



## THE SUPREME COURT *of* OHIO



### MAUREEN O'CONNOR

CHIEF JUSTICE  
SUPREME COURT OF OHIO

On Jan. 1, 2011, Maureen O'Connor became the first female chief justice and just the 10th chief in the history of the Supreme Court of Ohio. She joined the court in 2002, as the state's 148th justice, which, at the time, gave the Supreme Court its first-ever female majority.

On the first day of January, 2017, Chief Justice O'Connor began her second full term as the head of Ohio's judiciary.

The last day of her current term is Dec. 31, 2022.

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Chief Justice **Maureen O'Connor** is the 10th chief justice and the first woman in Ohio history to lead the Ohio judicial branch.

Since she took office in 2011, Chief Justice O'Connor has led significant reforms and improvements in the Ohio judicial system, including improving access to justice by addressing the impact that court fines, fees, and bail practices have on economically disadvantaged communities, an issue she focuses on as co-chair of the National Task Force on Fees, Fines and Bail Practices. She also is president of the Conference of Chief Justices (CCJ) and chair of the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) Board of Directors.

In addition, in 2016, she started an effort to address the opiate/heroin epidemic by gathering legal experts and state court officials from nine surrounding states to determine ways to address the issue on a regional basis. She also established a task force to maintain public trust and confidence in grand juries, created a committee to examine the administration of the death penalty, and proposed improvements to strengthen judicial elections in Ohio.

She joined the Supreme Court of Ohio as a justice in January 2003, and was re-elected in November 2008. She was elected chief justice in 2010, and was re-elected to a second, and final, six-year term in 2016.

Her first statewide judicial election in 2002, in which she took more than 57 percent of the vote, made her the 148th justice to the court, the sixth woman to join the court, and gave the court its first-ever female majority.

Born in the nation's capital and 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 degree at Seton Hill College in 1973 before going on to earn her law degree from Cleveland-Marshall College of Law in 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. There, she aggressively prosecuted repeat offenders, violent criminals, and public officials who committed ethical violations or improprieties, and lobbied the General Assembly for tougher laws on rape and gang-related offences. Her untiring work received accolades from victims' rights groups and educational institutions, and earned awards from Mothers Against Drunk Driving and Cleveland State University. In 1998, she was elected lieutenant governor – the second-highest official in the state. She became the governor's chief adviser 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 by working with law enforcement, Ohio EMA, and the Department of Homeland Security, efforts that garnered the praise of federal homeland security officials.

Chief Justice O'Connor also has raised two adult sons, Alex and Ed Kipp, and has five grandchildren.

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Chief Justice O'Connor has pursued an extensive agenda for strengthening the third branch of Ohio government in a number of key areas:

- **DEBTORS' PRISONS:** In 2016, Chief Justice O'Connor was named co-chair of the National Task Force on Fines, Fees and Bail Practices, created by the Conference of Chief Justices and the Conference of State Court Administrators, to address the ongoing impact that court fines, fees, and bail practices have on economically disadvantaged communities across the United States. In addition, under Chief Justice O'Connor's leadership, the Supreme Court has created and disseminated bench cards to better educate judges and court personnel about appropriate financial sanctions and obligations that can be levied in court.
- **GRAND JURIES:** In 2016, Chief Justice O'Connor named an 18-member Task Force to Examine Improvements to the Ohio Grand Jury System to maintain the public's trust and confidence in grand juries. The group's 11 recommendations included those to grant the Ohio Attorney General's Office exclusive authority to investigate and, if necessary, prosecute police lethal use of force cases; establish a process for the release of the grand jury record under limited circumstances, create education and outreach programs, and strengthen grand jury independence.
- **ACCESS TO JUSTICE:** Chief Justice O'Connor charged the Supreme Court's Task Force on Access to Justice with identifying obstacles to accessing the civil justice system in Ohio. The task force issued 11 recommendations in April 2015, which included more funding and higher fees for out-of-state attorneys to fund civil legal aid work.
- **JUDICIAL ELECTIONS:** After two years of study, Chief Justice O'Connor and partner organizations in 2015 launched JudicialVotesCount.org to better educate Ohio voters about what judges do and why it is important to all citizens. The website implemented a comprehensive statewide nonpartisan voter information and engagement effort to provide a centralized repository so voters can gain easy access to more information about judges and judicial candidates with an ultimate goal of elevating meaningful voter participation levels in judicial elections.
- **TECHNOLOGY/INNOVATION:** Chief Justice O'Connor led efforts to assist local courts with their technology needs by implementing the Ohio Courts Technology Initiative in 2015. More than \$5 million in grants have been awarded to local courts to upgrade technology that ensures the efficient and effective administration of justice. The Court also encouraged local courts to apply for up to \$75,000 in Innovation grant funding for projects that further the cause of justice.
- **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, to examine ways to ensure the administration of capital punishment is fair and judicious. The group issued a final report containing 56 recommendations on 2014.
- **CLE:** Working with judges and the organized bar associations, Chief Justice O'Connor led an effort to reform and improve the system of continuing legal education for judges and lawyers, including expanded use of technology and distance learning. The new rules went into effect in 2014.
- **COMMERCIAL DOCKETS:** Chief Justice O'Connor led the effort to establish rules that allow certain qualified courts to create separate dockets to resolve business-to-business disputes fairly and efficiently. The rules went into effect in 2013, and commercial dockets are now successfully operating in Hamilton and Lucas counties.

## LEGAL EXPERIENCE

### Chief Justice, Supreme Court of Ohio

- Elected in November 2010; term began Jan. 1, 2011
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- Re-elected in November 2016; term began Jan. 1, 2017

#### **Justice, Supreme Court of Ohio**

- Elected in November 2002; term began January 2003
- Re-elected in November 2008; term began 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; 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, Chief Justice O'Connor also chaired the State of Ohio Security Task Force and the State Building Security Review Committee

### **HONORS AND AWARDS**

- Esther Brocker Award, Capital University Law School, 2015
- Dr. Bennett J. Cooper Award, Ohio Justice Alliance for Community Corrections, 2015
- Public Service Award, Ohio Association for Civil Trial Attorneys, 2014
- Honorary Doctor of Laws, University of Akron School of Law, 2013
- Commencement Speaker for the University of Akron School of Law, 2013
- Alumnus of the Year, Cleveland-Marshall College of Law, 2012
- Founders' Award, Ohio Women's Bar Association, 2011
- Pioneer Award, Akron Bar Association, 2011
- Irish Legal 100, 2010
- 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

### **PROFESSIONAL**

Member, Board of Directors, Conference of Chief Justices

### **PERSONAL**

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

Member, St. Vincent de Paul, Akron, Ohio

Children: Alex and Ed

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