



THE SUPREME COURT *of* OHIO



MAUREEN O'CONNOR

CHIEF JUSTICE
SUPREME COURT OF OHIO

On Jan. 1, 2011, Maureen O'Connor became the first female chief justice and just the 10th chief in the history of the Supreme Court of Ohio. She joined the court in 2002, as the state's 148th justice, which, at the time, gave the Supreme Court its first-ever female majority.

On the first day of January, 2017, Chief Justice O'Connor began her second full term as the head of Ohio's judiciary.

The last day of her current term is Dec. 31, 2022.

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Chief Justice **Maureen O'Connor**, the first woman to lead the Ohio judicial branch, has made justice system reform the centerpiece of her nine-year tenure.

Among initiatives she has championed in Ohio and nationally are racial justice; challenges to "debtor's prisons;" attorney representation for the poor; reform of bail, fines and fees; sentencing fairness; cameras in courtrooms; and grand jury reform.

Chief Justice O'Connor led the creation in 2016 of the nation's first multistate body designed to fight the opioid epidemic by creating an across-borders team of judicial, legislative and law enforcement sectors with medical, scientific, research and philanthropic groups. The work of nine states acting as a unit continues today and has spawned a national body and regional efforts.

She has served as co-chair of the National Task Force on Fines, Fees, and Bail Practices and is past president of the national Conference of Chief Justices (CCJ) and past chair of the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) Board of Directors.

Maureen O'Connor was Ohio's lieutenant governor when she was elected to the Supreme Court of Ohio as a justice in November 2002. She was re-elected in 2008. Voters chose her as Ohio's 10th chief justice in 2010 and she was unopposed for a second six-year term in 2016.

In her first statewide judicial election in 2002, she took more than 57 percent of the vote to become the 148th justice of the court and the sixth woman to join the court. Her election gave the court its first female majority.

Born in the nation's capital and raised in Strongsville and Parma in Ohio, Chief Justice O'Connor's career in public service and the law spans three decades and includes service as a private lawyer, magistrate, common pleas court judge, and prosecutor.

She earned her Bachelor of Arts degree at Seton Hill College in 1973 and her law degree from Cleveland-Marshall College of Law in 1980.

While gaining experience in practice as an attorney during the early 1980s, Chief Justice O'Connor created a home for her family and her legal career in Northeast Ohio.

Appointed a magistrate in Summit County in 1985, she served until becoming a common pleas court judge in 1993. As a busy trial judge, she was selected by her peers to serve as the administrative judge — a testament to her ability to build coalitions and maintain collegiality while administering to the business of the courts.

She resigned from the bench to become the Summit County prosecuting attorney in 1995. There, she aggressively prosecuted repeat offenders, violent criminals, and public officials who committed ethical violations or improprieties, and lobbied the General Assembly for tougher laws on rape and gang-related offenses. Her untiring work received accolades from victims' rights groups and educational institutions, and earned awards from Mothers Against Drunk Driving and Cleveland State University.

In 1998, she was elected lieutenant governor — the second-highest executive office in the state. She became Governor Bob Taft's chief adviser on criminal justice issues, served as director of the Ohio Department of Public Safety and as chair of Ohio's Security Task Force and the State Building Security Review Committee.

In the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks, she led the state in its response to new threats of terrorism by working with the Department of Homeland Security, law enforcement, and the Ohio Emergency Management Agency, efforts that garnered the praise of federal homeland security officials.

Chief Justice O'Connor has pursued an extensive agenda for strengthening the third branch of Ohio government in a number of key areas:

