



ICJL 2012 Judicial Candidate Questionnaire

Sharon Finegan Patterson Cook County Circuit Judge – 8th Subcircuit – Roy Vacancy

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

The unique nature of my 31 years of legal experience makes me particularly qualified to serve as a Circuit Court Judge. First, I served for two years as a judicial clerk to a highly respected Justice on the Illinois Appellate Court, the Honorable Justice Daniel J. McNamara. He is the person who inspired me to become a judge. For the next 13 years, I worked at Lord, Bissell & Brook conducting civil litigation in trials and appeals in multi-million dollar cases including insurance coverage, products liability, toxic tort, and environmental contamination claims. For the past 16 years, I have primarily represented individuals in claims to protect their rights to be treated equally and to redress medical negligence. I have published a law journal article on a complex issue of civil procedure, and I have served as a law journal Editor. I have lectured law students on employment law, and I have received advanced training as a mediator.

Before I became a lawyer, I was a certified K-9 elementary school teacher. I taught math to middle school students and was responsible for managing 180 middle school students every day. I received four years of undergraduate training in how people think, what makes people behave as they do and, most importantly, what motivates people to learn and to change. This training will be invaluable to me as a Circuit Court Judge. It is critical that our Circuit Court Judges fully understand people, know how to communicate well with them, and know how to mentor and guide others.

All of the attorney bar associations have found me Highly Qualified, Qualified, or Recommended. The Chicago Council of Lawyers noted that my peers praise me as being “particularly hard-working,” “with good analytical skills,” “good temperament” and “good legal ability.” Likewise, the Chicago Bar Association commented upon my broad range of legal experience, my prior training as a schoolteacher, and my “fine temperament” and stated that I am “well versed in civil trial and appellate practice.”

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.

My integrity, impartiality, legal ability and temperament have been praised by the attorney bar associations, who have all found me Highly Qualified, Qualified, or Recommended, without exception. The Chicago Council of Lawyers specifically praised my "good legal ability," "good analytical skills" and "good temperament." The Chicago Bar Association likewise commented favorably upon my legal ability and temperament, stating that I am "well versed in civil trial and appellate practice" and that I have "a fine temperament."

After I have opposed attorneys in litigation, they have often gone on to refer their own friends, family, and clients to me. To earn the trust and respect of one's adversaries is truly the highest compliment that an attorney can receive. I witnessed first-hand by observing Justice McNamara how critical it is to treat every person with total dignity and respect. The fact that I choose in my own law practice to represent individuals to protect their rights to be free from discrimination speaks of my commitment to equality, impartiality, and fairness, and to my belief that every person should be given an opportunity to be fully heard. A Judge is a whole person. I have shown through my life and work choices that I possess all of the traits essential to being an outstanding Judge.

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

In one very rewarding case, I represented an African-American woman who had been promoted to manager in a factory. She was severely harassed on the basis of race and sex. The EEOC asked me to represent the named class plaintiff in a class action on behalf of African-American female employees. The result that was ultimately reached, which included both monetary compensation as well as equitable relief (including training personnel in the discrimination laws), was extremely gratifying.

In another meaningful case, I represented a little girl who had sustained a brachial plexus injury during the birth and delivery process. I found a world-renowned doctor who had pioneered new techniques in the repair of brachial plexus injuries in Houston, Texas. The girl's mother was a single mother without the financial means to get the little girl the surgeries that she needed. I fully developed the case for trial. On the eve of trial, the defendants agreed to pay a seven figure settlement. We arranged as part of the settlement to purchase an annuity that would provide funds to the little girl for life, as well as an up-front cash component to fund the multiple surgeries that the little girl will need in the future. Unlike many plaintiff's attorneys, I stayed connected to the little girl to monitor the medical situation, and I periodically report to the probate court on her medical status. I am happy to say that she has already received one of the surgeries and she is doing extremely well.

Another fascinating case arose from a steam turbine explosion in Pennsylvania that caused several million dollars in damage. There were complex insurance coverage issues, and the subcomponent part manufacturers (from Sweden, Norway and Italy) were each pointing the finger at each other on liability. I travelled to Sweden, Norway

and Germany on the case. Ultimately, I was able to act as mediator with the culturally diverse parties in this highly emotionally charged matter and to bring them together to achieve an amiable resolution.

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

The Circuit Court of Cook County would benefit from an across the board electronic e-filing system like the system that is used in our federal courts. Also, as in the federal courts, routine statuses should at times be conducted by telephone.

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?

The most helpful thing that can be done to address any specific problems that may arise in a specific courtroom is to improve the quality of our judiciary. Judges do and must have the discretion to address the specific needs in a courtroom, but we need to have the best jurists exercising that discretion.

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

Yes, there are rules in place to do this but the rules depend upon competent judges exercising their discretion to enforce the rules. Again, we need qualified judges to exercise that discretion.

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?

There is Illinois Supreme Court case law that addresses this question which I am bound to follow. Because I cannot comment on a specific legal issue that may come before me as a judge, I must ethically decline to further answer this question.