



**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA**

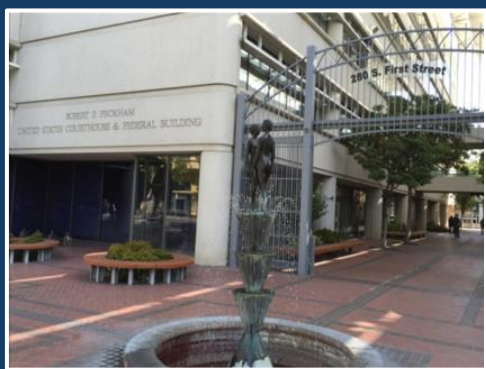
CONSENTING TO THE JURISDICTION OF A MAGISTRATE JUDGE



SAN FRANCISCO



OAKLAND



SAN JOSE



MCKINLEYVILLE

YVONNE GONZALEZ ROGERS
Chief District Judge

MARK B. BUSBY
Clerk of Court

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A MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF JUDGE OF THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

Welcome to the United States District Court for the Northern District of California where some of the most cutting edge and important cases are litigated. In order to provide timely services across a broad spectrum of cases, the District relies heavily on the incredible work of our premier magistrate judges. Whether as a party to a lawsuit or as an attorney, I encourage you to familiarize yourself with their backgrounds and to consider consenting to have a magistrate judge handle all aspects of your case, up to and including dispositive motions, jury or court trial, and the entry of judgment.

In a 2024 review, the Administrative Office of the Courts wrote that our magistrate judge program is considered to be the “national model for magistrate judge utilization” and found that we ranked “first in the nation” for the number of consent cases.

By way of background, the Northern District was one of the first federal trial courts in the country to assign a wide range of civil cases directly to magistrate judges upon filing. As a consequence, the magistrate judges of our district have direct experience with nearly all types of civil matters filed in our court. Because our court is very busy, agreeing to proceed before a magistrate judge often means that the case will be resolved more quickly than if the case remained before a district judge. If the case must be tried, your trial date will be more certain and less likely to be continued to accommodate a felony jury trial. While consent is customarily given soon after a case is filed, parties may consent to have a magistrate judge preside over their case at any point in the proceedings and may choose the magistrate judge.

Every magistrate judge in the Northern District underwent a highly competitive selection process and had years of experience before being appointed to the bench. Given the nature of the work and the ability to preside over their own consent cases, we attract the best of candidates dedicated to public service.

As the following biographies demonstrate, many magistrate judges in our district are active in law school teaching and continuing legal education for attorneys. Many have been appointed to important committees within the circuit and national governing bodies, and all are active in local court governance.

Each has been appointed based on detailed, confidential feedback from the bar and the community, and each is equipped to handle the full range of issues presented to our court. Combined, the Northern District’s magistrate judges bring thousands of hours of federal judicial experience to their work at our court.

Thank you for your consideration.

HOW CONSENT JURISDICTION WORKS

Under a law passed by Congress in 1976, the parties in a civil action in federal district court have the option of consenting to have the case handled by a United States magistrate judge. Magistrate judges are appointed by the district judges of each district court following a competitive merit selection process and serve for terms of eight years. Magistrate judges may be reappointed only after a rigorous review of their work that includes community input. In contrast, district judges are appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate and serve without term limits.

With the exception of certain types of cases (including capital habeas corpus cases, securities class actions, and bankruptcy appeals), when a civil action is filed in the Northern District of California, it is randomly assigned to either a district judge or a magistrate judge. For every case assigned to a magistrate judge, all parties (that is, all plaintiffs and all defendants) are asked to consent to have the case handled by a magistrate judge all the way through trial. The parties are encouraged to make a decision regarding magistrate judge jurisdiction as soon as possible and no later than the first case management conference (about 100 days after the case is filed). If any party does not consent, the case is reassigned to a district judge.

If all parties consent to magistrate judge jurisdiction, then the assigned magistrate judge presides over all aspects of the case and any appeals from the magistrate judge's rulings are made directly to the Court of Appeals.

