

NEWS RELEASE

SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA

COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO



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JUDGE KATHLEEN A. KELLY ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT AFTER OVER TWO DECADES OF JUDICIAL EXCELLENCE AND COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

After more than 21 years of distinguished service on the San Francisco Superior Court, Judge Kathleen A. Kelly will retire effective February 28, 2025. Appointed by Governor Gray Davis in 2003, Judge Kelly has left an indelible mark on the judiciary and the San Francisco community through her unwavering dedication to justice, innovation, and community engagement. She is often recognized and thanked by young people and families she has helped as she walks around the City she so deeply loves.

Presiding Judge Rochelle East praised Judge Kelly for her exemplary service to the Court and San Franciscans.

"Judge Kelly's contributions to the San Francisco Superior Court and to the city she loves are incalculable," Presiding Judge East said. "She is a respected and tireless jurist, with extraordinary knowledge and experience gained from decades of living and working in San Francisco. It is fitting that Judge Kelly considers her proudest achievement to be presiding over the Family Treatment Court, which does the difficult and often heartbreaking work of reuniting and repairing traumatized families. Her work with that court is a testimony to Judge Kelly's character and her dedication as a public servant. The Court will miss her greatly, both as a colleague and as an exceptional judge."

A Career of Judicial Excellence Across San Francisco's Courthouses

Judge Kelly is one of the few judges in San Francisco to have presided in all four courthouses: Civil, Criminal, Juvenile, and the Community Justice Center in the Tenderloin. Since 2018, she has presided over some of the Court's most significant civil trials, including cases involving employment discrimination, construction, personal injury, contracts, false claims, probate, and housing. Her ability to adapt during the COVID-19 pandemic, presiding over a complex construction trial entirely via Zoom, underscores her commitment to ensuring access to justice. In recognition of her exceptional civil trial work, Judge Kelly was named the San Francisco Trial Lawyers' 2024 Judge of the Year, with lawyers and jurors frequently praising her courtroom for its dignity, fairness, and efficiency.

Leadership in Civil Settlements and Collaborative Courts

In addition to managing civil trials, Judge Kelly was designated as a Civil Settlement Judge by the

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Court's Presiding Judges, where she successfully resolved a significant number of highly contentious cases through her expertise in problem-solving. Statewide, she is renowned for her work in collaborative courts, having served on the Judicial Council Collaborative Courts Advisory Committee under two Chief Justices and chairing its Juvenile Subcommittee. Judge Kelly's proudest accomplishment lies in her decade-long tenure as the longest-serving judge of San Francisco's pioneering Family Treatment Court. Her leadership has helped countless families achieve recovery and reunite safely with their children. Additionally, while presiding over Juvenile Justice Court, she developed model programs, organized training on critical youth issues, and established a library in the juvenile hall.

Distinguished Appellate Service and Statewide Leadership

In 2018, Judge Kelly was honored to be selected as a Justice Pro Tem for the California Court of Appeal, First Appellate District, Division One, and frequently served as an alternative member of the Superior Court's Appellate Division. Beyond her judicial assignments, she held significant leadership roles, including election to the Court's Executive Committee, serving as Vice President of the California Judges Association (CJA), and co-chairing the CJA/Bench Bar BASF Forum on Judicial Independence at the Commonwealth Club.

Judge Kelly also has demonstrated a commitment to education and mentorship, volunteering as a moot court judge, lecturing to international delegations, and presenting at numerous legal webinars, conferences, and law schools.

A Lifelong Dedication to Community Engagement

Judge Kelly's contributions extend beyond the courtroom and is reflected in her numerous leadership roles. She has served on the Board of Regents of St. Ignatius College Preparatory, co-founded the BASF Speakers in the Schools Program, and led as President of the Volunteer Auxiliary of Youth Guidance Center (now City Youth Now).

Her longstanding dedication to the San Francisco community is evident in her leadership roles with the United Way of the Bay Area and numerous other civic organizations.

Education and Early Career

Judge Kelly earned her undergraduate degree from the University of California, Berkeley, and her law degree from UC College of Law, San Francisco. Prior to her judicial career, she served as an Assistant United States Attorney, Senior Trial Attorney with the SF City Attorney's Office, a litigator in private practice, and an Adjunct Professor at the University of San Francisco School of Law. Her early achievements include receiving the Bar Association of San Francisco Barrister's Club "Barrister of the Year" Award.

Judge Kelly attributes her personal and professional successes to her 40-year marriage to Kevin Holl, a distinguished San Francisco attorney, and her two cherished daughters.

An Enduring Legacy

As Judge Kelly prepares to retire at the end of February, her extraordinary contributions to the judiciary and her community leave an enduring mark on the legal profession. Her tireless efforts to uphold justice and improve the lives of families and individuals in the community she serves ensure her legacy will continue to inspire for generations to come.

The San Francisco bench is comprised of 52 judges and one commissioner.

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