

My Career Narrative: A Story of Unique Preparation to Serve as Judge of Probate

In my varied and lengthy legal career, I have developed skills that have uniquely prepared me to become an excellent Judge of Probate. These skills go well beyond my significant litigation and probate law experience and include a deep grounding in legal theory derived from leadership roles in policy and statute drafting and advocacy. Further, I have a wealth of important experience managing public finance and operations to aid in running the court efficiently. Finally, in over more than 22 years in positions of public trust and volunteer elected office, I have proved myself to be fair, patient, tolerant, compassionate, empathetic, and nonpartisan, at times when these qualities have mattered most. I am the most prepared and competent candidate in this race to serve successfully as the next Judge of Probate in the 34th Probate District. My career narrative is below.

I became a licensed attorney in 1997 and have maintained my license for over 28 years. During that time, I spent over eleven years as an active civil trial lawyer, representing clients in courts throughout Connecticut, including the probate courts. That included jury trials, bench trials, practice in administrative agencies such as the Workers' Comp Commission, extensive motion practice, extensive civil procedure, extensive experience negotiating legal claims in the context of active civil suits, alternative dispute resolution, and private negotiations. My law firm included a range of practice areas, with a strong focus on family law (including regular encounters in the probate courts), personal injury (also including encounters in the probate courts), Workers' Compensation litigation, and Will preparation. I remained a partner and/or Of Counsel to that firm until 2017.

Beginning in 2011, I was a co-founding member of a Guilford-based limited liability company in the spirits industry (doing business as Single Cask Nation). In addition to being part owner of the company, I served as Secretary and General Counsel, the company's chief legal officer. I conducted company formation legalities, negotiated contracts, managed risk, and helped navigate the company's growth and compliance in a highly regulated industry. I sold my interest in that company in 2018 and at that time discontinued my legal role.

In 2008, I was hired by then Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz (now Lieutenant Governor) to direct the Commercial Recording Division at the Office of the Secretary of the State of Connecticut. This division (now called the Business Services Division) serves the crucial and high-visibility function of maintaining the business entities record and the UCC record (commercial filings) of the state. The Director position requires applicants to hold a law degree because the position is law-intensive and because the Director oversees a staff of lawyers, paralegals, and License & Applications Analysts, among other staff designations. I served as liaison to the Attorney General's Office on many matters, including litigation, the negotiation of

interagency Memoranda of Understanding, policy interpretation and application, collective bargaining and staff disciplinary matters, and other legal matters.

In that role, I would regularly appear before the Connecticut General Assembly to provide testimony as the Secretary's designee, on matters such as supporting or opposing various policies or bills, and in support of the agency budget request, for example. I provided testimony in support of funding one of the earliest instances of Business One Stop in the country; an online portal that I conceived to aid business formation. The Connecticut Online Business Startup Tool won an international innovation award in 2014.

While in that role I also served as the Secretary's Designee to the Business Law Section of the Connecticut Bar Association. I became a member of the Executive Committee of the Business Law Section for several years and I led a team of lawyers in drafting the Article 2 Filing provisions of the 2017 revision of the CT Limited Liability Company Act. I received a signing pen from the Governor for my work in getting that law drafted and adopted. I also served on a Law Revision Commission Legal Advisory Committee of the CT General Assembly that adopted the 2011 revisions of UCC Revised Article 9.

In addition to the copious legal work I managed and conducted in my role as Director of the Business Services Division, I was also directly responsible for the day-to-day management of the division's business affairs. I managed the budget and HR matters (in collaboration with the agency HR Manager), directed procurement for the division (a highly technical legal process under state law), oversaw automation projects and the development of administrative, automated, and policy-based efficiencies, and developed the vision for the division's operations, among other things. While there for almost nine years, I reduced my division's annual budget by a basis of over \$4M/year and managed a reduction in force of over 30% through attrition and hiring freezes during the Great Recession, while also vanquishing historic backlogs that existed when I was hired for the role. My work earned me two nominations for State Manager of the Year.

I left the Office of the Secretary of the State in 2016 to take a job in sales with a software development company that sells multimillion dollar software systems to Secretaries of State around the country. Because I was selling systems that manage elections, voter registration, campaign finance, and business/UCC registry, I had to deploy legal knowledge on a daily basis. I was a subject matter expert who often advised Secretaries and their staff on the legal aspects of the automated systems I sold. I had to research and analyze the laws of other states and communicate them to the development team to match our software to the policy and statutory requirements of the various client states. Moreover, I was required to help manage contract risk through negotiated Legal Terms & Conditions of all of the contracts I sold. I was also responsible for drafting and obtaining executed documents such as Nondisclosure Agreements and Teaming

Agreements with other companies we collaborated with on proposals and contracts. I had responsibility for continuing account management after making a sale, so I needed to regularly interpret contract provisions and ensure the company was compliant. Finally, automation sales to state agencies require intensive research, understanding, and knowledge of procurement law, which was a competitive advantage I brought to my sales practice.

I formed my own sales partnership in June 2020 to provide outsourced sales to software development companies. I was doing all the same work described above, but I needed to research the law in many new markets beyond just the Secretaries of State market. As such, I employed legal research, policy and statute analysis, and compliance analysis and obedience on a broader scale, exercising and advancing my legal skills intensively. Further, as Managing Partner of this new venture, I had to wear many hats. One hat that fell on my shoulders was to again serve as the chief legal officer of the partnership. This included business formation, compliance, contracting, procurement, risk management, etc.