Sometimes cases initially assigned to district judges are reassigned to magistrate judges because all parties consent to magistrate judge jurisdiction. The district judge may invite the parties at the initial case management conference to consider consenting to the jurisdiction of a magistrate judge, and the parties may take that opportunity to do so.

The magistrate judges of the Northern District handle hundreds of civil cases every year. Each magistrate judge has an assigned courtroom and dedicated staff, including a courtroom deputy and law clerks. Because of their diverse professional experiences before and during their service as judges, this court's magistrate judges are well-qualified to preside over all types of civil litigation.

Consenting to magistrate judge jurisdiction is straightforward: The Court provides a one-page form for parties to file in their case and that form has a check-box for a party to indicate their consent or declination to magistrate judge jurisdiction. The form is available at the Court's website at <https://cand.uscourts.gov/rules-forms-fees/forms>.

LAWS AND COURT RULES ON MAGISTRATE JUDGE JURISDICTION

Federal Magistrate Act of 1979, 28 U.S.C § 636(c)(1)
Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 73
Northern District of California Civil Local Rule 73

MAGISTRATE JUDGES OF THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

SAN FRANCISCO COURTHOUSE

450 Golden Gate Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94102 | (415) 522-2000

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OAKLAND COURTHOUSE

1301 Clay Street, Oakland, CA 94612 | (510) 637-3530

<u>Magistrate Judge Ajay S. Krishnan</u>	10
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SAN JOSE COURTHOUSE

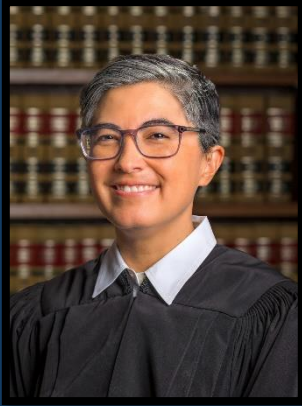
280 South 1st Street, Room 2112, San Jose, CA 95113 | (408) 535-5363

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MCKINLEYVILLE COURTHOUSE

3140 Boeing Avenue, McKinleyville, CA 95519 | (707) 445-3612

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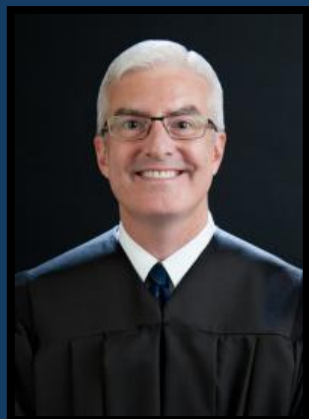
MAGISTRATE JUDGE LISA J. CISNEROS

San Francisco
Appointed 2022

Magistrate Judge Lisa J. Cisneros joined the Court in September 2022, following fifteen years of practice as a litigator and attorney in government and public service. Since her appointment she has presided as a trial, discovery and settlement judge in cases involving areas of law such as employment, copyright, trade secret, trademark, civil rights and insurance. Judge Cisneros currently serves on the Local Rules and Community Education committees of the Court. In addition, she has participated in a variety of panels and presented at the Sedona Conference Working Group on eDiscovery and Electronic Document Management. The Barristers Club of the Bar Association of San Francisco has awarded Judge Cisneros with the Annual Tara L. Riedley Barristers Choice Award.

Immediately prior to joining the bench, she was a Deputy Attorney General at the California Department of Justice, where she represented the State of California and its agencies in complex affirmative and defensive litigation. She also led federal regulatory advocacy on behalf of the California Attorney General's Office, often in coalition with other states, and managed investigations to enforce the California Child Abuse and Neglect Act. Earlier in her career, she clerked for U.S. District Judge Claudia Wilken, and practiced at Lieff Cabraser Heimann & Bernstein, LLP and California Rural Legal Assistance, Inc. In 2017, she was appointed by Governor Jerry Brown as a member of the California Fair Employment & Housing Council, where she promulgated regulations and conducted hearings.

