



Illinois Civil Justice League

Candidate: Bonnie Carol McGrath

Cook County Circuit Court, Hayes Vacancy

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

Within a few years of becoming a lawyer, I won the Chicago Bar Association Pro Bono Award for Sole Practitioner for doing the most pro bono work among my peers--ranging from representing domestic violence victims and juvenile arrestees to counseling people regarding landlord/tenant, employment discrimination, domestic relations, elder law and bankruptcy. My goal as a judge will be to maintain the same dedication to community service, intellectual pursuit and solid success that I have maintained in my extremely varied legal career thus far. Please see my website and resume for many details of my life and legal background.

I am proud of the fact that judges and law professors have referred cases to me involving their own friends and families. And I am very proud to be one of Today's Chicago Woman's "Women Making a Difference.

I have done immense amounts of award-winning legal writing and legal teaching during 16 years as a lawyer. I have contributed to manuals dealing with subjects such as legal ethics, traffic prosecutions, vehicle seizure and circuit court procedures. I have presided over approximately 300 Cook County arbitrations, most as chair. And I have done 30 criminal appeals on behalf of the State of Illinois.

I excel at being objective, understanding and even-handed. I am a patient listener and reader--and I would never make an important decision without hearing all the facts and familiarizing myself with all aspects of the law. I feel good communication is the key to being a good judge. I am "Recommended" by the Women's Bar Association of Illinois and the Black Women Lawyers' Association of Greater Chicago and "Qualified" by the Asian American Bar Association.

I have a stellar background in bar leadership. I have been president of a bar association (Decalogue Society of Lawyers) and chair of many committees, including the Chicago Bar Association Criminal Law Committee and the Bench/Bar Relations Committee. I have spearheaded many legal projects--including a pro bono civil order of protection desk at the Maywood courthouse, which garnered an award from the American Bar Association. And I have participated in many legal education seminars, panels and programs, often as an instructor, speaker or panelist. I have been a legislative liaison for several bar association committees, and I have been invited to join a number of task forces to address issues involving diversity, rapid response, fairness to defendants and other matters that needed

creative, diligent attention. I have also been on the Chicago Bar Association Editorial Board for 17 years.

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.

Integrity--I am an honest, forthright person. Most importantly, I never deny mistakes I make and I am forthcoming about them. The true mark of integrity is to be honest about every facet of your life and I have been so. Because I have been fortunate to be a professional journalist much of my life, and because I have been given a number of forums in which to write about myself, my life has been an open book. I have no secrets. No skeletons. Nothing I am ashamed of.

Impartiality--Again, because I have had a multi-award winning journalism career, as well as a legal career, I have been trained to be objective, impartial and neutral in observing life. All the qualities which make for a good journalist also make for a good judge!

Legal ability-- I think my work over the last 16 years as a lawyer has been incredibly varied and rich, and although I have been criticized by some bar associations for never having conducted a jury trial, the rest of my background in the law speaks for itself. I have a wonderful resume (it is on my website in full) and an extensive background in legal analysis and writing and teaching. I have exactly the kind of background that will make me a great judge.

Temperament--I am consistently praised for my temperament. Not only by those in the legal community, but I also have a severely disabled grown daughter--she has autism--and for the last couple of decades friends and colleagues have remarked on my ability to care for her and maintain my work, my life and my good humor. I get along with everyone.

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

I am proud of the cases I have done in the juvenile court where kids have been reunited with non-custodial parents (the parents not directly responsible for the problems that had ensued). It is a wonderful feeling to represent a parent, help them with all of their legal woes and to have a happy ending where parent and child can once again live together in a healthy family setting.

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

Very rich people often do well in court in resolving their problems. And very poor people do as well--due to the availability of various forms of legal assistance. I would like to see creative new ways for middle class people to come to court without harrowing expense--and to get their legal issues resolved efficiently.

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?

Different problems can be addressed in all the ways mentioned--legislatively, by Supreme Court rules and by constitutional amendment. Creative enterprise, maverick legal professionals, smart judges, etc. can also recognize the need for change and institute reforms that can build up and result in a much better court system. Diligence and commitment are important for the entire legal community to have and to exercise.

I see cost as a big problem in the legal system. Like medical expenses, legal expenses have gone up tremendously--not only the cost of lawyers but all the accompanying costs of litigating cases. If everyone can't afford to hire lawyers, get to court, hire mediation and arbitration companies, afford various other expenses, etc. our court system and our entire legal community is a failure for all.

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

No. I think there can be stronger sanctions for filing frivolous litigation. To be fair, though, the fine line between frivolous litigation and smart/creative lawyering is often very faint--and totally in the eye of the beholder. It is a problem that needs a lot of study and bright creative minds to think of ways to recognize and distinguish frivolous litigation--as opposed to dynamic lawyering.

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?

Wow! This is quite a question (s). It is ripe for debate. I do not feel adequately prepared to form an opinion on such a huge subject while writing this questionnaire. I will say one thing, though, I would love to put together a panel of experts, a book of essays or an advanced law school class that could totally explore these two questions. I think it would be fascinating--and it is very much a subject that our entire society needs to read about, think about, study up on and ultimately form intelligent opinions about. Let's talk!