Upon determining to run for the position of Judge of Probate, I have wound up my business partnership and opened my new law office. Legalities were involved in winding up the partnership, and additional legalities were involved in forming my new law practice. Probate judges are severely limited in their ability to practice probate law. My new practice is devoted to Environmental and Land Use law. I opened Klaskin Law Office in New Haven in July and already have several clients, most of which will likely have litigated matters before the superior court, federal district court, and administrative agencies. With my new practice established, I will be able to manage my caseload growth to allow me to easily meet the obligations of being a judge. That is a distinct advantage, versus potentially having to shed clients and cases after becoming a judge.

In addition to the law serving as an avocation over the past 28+ years, I have deployed my legal expertise in the public interest through devoted volunteerism in elected office and appointed positions in service to my community and my state. I have served in elected offices in Madison, Connecticut, for over 22 years, first as an elected member of the Zoning Board of Appeals for two terms, and then serving for sixteen of the past eighteen years on the Board of Education. I have served as Chair of the Board of Ed for almost five years, and before that I served for many years as a member of the Executive Committee, the founding chair of the Facilities Committee, and for many terms as the chair or a member of the Policy Committee. During one of those terms as Policy Chair, I led a comprehensive audit and update of the BOE policies. As Chair of the BOE, I reached across the aisle to appoint a Policy Chair from “the other political party” and I have supported her work to accomplish another modernization of our BOE policies. I continue to sit as an ex officio member of that committee. Furthermore, I have served in many appointed roles in town such as a member of the New School Building Committee for Neck River

Elementary School (a highly successful project that came in on time and under budget), an appointed member of the Town Strategic Vision committee, and others.

In many instances, I brought my legal skills, knowledge, and experience to bear in support of my volunteer work. For example, my legal practice has been helpful in my understanding of complex construction contracts, board and school district risk management and liability avoidance, procurement contracting, transportation contracting, insurance contracting, budgeting, bonding and referendum law, collective bargaining law, procedural due process and substantive education law at expulsion, residence, or other hearings, FOIA and FERPA laws, and other matters.

As a member of the Board of Directors of the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE), I have been a leader in advocacy in Hartford, advocating for local control of policy and curriculum, as well as advocating against unfunded education mandates. My advocacy in these areas would often run counter to popular legislative initiatives in Hartford, showing my comfort with eschewing partisan politics for the good of my primary constituents, the students in high performing districts like Madison and Guilford.

Since 2019, I have been a member of the CT General Assembly's Data Analysis Technology Advisory Board (DATA Board), where I helped draft and continue to update the state's Data Policy, adopted in 2020.

I have also donated pro bono legal services to help local organizations obtain nonprofit status, including Daniel Hand Vibe Show Choir and Artful Living (a community theater based in Killingworth).

I entered the practice of law in 1997. There are many different career paths in the law. Since 1997, I have employed intense legal practice in the private sector, as a government lawyer in the public trust, as an entrepreneur and chief legal counsel for two businesses, in my law-adjacent sales career, and, yes, in the probate courts of Connecticut, all without gaps in the application of my legal skills and often overlapping. I have been an acknowledged state and local leader in drafting law and policy, and I have been ever active in promoting and opposing legislation in Hartford. I am a member of the Bar of the Connecticut Superior Court and a member of the Bar of the United States Supreme Court. In my prior litigation practice, I also maintained a membership in the Bar of the US District Court for the District of Connecticut. In all my years of practice, I have never faced a disciplinary action, Grievance, or malpractice claim (let alone a malpractice lawsuit).

As a practical matter, judges need to understand how to analyze and apply legal principles and laws. Significantly, Superior Court judges are assigned to different dockets without regard to whether they ever practiced in those areas. They are expected to analyze the law and apply

legal principles in legal disciplines they are learning while on the bench. Similarly, there is no requirement that a Judge of Probate comes to the bench with any probate or litigation experience whatsoever. In fact, until 2011, probate judges were not even required to hold a law degree in Connecticut. All newly elected probate judges are required to undergo the same intensive training before they take the bench. As one might conclude after reviewing my extensive law practice background, I clearly exceed any reasonable expectation for legal knowledge, skill, and experience required to serve well as a probate judge.

What is a better predictor of whether a lawyer will make a good probate judge is not whether they have any probate practice experience or litigation experience (I have plenty of both). Rather, a good probate judge needs to be adept at managing a docket and managing the business affairs of the court, in order to ensure the efficient administration of justice in their district. They need to bring broad life experience and an appropriate disposition to the bench. Because the litigants before a probate court are often experiencing the distress of a loss or the need to provide guardianship for a child, or to establish a conservatorship for an aging parent or an adult child who lacks the capacity to manage their affairs, for example, and because many of them are not represented by legal counsel, judges of probate must exhibit the qualities of patience, tolerance, caring, compassion, and empathy. Judges need to be able to analyze and apply the law to the cases before them. A strong legal theory background rooted in policy analysis and drafting helps a judge to analyze and apply the law fairly.

In combination, my legal experience and public administration experience will ensure that I can apply the law and manage not only the docket, but the business of the court, administering justice efficiently for the citizens of Guilford and Madison. As important, in over 22 years in offices of public trust, I have exhibited the “people skills” and disposition necessary to be a fair, compassionate, respectful, and dignified judge. My significant policy experience will ensure the fair and appropriate administration of justice. I am tested and proven in the areas that make an excellent Judge of Probate, and I respectfully submit that I am uniquely and superbly qualified to become Judge Peter Barrett’s successor.