Judge Cisneros earned her law degree from UC Berkeley School of Law and her undergraduate degree with honors from Brown University.



MAGISTRATE JUDGE THOMAS S. HIXSON

San Francisco
Appointed 2018

Magistrate Judge Thomas S. Hixson joined the Court in 2018 following nearly 20 years as a litigator in private practice in San Francisco.

Before taking the bench, Judge Hixson was a partner at Morgan, Lewis & Bockius, LLP, and before then an associate and then partner at Bingham McCutchen LLP, and prior to that an associate at McCutchen, Doyle, Brown & Enersen, LLP. His practice encompassed complex litigation in federal and state courts in fields including intellectual property, antitrust and unfair competition, energy regulation, water management and telecommunications.

Judge Hixson is a past Chair of the California State Bar Antitrust and Unfair Competition Law Section (now the Antitrust, UCL and Privacy Section of the California Lawyers Association). He has contributed to the Section's treatise, *California State Antitrust & Unfair Competition Law*, published by Matthew Bender.

His pro bono work while in private practice included serving as counsel in a complex challenge to telecommunications marketing practices before the California Public Utilities Commission and assisting tenants facing eviction via the San Francisco Superior Court's Housing Negotiation Project. He also served on the Board of Directors of the AIDS Legal Referral Panel.

Judge Hixson earned his undergraduate and law degrees, both magna cum laude, from Harvard. The year after graduating from law school, he served as a law clerk to Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals Judge A. Wallace Tashima in Pasadena.



MAGISTRATE JUDGE PETER H. KANG

San Francisco
Appointed 2023

Magistrate Judge Peter H. Kang joined the Court in 2023 after a thirty-two year career as a trial attorney and litigator. During his career, he worked on complex civil cases in federal and state courts nationwide, the International Trade Commission, and the Patent Trial and Appeal Board. He was trial counsel in 17 bench and jury trials (including lead trial counsel in 8 trials to verdict).

Judge Kang serves the Court as Chair of the Pro Bono Projects Committee, as well as on the Patent Local Rules Advisory Committee. He also served the Court on the Security Committee, and he is a member of the Federal Magistrate Judges Association's International Committee.

Immediately prior to taking the bench, Judge Kang was a Partner at Baker Botts L.L.P., where he was Head of the First-Generation Professionals Group and Co-Head of the Korea Practice Group. He started private practice at the IP boutique Skjerven Morrill LLP in San Jose, CA (eventually becoming Managing Partner of the San Francisco office). After Skjerven, he was a Partner at Sidley Austin LLP and was one of the founding partners of that firm's Palo Alto office. Judge Kang litigated complex disputes, including patent, antitrust, contract, product defect, unfair competition, employment, trade secret, copyright, and trademark/false advertising cases.

Before private practice, Judge Kang served as Law Clerk for U.S. District Judge Ernest C. Torres of the District of Rhode Island. He was an Arbitrator with the American Arbitration Association. He served as a settlement officer for San Francisco and Santa Clara Superior Courts and in federal lawsuits. His work as a neutral covered a wide range, including contract/commercial paper, real estate, construction, personal property, IP, finance/banking, and personal injury.

Judge Kang was ranked by *Chambers* (Band 1 rankings), the *Legal 500*, and *Who's Who Legal*. He was a Senior Fellow of Litigation Counsel of America and received the Asian-American Bar Association's Commitment to Diversity Award. He served as President of the International Association of Korean Lawyers and on the Board of the Asia-Pacific American Bar Association of Silicon Valley. In 2024, he received the Korean-American Bar Association's Trailblazer Award.

Judge Kang received his B.S. in Industrial Engineering (1987) and his B.A. in Classics (1986) from Stanford University (where he received both the Fairclough Award and the Senior Prize). He received his J.D. *cum laude* from Georgetown University Law Center in 1990 where he served as a Law Fellow and as Head Coach of the Wagner Moot Court Team (national quarterfinalists).



