



Illinois Civil Justice League

**Candidate: Sharon Finegan Patterson**

**Cook County Circuit, Bronstein Vacancy**

1. State the qualifications and experiences that make you qualified to serve on the bench in Illinois.

**I have been an attorney for 29 years. I have a greater number of years of experience and a broader range of legal experience than most attorneys, having worked first for a respected Illinois Appellate Court Justice (Justice Daniel J. McNamara) for two years in a judicial clerkship, then for 13 years as an associate attorney representing primarily defendants at the respected law firm of Lord, Bissell & Brook, and then for 14 years as owner of my law practice in which I primarily represent individuals as plaintiffs in employment law disputes and complex personal injury litigation. Before I became a lawyer, I was an elementary schoolteacher to middle school students, an experience that will be invaluable to me as a judge.**

**Justice McNamara is the reason why I want to be a Judge. He was the best Judge that I have ever known. He was kind and intelligent, but what set him apart from other judges was the way in which he treated each and every person with total dignity and respect. Even the losing side felt that they had been fully heard and had received a fair day in court. Our justice system needs more judges like that. It is so important to vote for a person who is humble, who listens, who understands the diversity of Cook County and who is ready to serve its citizens.**

**I am experienced in trials, appeals and mediations, and I am trained to act as the mediator as well. I believe that every judge should be skilled in all of these areas, but few of our Circuit Court judges possess all of these skills.**

**A good judge truly cares about people. My background shows that I fit that bill. I was a schoolteacher first and, even after I became a lawyer, I continued to give back to students and the community. I regularly act as judge for law student moot court, trial, and mediation competitions. I traveled to four states in the 2008 Presidential Election season to volunteer my legal services as an attorney in the Attorney Voter Protection Program to protect citizens' rights to vote without interference.**

**I have been found "Highly Recommended" or "Qualified" and "Recommended" by every single attorney bar association.**

**Finally, my life experiences will aid me in being an outstanding judge. I was raised with four brothers and sisters in a close-knit, hard-working family in which we were taught to work hard; be accountable for our actions; that mistakes are learning experiences rather than failures; and to be compassionate and giving to others. These core values that I learned in my**

family most certainly affected the person that I have become and the judge that I will be. When you vote for a judge, you vote for the whole person. I promise to work hard to make the citizens proud that they decided to vote for me.

2. 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 they make you qualified to serve on the bench.

**I have received high grades in all of the areas of Integrity, Impartiality, Legal Ability and Temperament. The Chicago Council of Lawyers found that I have "good legal ability and temperament, and good analytical skills." They also found that I am "praised as being particularly hard-working." The Chicago Bar Association evaluated me in 2009 for both Associate judge and Circuit Court judge and found me Qualified for both, stating that I handle a variety of complex matters for both plaintiffs and defendants and that I possess all of the requisite qualifications for the positions. My primary supervising partners at my former large law firm in which I worked also give me the highest marks in these areas and, in fact, they are members of my campaign committee. Perhaps the best indicator of all is the fact that after I have opposed attorneys in civil litigation, they have repeatedly gone on to refer their own family members and clients to me. I believe that this is because of the lesson that I learned from Justice McNamara: one cannot help but respect someone who is honest, competent, hard-working and who treats even their adversaries with total dignity and respect.**

3. Describe the case in which you are most proud of your work as a lawyer.

**I have many cases that are special to me. Some have been extremely intellectually challenging, such as the multi-million dollar environmental insurance coverage litigation cases that I have handled in which there were complex contract and factual issues, or the multi-million dollar products liability explosion cases which involved unraveling the roles and liabilities of the component part manufacturers, or the complex settlement negotiations that I conducted in Sweden with component part manufacturers from Germany, Sweden, Norway and Italy which resulted in a successful settlement of a significant explosion case between culturally diverse parties.**

