



**Presiding Justice Kathleen E. O'Leary
from the Fourth Appellate District,
Division Three, to celebrate 40 years as
a California Judicial Officer**

September 30, 2021

Presiding Justice Kathleen E. O'Leary of the California Court of Appeal, Fourth Appellate District, Division Three will celebrate 40 years as a California judicial officer on October 2, 2021.

Governor Edmund G. Brown, Jr., appointed Justice O'Leary to the West Orange County Municipal Court on October 2, 1981. Governor George Deukmejian appointed her to the Orange County Superior Court five years later. In 1997, her colleagues elected her Presiding Judge of the Orange County Superior Court, making her the first woman in Orange County to hold that position. Her colleagues reelected her to that position two more times.

In 1999, Governor Gray Davis appointed her to serve as an Associate Justice of the California Court of Appeal, Fourth Appellate District, Division Three. She began her term in January 2000.

In 2011, Governor Brown appointed her to serve as Presiding Justice of the California Court of Appeal, Fourth Appellate District, Division Three. The California State Bar Commission on Judicial Nominees Evaluation rated Justice O'Leary "exceptionally well qualified" and her appointment was unanimously confirmed by the Commission on Judicial Appointments on February 10, 2012. Justice O'Leary became the first woman to hold this position in Orange County.

Justice O'Leary has dedicated her career to improving court administration and access to justice for all. She served for three years as a member of the Judicial Council of California, the body responsible for improving the administration of justice in California. She served as Co-Chair of the Judicial Council's Committee on Providing Access and Fairness and served as the Chair of the Judicial Council's Committee on Financial Accountability and Efficiency. She was a member of the Executive Committee of the Commission on the Future of the Courts and chaired its internal sub-committee on Fiscal and Administrative issues. As the Presiding Justice of the California Court of Appeal, she has led the court through the COVID-19

pandemic ensuring the court has remained open and operational while also working to provide a safe workplace for justices and court employees.

Associate Justice Richard D. Fybel said of Justice O’Leary: “Our colleague Justice O’Leary (“K.O.” to all) has served with great distinction as our division’s Presiding Justice for almost 10 years. We are grateful for and appreciate her leadership, expertise, ethics, devotion to court staff, good cheer, and outstanding service to the Bar and the community, both locally in Orange County and statewide. K.O. has also excelled as a justice in authoring and contributing to important opinions. Congratulations, my friend, on your 40th anniversary of extraordinary service to us and to California.”

While serving as Presiding Judge of the Orange County Superior Court, she oversaw the unification of the county’s superior and municipal courts. She also led that court through the aftermath of the Orange County bankruptcy and transition to state funding for the courts. Former Chief Executive Officer of the Orange County Superior Court Alan Slater commented on Justice O’Leary’s work during those unprecedented challenges. “I was so fortunate to have Justice O’Leary’s calm and steady leadership during this time of turmoil and uncertainty. Her leadership efforts have been well recognized, and it has been clear over the years that Justice O’Leary has been one of the ‘go to’ leaders who can be counted onto tackle the toughest issues with great skill, diplomacy, and grace.”

Justice O’Leary served as the first Chair of the Task Force on Self-Represented Litigants, which was charged with developing an action plan to improve the way courts function for self-represented litigants. The Task Force’s recommendations resulted in dedicated funding, court rules and judicial canons, and continuing education to ensure self-represented litigants can fairly and efficiently access the courts. As an Associate Justice of the California Court of Appeal, she worked to ensure the Court of Appeal remained in the county’s seat of government when it was deciding on a new location to ensure everyone had access to the appellate court. She currently serves as the California Supreme Court’s Chairperson of the Jury Selection Work Group studying changes or new measures to guard against impermissible discrimination in jury selection.

Associate Justice Laurie D. Zelon stated the following about Justice O'Leary's work on access to justice issues: "Justice O'Leary's tenure on the bench has been marked by her commitment to equal access to the courts-and to justice-for all who come before the courts. Her pioneering work for self-represented litigants has made the promise of equal access more of a reality for so many who must come into our justice system without the advantage of counsel. Her belief that not economics, nor language barriers, nor other circumstances beyond people's control should keep them from a full and fair opportunity to be heard and have their issues resolved, has guided so much of her work, and has, in turn, brought others into partnership towards the same end. Many Californians, whose names she does not know, and who do not know hers, have been given a voice and had their lives made better because of her work."

In recognition of her work promoting access to justice and improving court administration, Justice O'Leary has received many prestigious awards during her judicial career, including the following: California Judicial Council's Jurist of the Year Award (1999); Orange County Bar Association's Franklin G. West Award (2006); Aranda Access to Justice Award (2007); and California Women Lawyers' Joan Dempsey Klein Award (2014). She has also been recognized by the Hispanic Bar Association of Orange County (1998), the Orange County Asian America Bar Association (2001), and the Orange County Lavender Bar Association (2014).

Justice O'Leary graduated from Loyola Marymount University and received her juris doctorate degree from Southwestern University School of Law.