MAGISTRATE JUDGE SALLIE KIM

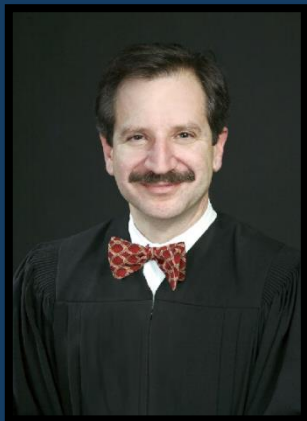
San Francisco
Appointed 2015

Magistrate Judge Sallie Kim brings a broad range of civil and criminal litigation experience to the bench, with a special emphasis on civil cases in federal court.

Judge Kim graduated from Princeton University in 1986 and from Stanford Law School in 1989. Upon graduation from law school, she served as a law clerk to United States District Judge Spencer Williams of the Northern District of California. She then entered private civil litigation practice in Palo Alto. From 1995-99, Judge Kim served as Associate and Assistant Dean for Student Affairs at Stanford Law School, after which she returned to private civil litigation practice and became a partner with the law firm of GCA Law Partners, LLP in 2002. She practiced at GCA Law Partners until she joined the Court in 2015.

Judge Kim's recent professional activities outside of regular civil litigation practice have included service in the following capacities: Co-Director of the Trial Advocacy Program and Lecturer in Law at Stanford Law School beginning in 2014; the Interim Title IX Coordinator for Stanford University in 2013 and 2014; and Volunteer Deputy District Attorney for Santa Clara County for 14 weeks in 2010.

Judge Kim currently serves on the Ninth Circuit Jury Instruction Committee.



MAGISTRATE JUDGE JOSEPH C. SPERO

San Francisco
Appointed 1999

Magistrate Judge Joseph C. Spero was appointed in 1999 and served as Chief Magistrate Judge for eight years. He presided as a trial judge in criminal and civil cases in a variety of subject areas, including patent and other intellectual property, employment, civil rights, commercial contract, and federal misdemeanor cases. He has also served as a settlement judge in over 1500 cases.

Judge Spero has served on the court's Executive Committee, as Chair of the court's Reentry Committee and of the Diversion Committee, as Chair of the court's Technology Committee, and as Liaison Judge for Pretrial Services and Probation. He also has served on various circuit and national committees including the Magistrate Judges Advisory Group of the Administrative Office of the Courts, the Magistrate Judge Executive Board, and the Capital Case Committee of the Ninth Circuit.

A 1981 graduate of Columbia University School of Law, he clerked for the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. He worked as an associate at Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom, and as an associate then partner at Coblenz, Cahen, McCabe & Breyer (now Coblenz, Patch, Duffy & Bass).

While in private practice, he trained as a mediator at Harvard Law School and served as a mediator in the Northern District's Alternative Dispute Resolution Program. He also served as a Judge Pro-Tem for the San Francisco County Superior Court.

Judge Spero served as pro bono counsel in a variety of cases. He received the Thurgood Marshall Award from the Bar Association of the City of New York.



MAGISTRATE JUDGE ALEX G. TSE

San Francisco
Appointed 2020

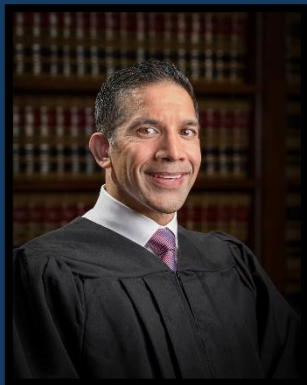
Magistrate Judge Alex G. Tse joined the Court in January 2020 after serving nearly twenty years in various positions with the United States Attorney's Office, including an interim appointment as the United States Attorney for the Northern District of California. Judge Tse began his legal career in 1990 in private practice. As a judge, he has presided over civil cases through bench and jury trials, and settlement conferences.

In 1994, he became an Assistant United States Attorney in the Civil Division, where he defended the federal government in civil cases, and pursued civil actions against defendants who defrauded the government.