**But the two cases that are most special to me are the medical negligence case in which I represented a wonderful little girl who sustained a brachial plexus injury at birth, and an employment discrimination case in which I represented an African American woman who was the only African American woman to have obtained a management position in a factory. After she obtained the promotion, she was discriminated against and severely harassed by others in management and co-workers in an attempt to drive her out. In the medical negligence case, I obtained a seven figure settlement for the little girl but then I also continued to represent the girl in the probate court to be sure that the settlement proceeds were used to obtain for her the surgery that she needs from a specialist in Texas to correct her injury. In the discrimination case, I was able to obtain both a substantial monetary recovery as well as other equitable relief for my client, including training for the company management personnel on the subject of**

discrimination to reduce the chance of additional discrimination occurring to others in the future.

**What makes me proud of the work that I did in these cases is that I went beyond the usual monetary recovery that most lawyers seek and I sought for my clients a result that would truly better their lives and the lives of others in more intangible ways.**

4. Name one change you would make in the Illinois court system.

**I have practiced for 29 years in both state and federal courts. I believe that the federal court practice of having the judge rule on more routine motions in advance of the hearing date, thus eliminating the attorneys' and parties' need to be present on the hearing date, should be followed in state court as well. Too much time and money is wasted in state court going to court on very routine matters that could easily be ruled upon in advance with an order sent to the attorneys over the internet. Clients often spend too much in attorney fees. Following this practice would assist the clients as well as the court and would be a much more efficient practice.**

5. Are there civil litigation reforms that you would like to see enacted to remedy particular problems that you have detected, either as a practicing lawyer or as a sitting judge? Are there reforms that would benefit the civil justice system? What needs to be changed? Should the enactment of any such changes be the province of the legislature, the Supreme Court or by Constitutional amendment?

**I like the reforms that I have seen enacted in Michigan for medical negligence cases. There, they require that a prospective plaintiff first give notice to the hospital or medical provider of intent to sue along with the details of the alleged claim and expert opinions concerning the alleged malpractice. The plaintiff is then precluded from suing for 60 days thereafter in order to enable the prospective defendant to analyze and consider the claim and to negotiate a settlement, if one is warranted, before any formal litigation is pursued. (The statute of limitations is tolled during this 60 day period as well.) This is a very wise procedure since it is an attempt to give both sides an opportunity to air their differences and to perhaps settle their differences before the gauntlet is thrown down. In my 29 years, I have seen too many lawyers with out of control egos "duking it out" all at the expense of the clients. We need to remember that the clients are the sole reason we are here and it is their interests that we are here to serve. This reform would benefit clients and would also reduce the number of cases filed in our courts. This reform could be adopted by the Illinois legislature.**

6. Do you believe that our judicial system adequately deters and penalizes frivolous litigation? If not, what reforms would you like to see?

**I do not think our system adequately deters frivolous litigation in each and every case but that there is at least a mechanism in place to address the issue of frivolous litigation. I do not subscribe to a black and white rule that the losing party must pay the other party's attorney's fees because there are honest disputes in which both sides have their arguments that they can honestly make and neither should be penalized for invoking their legal rights to pursue relief in our courts. But there are other cases that are**

**blatantly frivolous. We do have an adequate mechanism in the law to invoke in frivolous cases in the form of Illinois Supreme Court Rule 137. Even then, mistakes on both sides of the coin (the judge sometimes erroneously finds that Rule 137 sanctions should apply and other times the judge erroneously rules that no sanctions should apply) occur. This is why once again it is so imperative that we have qualified, competent and compassionate judges to rule on these issues.**

7. Do you believe the Illinois Constitution precludes legislative establishment of limitations on civil damages? Are there or should there be distinctions among economic, non-economic and punitive damages?

**I believe that arbitrary, rigid, pre-set, "caps on damages" is unconstitutional. But there are other mechanisms under the law that are constitutional and that allow the judge discretion to act to ensure that damages that are awarded have some rational relationship to the facts and the law. Once again, it all comes down to the imperative of having competent and qualified and fair judges in our court rooms to apply these rules of law.**