



HON. KATHLEEN A. KELLY (RET.)

Mediator • Arbitrator



Hon. Kathleen A. Kelly (Ret.) brings with her over 20 years of distinguished judicial experience and an exceptional reputation for her expertise in civil litigation and dispute resolution, and innovative work in collaborative problem solving courts. She has presided over hundreds of trials, and brings tremendous and invaluable insights into dispute resolution. She has earned widespread recognition, including the prestigious title of 2024 San Francisco Trial Lawyer Association's Trial Judge of the Year.

Judge Kelly meticulously prepares for each case and prioritizes pre-mediation consulting with counsel. She brings unique skill in fostering open dialogue, ensuring that parties feel heard and understood, thus, enabling mutually beneficial outcomes. Judge Kelly is unwavering in her commitment to helping resolve even the most challenging cases. Her philosophy is driven by a desire to alleviate the stress of protracted legal battles, offering parties a sense of control and certainty in bringing closure to disputes.

Before dedicating herself to dispute resolution, Judge Kelly built a distinguished legal career. Her journey in law began with a strong academic foundation. She earned her Juris Doctor from UC Law San Francisco in 1984 and her undergraduate degree in History and French at the University of California, Berkeley, including enriching international experiences at the Université de Paris-Sorbonne and Université d'Aix-Marseille III. These early achievements set the stage for a career defined by intellectual rigor and a global perspective. Her distinguished and broad-based legal career started at Fisher & Hurst, specializing in civil litigation and insurance, followed by ten years as a Senior Trial Counsel at the City Attorney's Office, then as an Assistant US Attorney for the Northern District of California.

Appointed to the San Francisco Superior Court in 2003, Judge Kelly has skillfully handled an impressive and wide variety of civil jury and bench trials, mediations, and has settled many of the Court's most challenging cases. She has presided over significant trials, including personal injury, commercial contracts, employment, construction, and housing/real estate disputes. Her leadership in the San Francisco Superior Court's Civil Settlement Program exemplifies her ability to guide parties toward resolution in high-stakes environments. Her tenure also includes service as a Justice *Pro Tem* for the California Court of Appeal, First Appellate District, as an elected member of the trial court's Executive Committee and as the longest serving judge in the Family Treatment Court.

Judge Kelly has presided over numerous high-profile cases, including the Marriott employment discrimination trial, a breach of contract and false claims case involving the San Francisco Unified School District, construction litigation with Lendlease as well as high stakes commercial dispute cases. These experiences highlight her ability to manage complex, multi-faceted disputes with precision and fairness.

Her contributions to the legal profession extend beyond the courtroom. Judge Kelly served as Vice President of the California Judges Association and was appointed by successive Chief Justices to Judicial Council committees, including Chair of the Juvenile Committee of the Judicial Council Collaborative Justice Courts Advisory Committee, where she advanced best practices in collaborative and treatment courts. She is also a respected educator, having lectured frequently at law schools and taught juvenile law at the USF School of Law, inspiring the next generation of legal professionals.

Her dedication to public service and dispute resolution is reflected in her numerous accolades. She has also contributed to the field through her publications, such as "The Educational Crisis for Children in the California Juvenile Court System," which underscores her commitment to addressing systemic inequities.

Through her innovative approaches and unwavering dedication, Judge Kelly has earned a reputation as a trusted and effective neutral. Her ability to navigate the complexities of human conflict with insight, empathy and expertise continues to make her a valued asset in the field of dispute resolution.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE

- Business / Commercial/Contract
- Construction
- Employment
- Landlord/Tenant
- Personal Injury
- Real Estate

EDUCATION

- **Juris Doctor**, UC Law San Francisco (formerly UC Hastings), 1984
 - Executive Editor, COMM/ENT, Hastings Journal of Communications and Entertainment Law
- **Bachelor of Arts**, History and French, University of California, Berkeley, 1980
 - Studied abroad: Université de Paris-Sorbonne and Université d'Aix-Marseille III

JUDICIAL EXPERIENCE

- **Judge, Superior Court of California, City and County of San Francisco** (2003–2025)
 - Presided over civil jury and bench trials, mediations, and settlement conferences.
 - Selected by Presiding Judges to Civil Settlement Program.
 - Developed and presided over Family Treatment Court, reuniting families impacted by child welfare and substance use disorder issues.
 - Served as Justice *Pro Tem*, California Court of Appeal, First Appellate District.
 - Presided over felony and misdemeanor trials, juvenile justice cases, and collaborative courts.

LEGAL CAREER

- **Assistant United States Attorney**, Northern District of California (2003)
 - Prosecuted major crimes including fraud, identity theft, and child pornography.
- **Senior Trial Attorney**, San Francisco City Attorney's Office (1989-1999)
 - Lead counsel in over 100 child abuse and neglect trials.
- **Associate Attorney**, Fisher and Hurst (1984-1989)
 - Handled a variety of civil litigation and insurance cases.
- **Adjunct Professor**, University of San Francisco School of Law (2001-2002)
 - Taught juvenile law to second- and third-year law students.

PROFESSIONAL AWARDS AND HONORS

- Keynote Speaker, St. Ignatius Law Society, 2025
- Trial Judge of the Year, San Francisco Trial Lawyers Association, 2024
- St. Thomas More Award, St. Thomas More Legal Society, 2011
- Barrister of the Year, Bar Association of San Francisco, 1992

COMMUNITY AND JUDICIAL LEADERSHIP

- Vice President, California Judges Association
- Treasurer, California Judges Association Foundation
- Chair, Juvenile Subcommittee of the Judicial Council Collaborative Justice Courts Advisory Committee
- Elected Member, San Francisco Superior Court Executive Committee
- Personnel Committee, San Francisco Superior Court
- Founding Member, Educational Rights of Foster Children Committee
- Co-Founder, Speakers in the Schools Program, Bar Association of San Francisco

PUBLICATIONS

- "The Educational Crisis for Children in the California Juvenile Court System," Hastings Constitutional Law Quarterly, 2000
- "Voir Dire: Is There a Constitutional Right of Access?" COMM/ENT, Hastings Journal of Communications and Entertainment Law, 1983