In 2001, Judge Tse became a Deputy Chief of the Civil Division. In late 2006, Judge Tse left the United States Attorney's Office and in 2007 took a position as an Assistant Chief City Attorney for the City and County of San Francisco, where for over five years he led the team of Deputy City Attorneys charged with investigating and abating public nuisances. In late 2012, Judge Tse returned to the U.S. Attorney's Office as the Chief of the Civil Division. In 2016, he became the First Assistant United States Attorney.

In 2016, he received a Special Commendation from the Civil Division of the U.S. Department of Justice, and he received a Director's Award for Superior Performance from the Executive Office of U.S. Attorneys in 2017. After completing his service in various leadership positions in the U.S. Attorney's Office, Judge Tse spent almost a year, in 2019, as a line prosecutor in the General Crimes section.

Prior to joining the bench, he served on various court committees in the Northern District of California, and served for several years as a volunteer court appointed mediator and early neutral evaluator. Judge Tse is a graduate of the University of California at Berkeley, and of the University of California, College of the Law, San Francisco (formerly Hastings College of the Law).



MAGISTRATE JUDGE AJAY S. KRISHNAN

Oakland
Appointed 2026

Magistrate Judge Ajay Krishnan joined the Court in 2026, following twenty-three years of practice as a litigator. He spent the bulk of his career at Keker, Van Nest & Peters, LLP, where he practiced for twenty years and served as a partner for the past fifteen. During that time, he tried more than a dozen cases, with a practice that included litigation in federal and state courts, before administrative agencies, and in arbitration. During his last ten years in private practice, he represented plaintiffs and defendants in roughly equal measure.

As a litigator, he handled a broad range of complex cases, including intellectual property disputes—spanning patent, copyright, trademark, and trade secret litigation—contract disputes, business torts, securities cases, class actions, and complex personal injury cases, among others. He also maintained a vigorous civil rights practice, representing clients in both individual and high-impact civil rights cases.

In 2017, he received the California Lawyer Attorney of the Year award for his work on *Cisco v. Arista*, a case involving the intellectual property rights associated with the commands used to program the vast majority of network routers. In 2023, he and his team at Keker, Van Nest & Peters received the Champion of Justice Award from the Center for Justice and Accountability for their work on *Camps v. Bravo*, a wrongful death case against one of the perpetrators of the 1972 Trelew Massacre, in which sixteen political prisoners were killed while detained at a military base in Argentina. In 2025, he received the Lola Hanzel Courageous Advocacy award for his work as a board member and as a cooperating attorney with the ACLU of Northern California.

Before joining Keker, Van Nest & Peters, LLP, he served as a Staff Attorney with the ACLU of Northern California. Additionally, he has volunteered at the San Francisco District Attorney's Office, where he prosecuted misdemeanor cases. Prior to his appointment, Judge Krishnan served on the Northern District of California's Patent Local Rules Committee, and he continues in that role now. He also continues to serve on the Board of Governors of the Bay Area Chapter of the Association of Business Trial Lawyers. He is a member of the American Law Institute.

Judge Krishnan earned his bachelor's degree in electrical engineering, magna cum laude, from Rice University—where he specialized in bioengineering and computer engineering. He received his law degree, magna cum laude, from Harvard Law School. Following law school, he clerked for the Honorable Marsha Berzon on the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit.



MAGISTRATE JUDGE KANDIS A. WESTMORE

Oakland
Appointed 2012

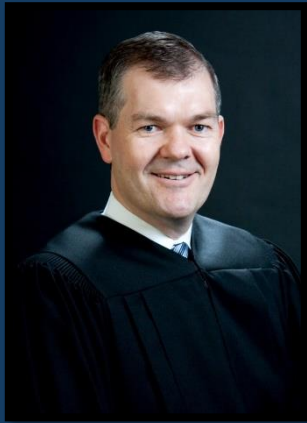
Magistrate Judge Kandis A. Westmore was appointed in February 2012. Since then, she has presided over a wide variety of consent cases, involving contracts, commercial law, civil rights, employment, patent, trademark, and copyright infringement, securities, administrative and constitutional law, immigration, environmental, and personal injury. She also conducts settlement conferences and manages discovery, including in class actions and multi-district litigation. Judge Westmore currently serves on the court's Personnel Committee, co-leads the court's Convictions Alternatives Program ("CAP"), and presides over CAP Aftercare Court, which follows CAP graduates for the first year of their probation and as otherwise needed.

