



Illinois Civil Justice League

ICJL 2018 Judicial Candidate Questionnaire

Stephanie Saltouros Cook County Circuit Court (10th Subcircuit) – O’Neill Burke Vacancy

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

I am currently a sitting Judge in the Circuit Court of Cook County. On September 29, 2016, I was appointed to the bench by the Illinois Supreme Court on the recommendation of Justice Mary Jane Theis. I was an attorney for 20 years prior to my appointment. I began my judicial career in the First Municipal District. While in that assignment, from September 2016 to November 2017, I handled hundreds of cases in the civil section where I presided over contract disputes, torts, collection proceedings, landlord-tenant disputes, and pro se matters. I also presided over trials, negotiated settlements, ruled on pre-trial and post-trial motions including motions for summary judgment, motions to dismiss, motions to produce, motions in limine, motions to quash service, and numerous issues relating to discovery. Additionally, I presided over high volume court calls in both the traffic and misdemeanor sections where I heard jury and bench trials, as well as pre-trial motions and post-trial motions.

In November 2017, I was transferred to the Domestic Violence Division where I currently preside over high volume civil and criminal court calls. In this division, I hear emergency motions, as well as hearings for orders of protection, workplace orders of protection, civil no contact orders, and stalking no contact orders. In the criminal section, I preside over misdemeanor and felony cases where family or household relationships exist between the victim and the defendant.

I have been found highly qualified, highly recommended, qualified, or recommended by all evaluating bar associations that evaluate judicial candidates.

I began my legal career in 1996 as an Assistant State’s Attorney for the Cook County State’s Attorney’s Office. I stayed in that position for 12 years, the last 8 of which were in the Felony Trial Division, during which time I tried hundreds of criminal cases from traffic offenses to murder. In addition, I litigated hundreds of motions, engaged in pre-trial conferences, ran court calls, and prepared discovery. I also supervised attorneys as the Domestic Violence Coordinator where I was the lead attorney in charge of all domestic violence cases in the

Second Municipal District. Additionally, I wrote appellate briefs and argued before the Illinois Appellate Court, First District.

In 2008, I left the Cook County State's Attorney's office to open my own law practice. I handled both criminal and civil litigation matters where I appeared in court and negotiated dispositions for my clients by way of plea, motion, and/or trial. I also learned how to run my own business which was an invaluable experience. While in private practice, I was a volunteer attorney in my community for the Amicus Poloniae Legal Clinic, which is a division of Chicago Volunteer Legal Services. Additionally, I was a volunteer at my children's school, Decatur Classical Elementary, where I was the Vice-Chairman of the Local School Council and PTA Vice-President of Arts & Education. I am a lifelong resident of Cook County and I live on the northwest side of Chicago with my husband, my 14 year old son, and my 12 year old daughter.

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 been found qualified or recommended by all of the evaluating bar associations in these areas. I bring a strong ethical belief to the bench. As a judge, I am honest and fair to all those who appear before me in my courtroom. I strive to be hard working and dedicated and I am committed to being a good public servant. I base my decisions, as a Circuit Court Judge, on the law and the evidence before me and the applicable law. Many individuals have told me I have a great temperament and I am very easy going and make a point to treat all individuals with dignity and respect that appear in front of me. I treat all individuals fairly and impartially. In one of my judicial evaluations, the Chicago Bar Association stated that,

"Ms. Saltouros has substantial felony and misdemeanor trial experience. Ms. Saltouros is well regarded for her knowledge of the law, integrity, fine temperament, diligence, work ethic, good communication skills and punctuality."

-Chicago Bar Association.

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

I worked on many cases throughout the 20 year period during which I was an attorney. I would say that I am proud of all my work on all of my cases. However, if I had to pick one that I am most proud of it would be a case I prosecuted as a Cook County Assistant State's Attorney. I prosecuted an individual for Aggravated Battery to a Child. The defendant intentionally burned the bottom of a 9 year old child's feet resulting in 3rd degree burns to the child and the defendant never got medical care for the child. The child was seriously injured. The defendant was abusing all of the children in the family. One child was 3 years old. I worked many hours to prepare the case for trial and I wanted to give my victim the best representation possible. It was a difficult case because the chief

witness was a child. I am proud to say that the State won and the defendant was sentenced to over 20 years in the Illinois Department of Corrections. As an attorney, I was always prepared and organized, traits I bring to the bench. I was an advocate for victims and clients while always treating the other side with respect which I continue to do as a Judge. I had a good reputation with all the Judges I appeared in front of and now have a good reputation as a fellow Judge.

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

I would support changes to allow for more access to the courts by more individuals. We can do more to ensure legal representation and access. I feel one issue that needs to be addressed is that, generally, many litigants are not able to afford an attorney and try to represent themselves. There needs to be more pro bono lawyers in the courthouses to serve the litigants or offer some advice on how to proceed in court. This is especially true on the civil side. More outreach needs to be done with the communities by lawyers or bar associations to inform individuals on the mechanics of the court system. The court system and the rules of procedure are complex and confusing and we need to work to ensure fairness at this level within the system. I would also like to see judicial reform addressed in how we elect and finance judges. It is very difficult to educate the voters on who is running for judge and their credentials and qualifications and the cost of reaching voters is often prohibitive to all but the wealthy or well funded. This has resulted in the election of judges by special interest groups or judges with the best name. This is not the best result given the important role judges play in our system of government.

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?

There needs to be a panel that can explore the civil system and make recommendations to the Illinois General Assembly for reform. There needs to be more communication and cooperation among lawyers especially in discovery related matters. Some lawyers abuse the process by seeking motions to compel without trying to resolve matters with the opposing counsel. Perhaps there needs to be more guidance on discovery related issues to prevent abuses. In addition, as I mentioned earlier, there needs to be more pro bono representation for individuals who cannot afford legal representation in civil matters, particularly small business defendants.

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

Many individuals are able to file actions as pro-se litigants and can ask to have the fees waived based upon their economic status. All individuals should have access to the courts but there needs to be in

place a system to monitor the filings and have Judges indicate if the matters are frivolous so a fee can be charged for future filings.

Also, the Canon of ethics prohibits an attorney from filing a frivolous lawsuit and I think the Bar Association needs to review the process for monitoring attorney actions in this area and how they enforce the ethics upon lawyers who do not follow the rules regarding filing frivolous lawsuits. All too often people are filing suit knowing that the plaintiff will settle rather than go to the expense of defending the lawsuit. This calls for legal reforms from within the system of lawyers.

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?

The Illinois Constitution does not preclude limitations on awards for civil damages. There should not be a distinction for an award of punitive damages based upon someone's economic status. The jury should take all relevant factors and the law into consideration when awarding punitive damages. If an improper action or course was taken with malicious intent then the litigant should be subject to the appropriate damages as provided by the law. As a Judge, it is my job to follow the law and give a jury proper instructions.