



HON. THOMAS M. GOETHALS (Ret.)

Mediator, Arbitrator,
Private Judge, Appellate Consultant



Hon. Thomas M. Goethals (Ret.) brings a wealth of experience, insight, and professionalism to his work as a dispute resolution neutral. Over nearly five decades, he has served as a trial lawyer, criminal prosecutor, Superior Court judge, and appellate justice. Throughout his career, he has demonstrated a deep understanding of the complexities of both civil and criminal law, earning a reputation for fairness, integrity, and the ability to guide parties toward resolution. Justice Goethals has earned a reputation as a principled and pragmatic decision-maker. His extensive experience in trial litigation, combined with his judicial leadership, makes him uniquely qualified to assist parties in navigating mutually beneficial outcomes through mediation and arbitration.

Justice Goethals' legal career began as a law clerk and civil litigator at Keesal, Young & Logan. He later joined the Orange County District Attorney's Office, where he prosecuted a broad spectrum of criminal cases over the course of more than a decade. As a trial prosecutor, he became highly skilled in courtroom advocacy, frequently handling high-profile and high-stakes matters requiring sound judgment under intense scrutiny. His experience prosecuting and managing high-profile cases deepened his commitment to preserving the integrity of the legal system.

Seeking to expand his expertise, Justice Goethals entered civil litigation at Robinson & Robinson (now Robinson Calcagnie), where he represented plaintiffs in complex personal injury cases. This experience broadened his perspective on mediation and settlement dynamics, deepening his appreciation for the nuanced negotiations that lead to fair and efficient case resolutions. He later became a partner at the boutique firm Pohlson, Moorhead, and Goethals, where he handled both criminal and civil matters. During his 24 years as a trial attorney at the DA's office and in private practice, he tried nearly 200 jury cases to verdict and mediated and arbitrated many others in the areas of personal injury, wrongful death, business disputes, probate, and professional liability.

In 2002, Justice Goethals was appointed to the Superior Court of California, where he presided over approximately 300 jury trials. His approach to the bench emphasized preparation, respect for the legal process, and the importance of helping parties reach a resolution that aligned with the evidence. His decisions often demonstrated a keen understanding of the challenges faced by both sides of a dispute, fostering an environment where disputes could be resolved efficiently and equitably.

In 2017, Governor Jerry Brown nominated Justice Goethals to the California Court of Appeal, where he authored more than 500 opinions addressing a wide array of civil and criminal matters. His expertise was recognized with the State Bar's highest rating of "Exceptionally Well Qualified," and his nomination was unanimously confirmed by the Commission on Judicial Appointments. His appellate tenure further sharpened his ability to analyze intricate legal issues and balance competing interests—an invaluable skillset in his mediation and arbitration practice.

Justice Goethals has received numerous accolades for his contributions to the legal field. His decisions in high-profile criminal cases have been the subject of editorials in *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Washington Post*. He was named one of Orange County's most influential people by the *Orange County Register* and *Coast Magazine* in 2015 and has been honored with the Justice of the Year award from the Hispanic Bar Association of Orange County and the Distinguished Orange County Alumnus Award from Loyola Law School.

Beyond the courtroom, Justice Goethals has a long history of mentorship and education. He served as an adjunct professor at Loyola Law School and Whittier Law School for over two decades, teaching trial

advocacy and sharing practical insights with aspiring lawyers. He also instructed at the California District Attorneys Association's Master Trial Advocacy College and the Orange County Bar Association's College of Trial Advocacy. His passion for teaching and learning has fostered a deep understanding of people, which has enhanced his ability to connect with litigants and counsel.

Justice Goethals' core values—respect for the legal process, faith in the justice system, preparation, and empathy, coupled with his extensive experience and ability to foster trust and cooperation—continue to guide his work in dispute resolution.

Dispute Resolution Philosophy

Justice Goethals' extensive trial and appellate experience informs his approach to dispute resolution. He believes that successful mediation requires a foundation of trust, preparation, and empathy. He engages with parties early, ensuring that he understands their goals, concerns, and the strengths and weaknesses of their positions. He emphasizes listening and maintaining a neutral but supportive role, helping parties to see the potential benefits of settlement over prolonged litigation. His ability to break down complex issues and guide parties through impasses has led to numerous successful resolutions over his career.

Justice Goethals is acutely aware that litigation is often a stressful and corrosive experience for those involved. He approaches each case with the goal of reducing that burden, helping parties move forward with dignity and closure. When an impasse arises, he employs patience and creativity to identify paths toward resolution, often encouraging breaks and fresh perspectives. He is also adept at post-mediation follow-up, understanding that not all cases are ready to settle on the day of the mediation itself. His persistence and attention to detail frequently result in meaningful, lasting resolutions.

EDUCATION

- Loyola Law School, Juris Doctor, Dean's List, 1977
- Santa Clara University, Bachelor of Arts in History, *cum laude*, 1974

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Justice, California Court of Appeal, Fourth District, Division Three, 2017-2025

- Authored over 500 judicial opinions on complex civil and criminal issues.
- Rated "Exceptionally Well Qualified" by the State Bar Evaluation Committee.
- Unanimously confirmed by the Commission on Judicial Appointments.

Judge, Superior Court of California, 2002-2017

- Presided over approximately 300 jury trials across civil and criminal matters.

Partner, Pohlson, Moorhead and Goethals, 1990-2002

- Litigated both civil and criminal cases to verdict.

Deputy District Attorney, Orange County, 1978-1990

- Prosecuted a wide range of criminal cases in Orange County.

Civil Litigator, Robinson and Robinson (Now Robinson Calcagnie), 1984

Law Clerk and Associate, Keesal, Young & Logan, 1976-1978

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- Adjunct Professor, Loyola Law School, 1998-2018
- Adjunct Professor, Whittier Law School, 2010-2019
- Instructor, Center for Judicial Education and Research (CJER), 2008-2016

- Instructor, California District Attorneys Association, Master Trial Advocacy College, 1988-1989
- Instructor, Orange County Bar Association, College of Trial Advocacy, 1982-1989

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

- Gray Inn of Court – Master Member, 2003-2018
- Board of Directors, Orange County Bar Association, 2000-2002
- Orange County Superior Court Committees: Finance Committee, Security Committee, Grand Jury Committee (Chair)

AWARDS & RECOGNITION

- Orange County's 100 Most Influential People, Orange County Register, 2015
- Orange County's 50 Most Influential People, Coast Magazine, 2015
- Justice of the Year, Hispanic Bar Association of Orange County, 2018
- Distinguished Orange County Alumnus Award, Loyola Law School, 2019

MEDIA MENTIONS

- *Los Angeles Times* editorial: "Stand Up for the Judge" (March 14, 2015)
- *New York Times* editorial: "Dishonest Prosecutors, Lots of Them" (September 30, 2015)
- *Los Angeles Times* editorial: "Schemes in the O.C. Jailhouse" (December 2, 2015)