Judge Westmore's legal career began as a law clerk with the Contra Costa County Public Defender's Office, before obtaining her first attorney position at an Oakland-based boutique law firm specializing in plaintiffs' civil rights litigation.

In 1999, she joined the Oakland City Attorney's Office as a Deputy City Attorney. During her tenure, she advised City agencies and served as both a trial attorney and a law and motion attorney, where she filed suit on behalf of the City and defended the City and its employees on a wide range of matters in federal and state trial and appellate courts, including civil rights, personal injury, inverse condemnation, labor and employment, and complex litigation.

Prior to taking the bench, Judge Westmore served as President-Elect of the Alameda County Bar Association ("ACBA"), and volunteered for the ACBA Volunteer Legal Services Corporation's Pro Bono Program representing low-income individuals in family law cases. She also served as the President of the Earl Warren American Inn of Court in 2017. Judge Westmore was the recipient of the Charles Houston Bar Association's Guardian of Justice Award in 2018, the Black Women Lawyers of Northern California's Judicial Excellence Award in 2022, and the University of San Francisco School of Law's Hon. Sandra Brown Armstrong Alumni Award in 2025.

Judge Westmore received her B.A. from the University of California, Berkeley, and her J.D. from the University of San Francisco, School of Law, all while working full-time and being a wife and mother of two young children. As a law student, Judge Westmore served as a judicial extern to U.S. District Judge Sandra Brown Armstrong. In 2023, Judge Westmore became an adjunct professor at USF School of Law, where she teaches a judicial externship course. Previously, Judge Westmore taught Honors Evidence at Golden Gate University School of Law.



CHIEF MAGISTRATE JUDGE NATHANAEL COUSINS

San Jose
Appointed 2011

Magistrate Judge Nathanael Cousins has his chambers in San Jose, but he has served in each courthouse in the Northern District of California, from Salinas to Eureka.

He joined the Court from the U.S. Department of Justice, where he worked as an Assistant U.S. Attorney (San Jose and San Francisco offices) and Antitrust Division Trial Attorney (San Francisco). In those positions, he had criminal jury trials before many of the Judges of this Court. He was part of the team that prosecuted global price-fixing cartels in memory chip markets. He also coordinated Operation Ceasefire, a community program to reduce gang violence in Monterey County.

Immediately before joining the Department of Justice, he worked as a civil litigation associate and then partner in the Chicago office of Kirkland & Ellis, and before that he was a litigation associate in the Los Angeles office of Greenberg Glusker. His civil litigation cases focused on antitrust, class actions, consumer fraud, securities fraud, and civil rights. He was pro bono class counsel for inmates at an Illinois state prison.

Judge Cousins graduated from the University of California, Hastings College of the Law. After law school, he clerked for the Hon. F.A. Little, Jr., Chief Judge of the U.S. District Court, Western District of Louisiana. He received his undergraduate degree in political science from Stanford. While in school, he studied abroad in Russia and the Netherlands.

Judge Cousins has taught legal writing, moot court, and antitrust law at Hastings, and participates regularly in moot court and trial training programs at Bay Area law schools. He also coaches basketball and soccer.



MAGISTRATE JUDGE VIRGINIA K. DEMARCHI

San Jose
Appointed 2018

Magistrate Judge Virginia DeMarchi joined the Northern District of California in 2018 after 22 years as a litigator in private practice in Silicon Valley.

