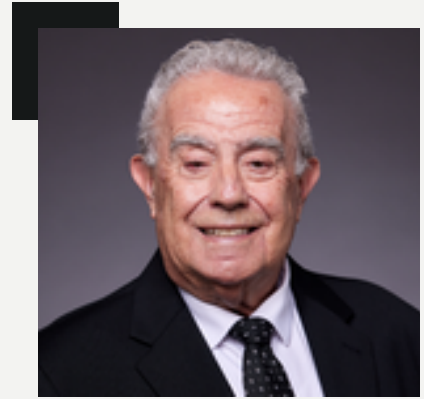


Get to Know Hon. Stephen Pulido (Ret.)



With more than four decades in the legal profession—28 years as a practicing attorney and 18 years on the bench—**Hon. Stephen Pulido (Ret.)** has built a reputation as a steady, experienced presence in the courtroom and beyond. Now serving as a neutral with ADR Services, Inc., Judge Pulido brings a depth of insight, compassion, and pragmatism to dispute resolution, particularly in complex family law and civil matters. We sat down with him to reflect on the pivotal moments of his career, his approach to mediation, and the life experience that shaped his work on and off the bench.

Q: Let's start with your foundation. How would you describe the focus of your legal career?

Judge Pulido: My entire 46-year legal career has revolved around civil litigation, with a primary focus on family law. I practiced family law for 28 years and then served as a judge for 18 years, focusing on both family and civil matters. I was honored to serve as the Supervising Judge of Family Law for eight (8) years and Chief Supervising Judge in Civil for two(2) years. That combination of advocacy and adjudication really impacts how I now approach dispute resolution.

Q: You've had quite a range of leadership roles. What would you say are your core strengths?

Judge Pulido: I bring extensive trial and case management experience to the table, both as an attorney and as a judge. I've always been comfortable leading—whether it's chairing the Family Law Committee, serving on the Executive Committee of the court, or managing a family law

firm. But I think what really sets me apart is my ability to work with people. I'm patient, a strong communicator, and I understand the emotional complexity of the disputes I help resolve.

Q: Looking back, what are you most proud of in your career?

Judge Pulido: Helping people through difficult, emotional periods—particularly in family law—has always been incredibly meaningful. During the pandemic, I presided over nine remote jury trials and received a Special Recognition Award from the San Francisco Trial Lawyers Association for “keeping justice alive.” I've mentored countless lawyers, judges, and students, and I've always made civic engagement a priority, from my early student government involvement, to serving on the Pleasanton School Board and judging high school mock trials.

Areas of Expertise:

- Child Custody, Timeshare and Child Relocation Cases
- Post-Judgment Spousal Support Cases
- Child Support Cases
- Character, Value and Division of Property
- Parentage Cases
- Date of Marital Separation Cases
- Putative Spouse Cases
- Parental Rights in Adoptions Cases
- Validity And Enforceability of Pre-Marital And Post-Marital Agreements
- Jurisdiction/UCCJA/UCCJEA Cases

On a personal note, I underwent a kidney transplant in 1990 and haven't skipped a beat since. That experience gave me a deep appreciation for resilience, both in myself and in others.

Q: Was there a turning point that led you to focus on dispute resolution?

Judge Pulido: Honestly, I've been drawn to resolving disputes for as long as I can remember—from student government and debate in high school to the courtroom and my time as a Trustee on the Pleasanton School Board. But my parents' contentious divorce, when I was fifteen (15) years old, had a profound effect on me. It gave me a first-hand understanding of the emotional toll that legal proceedings can take on families, and it's shaped my approach to law ever since.

Q: What's your strategy when parties hit an impasse in mediation?

Judge Pulido: I usually start by having candid, separate conversations with the attorneys (or self-represented parties) about the strengths and weaknesses of their cases. I'm honest, direct, and not afraid to give a realistic assessment. Family law, in particular, is rarely black and white—there are lots of gray areas.

When appropriate, and with the attorneys' permission, I speak directly with the parties, together or separately. Emotions can run high, especially when children are involved. I encourage parties to think of property division and support issues as a business deal—look at the cost, the risk, and the benefit of going to trial. Sometimes, resolving the "easier" issues first builds enough trust to circle back to the tougher ones.

Q: How do you prepare for a mediation session?

Judge Pulido: Preparation is everything. I carefully review mediation briefs, court filings, and the Register of Actions. I develop a Plan of Action that outlines key issues and strategies—but I also stay flexible. Each case has its own rhythm, and I keep an open mind to follow where the mediation leads.

Q: And if the case doesn't settle during the session?

Judge Pulido: I follow up—always. I'll schedule status check-ins and invite supplemental briefing if necessary. If I'm also the trial judge, I'll lock in dates and help move the case forward efficiently.

Q: What do you find most rewarding about your work as a neutral?

Judge Pulido: Helping people find closure. Assisting parties in resolving their issues—especially in family law—gives them the opportunity to move on with their lives. Avoiding a long, emotionally and financially draining trial can make all the difference.

Q: How do you think lawyers who've worked with you would describe your style?

Judge Pulido: I think they'd say I was fair, even-tempered, and deeply knowledgeable. That I respected their time, had a strong command of my courtroom (or mediation session), and treated everyone with civility. I hope they'd also say I had a good sense of humor and a human touch, especially when dealing with sensitive matters like child custody. I've been on both sides of the counsel table, and I never forgot what that felt like.

A Judge Grounded in Experience, Driven by Compassion.

Judge Pulido's career has been marked not just by leadership and longevity, but by a deep understanding of the people at the heart of every legal dispute. With his combination of legal expertise, life experience, and a genuine passion for helping others, he continues to guide parties toward thoughtful, lasting resolutions—one case at a time.

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