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Pointers From The Bench: An Interview With Judge Emily Hagan

By Christine M. LaSalvia

The Honorable Emily Hagan was elected to the Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Court in 2019. Since taking the bench, she has run her courtroom with a philosophy of open communication and common sense.



Judge Emily Hagan

Judge Hagan always knew she wanted to help people, particularly children. She obtained a degree in early childhood education and did her student teaching in Athens, Ohio. These experiences solidified her goal to have a professional life which would serve children and their needs. However, she realized that pursuing the law could achieve this goal in a different way. She obtained her Juris Doctorate degree with that goal in mind. She worked for two non-profit organizations before serving as staff attorney to Justice Michael Donnelly when he was seated on the Common Pleas Court. She held this position from 2007-2018.

Being a staff attorney was a tremendous training ground for her current position. She credits Justice Donnelly as an excellent teacher, and learned a lot from watching him preside over trials and deal with attorneys and visitors to his courtroom. She admires his temperament, specifically his patience and ability to listen to people. She believes that often those who visit her courtroom need the experience of being heard by the Judge. By listening, you can often find a common sense solution to resolve the problem that brought them to Court. She also credits Justice Donnelly with encouraging her to run for Judge.

Overall, Judge Hagan believes in having an open courtroom. She is always willing to meet with the parties, as some issues require the Judge to intervene and be present. She carries

this philosophy through her civil trial order. Although Case Management Conferences are generally held by phone with the staff attorney, if the parties prefer to come to court and meet with the Judge, that option is available if requested.

Judge Hagan will assist with discovery disputes and is aware that nothing can slow a case down faster than an unresolved dispute. Her Court will listen to disputes and if the call cannot be transferred to her immediately, she will endeavor to provide a decision within twenty-four hours to keep the case moving toward a resolution.

Judge Hagan is willing to preside over settlement conferences in person, and to meet with the parties directly if the lawyers believe it will be helpful. She learned from Judge Donnelly that often this is what is needed to resolve the case.

Judge Hagan enjoys presiding over jury trials. She believes it is important for attorneys to keep the big picture in mind when presenting a case to the jury. It is helpful for attorneys to stipulate to anything both parties agree upon. Juries appreciate brevity and a streamlined trial.

Regarding voir dire Judge Hagan prefers that the entire panel be questioned at once. She poses a few questions to the jury, then allows the attorneys to handle most of the questioning, as they have a superior knowledge of the case and the issues.

When asked what aspects of being a Judge she found to be most rewarding, Judge Hagan went back to her original goal for attending law school. Her path in life has been guided by her desire to help people. She enjoys the parts of her job that allow her to make a difference. There are many ways to help people in the criminal arena, but in civil cases, one of the best ways to help is by assisting with the settlement to avoid the uncertainties of jury trial. In her free time, Judge Hagan likes to stay active by running, spending time with her family, and reading. ■