



Supreme Court of Illinois

Joseph R. Tybor
Director of Communications

222 North LaSalle Street, 13th Floor
Chicago, Illinois 60601
Telephone (312) 793-2323
Mobile (312) 636-0479
Fax (312) 793-0871
jtybor@illinoiscourts.gov

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ILLINOIS SUPREME COURT FILLS TWO COOK COUNTY CIRCUIT COURT VACANCIES

The Illinois Supreme Court and Justice Mary Jane Theis announced Friday the appointment of Chicago attorneys Alison C. Conlon and Rossana P. Fernandez as Cook County Circuit Judges.

Ms. Conlon was appointed by the Court to fill the at-large vacancy created by the retirement of Judge Thomas Hogan on December 31, 2014. Her appointment is effective February 2, 2015 and will terminate December 5, 2016, when the position is filled by the 2016 General Election.

In a separate order, the Supreme Court appointed Ms. Fernandez to fill the at-large vacancy created by the death of Judge Richard J. Elrod. Her appointment is effective February 2, 2015 and will terminate December 5, 2016, when the position is filled by the 2016 General Election.

Ms. Fernandez' appointment marks the first time a Hispanic woman has been appointed to the Circuit Court in Illinois. The appointment of both women increases the diversity of the judiciary in Illinois. Of the 956 currently sitting judges, there will now be 299 women, and 35 Hispanic or Latino judges—with 14 of those women.

Justice Theis recommended the appointments to the Supreme Court for the two countywide vacancies after the applicants went through a thorough screening and evaluation process, including an evaluation by the Alliance of Bar Associations and the Chicago Bar Association. Both candidates received a recommended or higher rating by the Alliance.

Further review of the applicants was also conducted by a bipartisan judicial screening committee established by Justice Theis in 2013. The judicial screening committee is co-chaired by retired U.S. District Court Judge Wayne R. Andersen and retired Illinois Appellate Court Justice Michael J. Gallagher.

"I am humbled and honored beyond belief to become the first Latina appointed to the bench by the Supreme Court of Illinois," Ms. Fernandez said. "It literally is a dream come true for me! I have been bestowed by the Supreme Court and by Justice Theis the highest trust that can be given to a person.

"This is the start of something amazing. I pledge to serve the citizens of Cook County to the best of my ability."

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Graduating from the University of Illinois with Honors in 1993, Ms. Fernandez received her *juris doctor* degree from IIT Chicago-Kent College of Law in 1996. After graduating from law school, Ms. Fernandez worked for 2 1/2 years as an associate with the firm of Galvin, Lowery & Meade, concentrating in civil litigation. She also worked with the firm of Sanchez, Daniels & Hoffman for 13 years, becoming the first Latina partner in January 2007, and remaining in that capacity for her last six years with the firm.

Since 2013, Ms. Fernandez has been the owner of the Chicago law firm of Fernandez and Associates, LLC. In her 18 years of practice, she has served as trial counsel for Fortune 500 companies in a variety of civil law cases, including transportation, automobile, premises, trucking, personal injury, property damage, DUI, coverage disputes, chancery litigation, construction negligence, and railroad defense. She attended numerous mediations, hearings, and has negotiated numerous settlements. Ms. Fernandez also served as an arbitrator (chair eligible) with the Cook County Mandatory Arbitration Program since 2000.

Throughout her legal career, Ms. Fernandez has done pro bono work. She has assisted undocumented and indigent individuals to maneuver the court system in varied capacities from answering a single question to court appearances on their behalf to resolve legal issues.

She was also instrumental in implementing the first immigration law course at Chicago-Kent College of Law.

Active in the legal community, Ms. Fernandez is a member of the Chicago Bar Association, the Illinois State Bar Association, the Women's Bar Association of Illinois; the Illinois Association of Defense Trial Counsel board of governors, the Hispanic Lawyers Association of Illinois board of governors, and the National Association of Railroad Trial Counsel.

Ms. Conlon received her *juris doctor* degree *magna cum laude* from Duke University School of Law in 2000, after earning her B.A. degree *cum laude* from Yale University. After starting her career working as a law clerk for U.S. District Judge Charles P. Kocoras, Ms. Conlon worked as an assistant corporation counsel for the City of Chicago; she subsequently worked for the Chicago law firm of Wildman, Harrold, Allen & Dixon LLP for nearly eight years, the last three years as partner.

As a partner in the Chicago office of Barnes & Thornburg LLP since 2010, Ms. Conlon focuses her practice on litigating commercial disputes, toxic tort cases and other matters for companies, municipalities and individuals.

"I am very honored by this appointment," Ms. Conlon said. "I am grateful for the confidence shown in me by the Supreme Court and by Justice Theis. Today's appointment starts an important new chapter for me in which I look forward to serving the residents of Cook County as a circuit judge."

Throughout her legal career, Ms. Conlon has been committed to *pro bono* work. Most recently, she started a firm initiative to handle *pro bono* engagements *pro se* litigants in Cook County who are nearing trial.

Ms. Conlon serves on the Hearing Board of the Illinois Attorney Registration and Disciplinary Commission. Active in legal and civic affairs, she is a member of the board of directors for the Public

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Interest Law Initiative (PILI) and an advisory board member for Catholic Charities. She previously served on the Board of Managers of the Chicago Bar Association and on the Local Rules Committee for the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois.

In 2012, Ms. Conlon was named a "Top 40 Under Forty" honoree by the Chicago Daily Law Bulletin. In 2013, Ms. Conlon received the Law Bulletin Publishing Company's "Women Making an Impact" honor as part of its 2013 edition of "Women in Law" for her professional achievements and commitment to mentoring younger lawyers.

Under the Illinois Constitution, the Supreme Court fills judicial vacancies by interim appointment until the next election. Traditionally, the three justices from the First Judicial District in Cook County rotate in recommending a candidate to the Court appointment to the Cook County Circuit Court.

The Alliance of Bar Associations for Judicial Screenings is comprised of bar groups working collaboratively to improve the process of screening judicial candidates in Cook County. The participating bar groups are: the Asian American Bar Association of the Greater Chicago Area; Black Women's Lawyers Association of Greater Chicago; Chicago Council of Lawyers; Cook County Bar Association; Decalogue Society of Lawyers; Hellenic Bar Association; Hispanic Lawyers Association of Illinois; Illinois State Bar Association; Lesbian and Gay Bar Association of Chicago; Puerto Rican Bar Association of Illinois and the Women's Bar Association of Illinois.

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(FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT: Joseph Tybor, director of communications to the Illinois Supreme Court, at 312.793.2323 or Dawn Frison Cook, senior communications specialist to the Illinois Supreme Court, at 312.793.0870)