- **RACIAL FAIRNESS:** Chief Justice O'Connor is leading an initiative to establish a transparent, comprehensive criminal justice data system aimed at promoting the fair and equitable administration of justice. It would bring together the data of the courts along with those of law enforcement, prosecutors, probation officers and corrections departments in the interest of equality and transparency.
 - **CONVICTION REFORM:** 2020 marks the appointment of The Task Force on Conviction Integrity. The Task Force, made up of all interested parties, will analyze and recommend substantive and procedural improvements regarding the integrity of convictions and the postconviction review process.
 - **BAIL REFORM:** Ohio's chief justice led the efforts that in 2020 changed the rules governing bail, bond, and pre-trial release in criminal cases. Courts now must use the least-restrictive bond conditions and least amount of monetary bail to secure the defendant's appearance. Bond schedules now are to be used only for securing release before an initial appearance and are not to be considered by a trial court during a bond hearing.
 - **TECHNOLOGY/INNOVATION:** When the coronavirus crisis hit America in 2020, Chief Justice O'Connor acted quickly, sharing \$6 million of her budget with local courts for the purchase of remote technology to keep them in session while abiding by the Ohio Department of Health guidelines. Immediate action was made possible by the Ohio Courts Technology Initiative, a system of annual tech grants to courts that she had instituted in 2015. More than \$17 million in grants had been made under that program when the coronavirus dollars were added, bringing the total to \$23 million. These technical upgrades ensure the efficient and effective administration of justice. She also has encouraged local courts to apply for up to \$75,000 in annual Innovation grants that further the cause of justice.
 - **DEBTORS' PRISONS:** In 2016, Chief Justice O'Connor was named co-chair of the National Task Force on Fines, Fees and Bail Practices, created by the Conference of Chief Justices and the Conference of State Court Administrators, to address the ongoing impact that court fines, fees, and bail practices have on economically disadvantaged communities across the United States. Under Chief Justice O'Connor's leadership, the Supreme Court has created and disseminated bench cards to better educate judges and court personnel about appropriate financial sanctions and obligations that can be levied in court.
 - **GRAND JURIES:** In 2016, Chief Justice O'Connor named an 18-member Task Force to Examine Improvements to the Ohio Grand Jury System to maintain the public's trust and confidence in grand juries. The group's 11 recommendations included those to grant the Ohio Attorney General's Office exclusive authority to investigate and, if necessary, prosecute police lethal use of force cases; establish a process for the release of the grand jury record under limited circumstances, create education and outreach programs, and strengthen grand jury independence.
 - **ACCESS TO JUSTICE:** Chief Justice O'Connor charged the Supreme Court's Task Force on Access to Justice with identifying obstacles to accessing the civil justice system in Ohio. The task force issued 11 recommendations in April 2015, which included more funding and higher fees for out-of-state attorneys to fund civil legal aid work.
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- **JUDICIAL ELECTIONS:** After two years of study, Chief Justice O'Connor and partner organizations in 2015 launched JudicialVotesCount.org to better educate Ohio voters about what judges do and why their work is important to all citizens. The website implemented a comprehensive statewide nonpartisan voter information and engagement effort to provide a centralized repository so voters can gain easy access to more information about judges and judicial candidates with an ultimate goal of elevating meaningful voter participation levels in judicial elections.
 - **DEATH PENALTY:** In a cooperative effort between the Supreme Court of Ohio and the Ohio State Bar Association, Chief Justice O'Connor led the establishment of the Joint Task Force to Review the Administration of Ohio's Death Penalty, a group of 21 judges, prosecuting and defense attorneys, and lawmakers, to examine ways to ensure the administration of capital punishment is fair and judicious. The group issued a final report containing 56 recommendations in 2014.
 - **CLE:** Working with judges and the organized bar associations, Chief Justice O'Connor led an effort to reform and improve the system of continuing legal education for judges and lawyers, including expanded use of technology and distance learning.

LEGAL EXPERIENCE

Chief Justice, Supreme Court of Ohio

- Elected in November 2010; re-elected in November 2016 term began January 1, 2017

Justice, Supreme Court of Ohio

- Elected in November 2002 and began term January 2003; re-elected in November 2008 and began term in January 2009

Prosecuting Attorney, Summit County

- Served from 1995 to 1999

Judge, Summit County Court of Common Pleas

- Served from 1993 to 1995 and elected by her peers to serve as administrative judge

Magistrate, Summit County Probate Court

- Appointed in 1985 and served until 1993

Attorney, Private Practice of Law

- Practiced from 1981 to 1985 and handled both criminal and civil cases

STATEWIDE PUBLIC SERVICE

Lieutenant Governor and Director of the Ohio Department of Public Safety, State of Ohio

- As lieutenant governor from 1999 to 2003, Chief Justice O'Connor also chaired the State of Ohio Security Task Force and the State Building Security Review Committee.

HONORS AND AWARDS

- The Ohio Bar Medal, the highest honor of the Ohio State Bar Association, 2019
 - President's Partnering for Quality Award, Ohio Association of County Behavioral Health Authorities, 2019
 - Thomas J. Moyer Award for Judicial Excellence, Ohio State Bar Association, 2018
 - Esther H. Bocker Award, Capital University Law School, 2015
 - Dr. Bennett J. Cooper Award, Ohio Justice Alliance for Community Corrections, 2015
 - Public Service Award, Ohio Association for Civil Trial Attorneys, 2014
 - Honorary Doctor of Laws, University of Akron School of Law, 2013
 - Commencement Speaker for the University of Akron School of Law, 2013
 - Alumnus of the Year, Cleveland-Marshall College of Law, 2012
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HONORS AND AWARDS - *cont.*

- Founders' Award, Ohio Women's Bar Association, 2011
- Pioneer Award, Akron Bar Association, 2011
- Irish Legal 100, 2010
- Commencement Speaker for Seton Hill College, May, 2001
- Commencement Speaker for Cleveland-Marshall College of Law, 1999
- Cleveland State University Distinguished Alumnae Award for Civic Achievement, 1997
- MADD Law Enforcement Award, Summit County, Ohio, 1997

EDUCATION

- Bachelor of Arts, Seton Hill College, 1973
- Juris Doctor, Cleveland-Marshall College of Law, 1980

PROFESSIONAL

- Past Chair and Board Member, Conference of Chief Justices
- Ohio State Bar Association
- Past President of the Conference of Chief Justices

PERSONAL

Born in Washington, D.C., and raised in Strongsville, Ohio, and Parma, Ohio

Children: Alex and Ed
