing cases. She equated the campaign with "a very demanding client."

With early voting beginning in early June and election day approaching, Davis expects a heavy final push.

"I'm going to be canvassing and getting out with [Dwight] at the polls, talking to voters," she said.

But for Davis, the campaign is not just an exercise in transferable skills. It is also deeply personal.

"I just really deeply believe in the franchise," she said, pointing to her long-standing involvement in election protection efforts and upbringing in Atlanta, where John Lewis was her long-time Congressman.

The Davis family has been fully engaged as well, with the couple's children and extended relatives joining canvassing efforts across the city.

"It's been hard, but it has been a very good opportunity for all of us to bond," she said. "I'm very proud of him for doing this," she said of her husband.

Look for a verdict on his candidacy on June 16 or sometime shortly after.