

Judge Marcia Maras

ICLJ 2018 Judicial Retention Questionnaire

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

I am very honored and proud to be a member of the Circuit Court of Cook County! Every job and experience that I have had to date has prepared me to meet the responsibilities of the office that I now seek to retain. I have trained and was certified as a special education teacher, worked as a government attorney and administrator, clerked in the appellate court, been a litigator in the private sector and served as a judge for 19+years. Since being appointed to the bench in 1999, every bar association that has evaluated me has found me either qualified, recommended, well qualified or highly qualified

My performance as a judge brings together bits and pieces of each of these experiences so as to enhance my ability to perform my role with honor, dignity, integrity, patience, knowledge and sometimes even creativity! If retained, I pledge to maintain, and hope to surpass, the high level of commitment and strong work ethic that is part of my daily service as judge.

During my years on the bench, I have been fortunate to have served in the First Municipal, County and Law Divisions. Upon being appointed to the bench in February 1999, I was assigned to a short stint in Traffic Court until being transferred in May 2000 to the County Division where I handled adoption, election, and mental health and property tax cases. In November 2006, I was assigned to the Law Division where I handle a large trial assignment call comprised of 5000+ cases per year. In addition, I have my own active case management call wherein I am responsible for every aspect of every case on the call until it is ready for trial. These responsibilities include case management and the hearing of countless potentially dispositive motions.

Being a product of the southeast side of Chicago, I have a strong work ethic. I pride myself on being up to date on the law and prepared for every case over which I preside. Being a good judge is also all about fairness and service- to the attorneys, the litigants and the citizens of Cook County. Each day I strive to bestow the highest level of dignity and respect upon every member of these groups. My daily goal is that each person's interaction with me and our court system is both satisfying and fair. Unfortunately, the resolution of any case yields both a winning and losing party. I do hope, however, that when either side exits through the doors of my courtroom, they feel that (1) their arguments and briefs were given full consideration; (2) they were treated with the dignity and respect that they deserved and (3) the legal process which they experienced was both fair and impartial.

I also believe that as judges we should give back to the community. For the past 19 years, I have been an active participant in Women Everywhere: Partners in Service Project (www.wechicago.org), a non-profit aimed at coordinating volunteer activities benefiting women and children in need, with a particular focus on education and community service. Also, I have been on its Board of Directors since 2008 and have received its 2007 Outstanding Partner Award.

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

I cannot single out any one act. However, I am proud of the fact that I am prepared for every case by reading all briefs, cited cases, doing my own research where necessary and listening intently to each oral argument. Every case is given full consideration without bias or prejudice and all parties are treated with dignity and respect.

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

I would implement mandatory limits on how much money can be spent on judicial elections. I believe that campaign funding is the most important ethical issue facing the judiciary today. Between 1986-2008, Cook County judicial candidates reported more than \$30 million in campaign spending during primary election cycles! Klumpp, *What Influences the Voters?*, CBA RECORD, January 2010. In 2004, campaign contributions for one contested Illinois Supreme Court race totaled \$9 million! In 2010, one Illinois Supreme Court Justice raised \$2.8 million to fend off a business-backed campaign to defeat his retention bid.

Several studies have shown that approximately 70% of the public believes that judges are influenced by campaign contributions and more than one-quarter of judges themselves think contributions affect their decisions. DeGaris, *How Money and Politics are Destroying State Court Appellate Justice Across America*, 2011 (Fall/Winter) VOIR DIRE 5. Even if a judge's impartiality is not impacted by how much is spent in an election, it is difficult to maintain the appearance of impropriety when one accepts a large campaign contribution from any single source.

The *Citizens United* and subsequent U.S. Supreme Court rulings have led to unrestricted spending from outside groups. Donors from many special interest groups have been spending large sums of money in an attempt to make courts friendlier to partisan agendas.

In addition, the current budgetary crisis that many court systems are experiencing could affect the judiciary's independence. Across the country, deep budget cuts have created increased caseloads and long delays which could lead to a denial of basic access to justice. An American Bar Association task force recently took on this issue in *Crisis in the Courts: Defining the Problem*. This report notes that when state legislatures cut funding on the courts, public safety is degraded by delaying the resolution of criminal cases; vulnerable populations like children and the elderly are hurt; and our separate and co-equal judicial branch is weakened, damaging our system of government. See *Threadbare American Justice*, New York Times, August 17, 2011.

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?

Each day I strive to bestow the highest level of dignity and respect upon every litigant and their attorneys. My daily goal is that each person's interaction with me and our court system is both satisfying and fair. Unfortunately, the resolution of any case yields both a winning and losing party. I do hope, however, that when either side exits through the doors of my courtroom, they feel that (1) their arguments and briefs were given full consideration; (2) they were treated with the dignity and respect that they deserved and (3) the legal process which they experienced was both fair and impartial.

I am grateful that my bar evaluations since being appointed in 1999 illustrate that I have lived up to the highest standards of integrity, impartiality and civility. If retained I will continue to strive to achieve if not surpass these standards.