



ICJL 2018 Judicial Retention Questionnaire

**Eric J. Dirnbeck
Circuit Judge – 2nd Circuit**

1. State the main reason why voters should return you to the bench.

Judges can often be heard saying things like “not in MY courtroom” or “I’ll be in MY chambers.” I make an effort to refrain from using these common phrases because, to me, they imply some right to possession to the Judicial Office. I have never thought of my position as a right but rather a privilege, one that I remain accountable for in the way that I conduct myself as a Judge. I make every effort to treat everyone, no matter their station in life, with basic human dignity and I strive for every party that appears in front of me to feel that I have been fair even if they did not get the outcome they wanted.

2. What actions have you taken as a judge of which you are most proud?

I believe that I have earned the respect of my Judicial colleagues because of my work ethic, my legal abilities and because of the way that I conduct myself in and out of the Courtroom. I have always held the Judges in my circuit in high regard so to be among them and have their respect as a peer makes me very proud.

3. Name and describe one change you would make in the Illinois court system.

Before becoming a Judge, I served as a Public Defender in my home county for nearly 14 years. During that time, I did my best to provide my clients high quality legal services without regard to the fact that they were not paying for those services. My case load consistently increased while the pay remained unchanged. Further, the resources available to the prosecution far exceeded those available to the Public Defender. This creates an issue of fundamental fairness of the process and a perception that Justice can be bought. For these reasons, one change I would make would be to increase funding for legal services for the indigent.

4. One prominent Illinois judicial evaluation survey asks attorneys to evaluate candidates on Integrity, Impartiality, Legal Ability and Temperament. Critique yourself in these four areas as to how you personally approach your job as a judge?

a. Integrity: In life and in a career that revolves around dealing with people and their problems, Integrity is an asset. I have learned that if you take unfair advantage of someone else, you might benefit

in that one instance but then integrity is lost and there will be a price to pay in the future. I believe that I have established and maintained a reputation of integrity because of the way that I have always conducted myself with my family, friends, colleagues and even my adversaries.

b. Impartiality: Impartiality is a key trait of a good Judge, without it, the Court system loses legitimacy. It is my duty in every case that comes before me to determine whether I have any conflict that would affect my impartiality and if so, immediately recuse myself. It is also my practice to immediately disclose to all parties involved, any facts that might even give the appearance of a conflict even if I don't think one exists.

c. Legal Ability: Aside from my service as Public Defender, during my 17-year career as an attorney, I maintained a busy general law practice. During that time, I routinely handled a wide variety of cases. This necessitated my being up to date and competent in many areas of the law. Of course, the law is vast, complicated, nuanced and always changing. I have always enjoyed learning so it natural for me to incorporate continuing legal education into my daily routine.

d. Temperament: To those of us in the legal profession, the Courtroom is part of our every day life, but for the people we are here to serve, that is not the case. For the average citizen, the Courtroom can be a scary place that can have a big impact on their lives. For those reasons, I have always felt compelled to try to put people at ease and to take the time to explain to them what they can expect and how things work. It is appropriate for me to have different expectations of Attorneys that appear in front of me but in any case, I do not seek to be feared. I expect Attorneys and parties to show respect for the Court as an institution. Any respect they may have for me individually, I expect that I must have earned it.