



THE SUPREME COURT *of* OHIO

# Maureen O'Connor

## *Chief Justice*



Chief Justice **Maureen O'Connor** is the 10<sup>th</sup> Chief Justice in Ohio history and is the first woman to lead the Ohio judicial branch.

She first joined the Supreme Court of Ohio as an associate Justice in January 2003. She was re-elected in November 2008 and then as Chief Justice in 2010.

Born in the nation's capital, but raised in Strongsville and Parma, Chief Justice O'Connor's career in public service and the law spans three decades and includes service as a private lawyer, magistrate, common pleas court judge, prosecutor, and Supreme Court Justice.

She earned her bachelor of arts at Seton Hill College in 1973 before going on to earn her law degree from Cleveland-Marshall College of Law, 1980.

While gaining experience in practice as an attorney during the early 1980s, Chief Justice O'Connor created a home for her family and her legal career in Northeast Ohio. Appointed a magistrate in Summit County in 1985, she served in that capacity until becoming a common pleas court judge in 1993. As a busy trial judge, Chief Justice O'Connor was selected by her peers to serve as the administrative judge — a testament to her ability to build coalitions and maintain collegiality while administering to the business of the courts.

She resigned from the bench to become the Summit County prosecuting attorney in 1995. She was recognized for her work on behalf of crime victims, and received awards from Mothers Against Drunk Driving and Cleveland State University. As prosecutor, Chief Justice O'Connor also lobbied the General Assembly on important criminal justice reforms.

In 1998, she was elected lieutenant governor — the second-highest official in the state. She became the governor's chief advisor on criminal justice issues, serving as director of the Ohio Department of Public Safety, and as chair of Ohio's Security Task Force and the State Building Security Review Committee.

In the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks, she led the state in its response to new threats of terrorism working with law enforcement, Ohio EMA and The Department of Homeland Security.

Chief Justice O'Connor won election as Chief with more than 67 percent of the popular vote, nearly the same percentage earned in her 2008 re-election victory. Her first statewide judicial election in 2002, in which she took more than 57 percent of the vote, made her the 148<sup>th</sup> Justice to the Court, the sixth woman to join the Court and gave the Court its first-ever female majority.

*Jan. 1, 2011 - Maureen O'Connor became the first female Chief Justice and just the tenth Chief in the history of the Supreme Court of Ohio. She joined the Court in 2002, as the state's 148<sup>th</sup> Justice, which, at the time, gave the Supreme Court its first-ever female majority.*

Since being sworn in as Chief Justice in January 2011, Chief Justice O'Connor has pursued an extensive agenda for strengthening the third branch of Ohio government in a number of key areas:

- **BUDGET:** Chief Justice O'Connor appointed a task force on the judicial budget to identify the method and manner by which Ohio courts are funded, determine the long term efficacy of the current funding models, and review possible alternatives that might provide sustained and consistent funding for Ohio courts.
- **DIVERSITY:** Chief Justice O'Connor continued strong support for the Law and Leadership program that prepares the next generation of urban students to consider a career in the law, announced support for developing a diversity curriculum for judges, and has made enhancing the diversity of the bench and bar a top priority.
- **DEATH PENALTY:** In a cooperative effort between the Supreme Court of Ohio and the Ohio State Bar Association, Chief Justice O'Connor led the establishment of the Joint Task Force to Review the Administration of Ohio's Death Penalty, a group of 21 judges, prosecuting and defense attorneys, and lawmakers that is examining ways to ensure that the administration of capital punishment is fair and judicious. The group is expected to issue a report sometime in late 2012.
- **IMPARTIAL COURTS:** Recognizing the critical importance of supporting public trust in the courts, Chief Justice O'Connor has proposed a number of reforms to combat even the perception that courts are subject to political influence. Her ideas include the consideration of a nonpartisan judicial primary, support for local judicial candidate screening processes, a constitutional amendment to require the advice and consent of the Senate for gubernatorial appointments to fill Supreme Court vacancies, and other proposals.
- **COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT:** Chief Justice O'Connor is active in encouraging members of the judiciary to be active members of their communities, volunteering and engaging to support worthwhile causes while dispelling the common misconception that judges are separate and apart from the communities they serve.
- **INTERNAL EFFICIENCIES:** Chief Justice O'Connor and her colleagues on the bench have initiated a comprehensive project to use information technology to streamline the process for circulating case documents, and editing and processing opinions for release.
- **CLE:** Working with judges and the organized bar associations, Chief Justice O'Connor is spearheading an effort to reform and improve the system of continuing legal education for judges and lawyers, including expanded use of technology and distance learning.
- **COMMERCIAL DOCKETS:** Chief Justice O'Connor has been supportive of a recommendation that certain qualified courts be allowed to create separate dockets to resolve business-to-business disputes fairly and efficiently. A Supreme Court Task Force recently issued a report recommending this and other actions for supporting commercial dockets.

## **LEGAL EXPERIENCE**

Chief Justice, Supreme Court of Ohio

Elected in November 2010; term began January 1, 2011

Justice, Supreme Court of Ohio

Elected in November 2002 and began term January 2003;

Re-elected in November 2008 and began term in January 2009

Prosecuting Attorney, Summit County

Served from 1995 to 1999

Judge, Summit County Court of Common Pleas

Served from 1993 to 1995 and elected by her peers to serve as administrative judge

Magistrate, Summit County Probate Court

Appointed in 1985 and served until 1993

Attorney, private practice of law

Practiced from 1981 to 1985 and handled both criminal and civil cases

## **STATEWIDE PUBLIC SERVICE**

Lieutenant Governor and Director of the Ohio Department of Public Safety, State of Ohio

As lieutenant governor from 1999 to 2003, O'Connor also chaired the State of Ohio Security Task Force and the State Building Security Review Committee.

## **HONORS AND AWARDS**

- Founders' Award, Ohio Women's Bar Association, 2011
- Pioneer Award, Akron Bar Association, 2011
- Commencement Speaker for Seton Hill College, May 2001
- Commencement Speaker for Cleveland-Marshall College of Law, 1999
- Cleveland State University Distinguished Alumnae Award for Civic Achievement, 1997
- MADD Law Enforcement Award, Summit County, Ohio, 1997

## **EDUCATION**

- Bachelor of Arts, Seton Hill College, 1973
- Juris Doctor, Cleveland-Marshall College of Law, 1980

## **PERSONAL**

Born in 1951 in Washington, D.C. and raised in Strongsville, Ohio and Parma, Ohio

Member of St. Ann's Parish, Cleveland Heights, Ohio

Children: Alex and Ed