Before taking the bench, Judge DeMarchi was a partner with Fenwick & West LLP where she represented technology and life sciences companies in patent infringement and other intellectual property matters across a wide range of industries, including e-commerce, computer hardware and software, industrial enzymes, pharmaceuticals, medical devices, financial services, communications, and consumer products. She also served as general counsel to the firm and as a member of the executive committee.

In addition to her private law practice, Judge DeMarchi served for nearly 10 years on the board of directors for the Law Foundation of Silicon Valley and was active in pro bono representations of federal and state inmates and victims of domestic violence.

Before joining Fenwick & West, Judge DeMarchi served for two years as a trial attorney with the Civil Division of the United States Department of Justice in Washington, D.C. and clerked for the Honorable Steven J. McAuliffe in the District of New Hampshire. Judge DeMarchi earned her law degree cum laude from Harvard Law School and her undergraduate degree with honors from Stanford University.

Judge DeMarchi serves on the Northern District of California's Patent Local Rules Committee and on the San Jose Division's Conviction Alternatives Program ("CAP") team.



MAGISTRATE JUDGE SUSAN VAN KEULEN

San Jose
Appointed 2017

Magistrate Judge Susan van Keulen joined the Northern District of California following 28 years as a commercial and intellectual property litigator in Silicon Valley.

Judge van Keulen's private law practice focused substantially on intellectual property cases in federal and state courts and in private arbitrations, with particular experience handling technology and commercial disputes involving semiconductor, computer, and electronics technologies. Judge van Keulen prepared dozens of cases for trial and served as lead trial counsel in a number of cases in the Northern District.

As an active part of her practice, she also regularly represented pro bono clients in cases involving landlord-tenant disputes, immigration issues and legal remedies for domestic violence.

In addition to her active law practice, Judge van Keulen served on the Northern District's Patent Local Rules Advisory Subcommittee from 2006 to 2014 and has lectured and written widely on patent law and federal procedure.

Judge van Keulen graduated from the University of California, Davis and UCLA School of Law. She practiced law with the Thelen law firm (1988-2008) and as a partner with O'Melveny & Myers (2008-2016) until taking the bench.



MAGISTRATE JUDGE ROBERT M. ILLMAN

McKinleyville
Appointed 2017

Magistrate Judge Robert M. Illman was appointed to the bench in 2017.

Prior to taking the bench, Judge Illman served as a law clerk to Magistrate Judge Nandor J. Vadas in the Northern District of California from 2014 to 2017, and to Chief Magistrate Judge Wallace Capel, Jr. of the United States District Court for the Middle District of Alabama from 2007 to 2014. Prior to that, Judge Illman served as an Assistant Federal Public Defender in Montgomery, Alabama, from 2003 to 2007. In that role he represented indigent defendants charged with various crimes in federal trial and appellate courts, as well as representing Alabama's death row inmates in their federal habeas corpus litigation. Through his broad background as an attorney working for and practicing in the federal courts, Judge Illman has developed extensive experience in all manner of cases brought before the district court.

Judge Illman graduated with a degree in history from Covenant College in Lookout Mountain, Georgia, and from the University of Alabama School of Law in Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

All new civil and criminal actions arising in the counties of Del Norte, Lake, Humboldt, and Mendocino are assigned directly to Judge Illman, subject to consent under 28 USC § 636(c)(1). Judge Illman can hold case management conferences and hear many types of motions by videoconference if parties prefer to appear in San Francisco rather than travel to McKinleyville. In addition, parties can schedule dispositive motions to be heard on days when Judge Illman is in San Francisco.



QUESTIONS

If you have questions about magistrate judge jurisdiction, please contact
CAND Clerk's Office (415) 522-2000

BROCHURE COPIES

This brochure is available on the court's website cand.uscourts.gov.
Print copies are available at all four courthouses.

CREDITS

Magistrate judge portraits were taken by Roslyn Banish and Mike Oria (Judge Tse).
Courthouse photos were taken by court staff members.

LAST UPDATED

August 2026