



Kathryn Messerich

Retired Chief Judge of District Court

Mediator | Arbitrator | Special Master

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“Throughout my career—as a nurse, lawyer, and judge—I’ve learned that difficult problems are rarely solved by looking at only one piece of the picture. Mediation gives us the opportunity to listen, understand what matters, and work toward solutions that are practical, thoughtful, and lasting.”

— Judge Kathryn D. Messerich (Ret.) | PowerHouse

BIOGRAPHY

Judge Kathryn D. Messerich (Ret.) brings an unusually broad perspective to her work as a mediator and arbitrator with PowerHouse Mediation. Her career spans critical-care nursing, civil litigation, healthcare law, and more than 17 years on the Minnesota District Court bench, including service as Chief Judge of the First Judicial District. That combination of legal, judicial, and healthcare experience gives Judge Messerich a practical and thoughtful approach to resolving complex disputes.

Appointed to the Dakota County District Court in 2004, Judge Messerich served as Assistant Chief Judge of the First Judicial District from 2013 to 2017 and as Chief Judge from 2017 until her retirement from the bench in 2021. She continues to serve by appointment as a Senior Judge. During her judicial career, she handled a broad range of civil and family matters and served in specialized assignments including Juvenile Court, Adult Treatment Court, Family Dependency Treatment Court, and Safe Streets First Court.



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BIO (Continued)

Before joining the bench, Judge Messerich spent nearly two decades in private and in-house legal practice. She was a shareholder at Hallelund, Nilan, Sipkins & Johnson and Bassford, Lockhart, Truesdell & Briggs and served as Associate General Counsel for Litigation at Allina Health System. Her experience as both a trial lawyer and healthcare counsel provides particular insight into medical malpractice, healthcare, personal injury, insurance, employment, business, and other complex civil disputes.

Before becoming a lawyer, Judge Messerich was a registered nurse working in demanding clinical settings, including pediatric, coronary, medical, and cardiac intensive care. That experience gives her a distinctive understanding of medical issues and the human dimensions of injury, illness, and healthcare disputes—perspective she brings to her work as a neutral.

Judge Messerich has also held significant leadership roles throughout Minnesota's legal and judicial communities and has been recognized for both judicial excellence and professionalism. Her honors include the Minnesota Chief Justice Award, the American Board of Trial Advocates Professionalism Award, ABOTA Judge of the Year, and Minnesota District Judges Association Judge of the Year.

At PowerHouse Mediation, Judge Messerich combines the perspective of a nurse, trial lawyer, healthcare counsel, and judge with a straightforward commitment to listening, careful evaluation, and practical problem-solving. She helps parties understand the strengths, risks, and realities of their disputes while creating the opportunity to reach thoughtful and durable resolutions.

PRACTICE AREAS

- Civil Mediation
- Family Mediation
- Civil Arbitration
- Special Master Assignments



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EDUCATION

- William Mitchell College of Law — J.D.
- University of Minnesota — M.S.N.
- Northern Michigan University — B.S.N.

BAR ADMISSIONS

- State of Minnesota
- State of Wisconsin
- District Court, District of Minnesota

PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYMENT

District Court Judge, First Judicial District (Dakota County) — 2004–2021

- Chief Judge (2017–2021)
- Assistant Chief Judge (2013–2017)
- Senior Judge Appointment (2021–2027)
- Specialty assignments included Juvenile Court, Adult Treatment Court, Family Dependency Treatment Court, and Safe Streets First Court

Legal Practice — 1987–2004

- Halleland, Nilan, Sipkins & Johnson — Shareholder (2000–2004)
- Allina Health System — Associate General Counsel for Litigation (1997–2000)
- Bassford, Lockhart, Truesdell & Briggs — Shareholder (1991–1997)
- Lommen, Nelson, Cole & Stageberg — Associate (1987–1991)

Nursing Practice

- University of Minnesota Hospitals and Clinics — Senior Staff Nurse, Pediatric Intensive Care
- Methodist Hospital — Staff Nurse, Coronary Care Unit
- University of Wisconsin Hospitals & Clinics — Staff Nurse, Medical Intensive Care
- Bell Memorial Hospital — Cardiac Intensive Care



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PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

- American Board of Trial Advocates
- Academy of Certified Trial Lawyers of Minnesota
- Minnesota State Bar Association
- First District Bar Association
- American Bar Association
- Minnesota Women Lawyers

LEADERSHIP & PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

- Minnesota Clemency Review Commission – 2023–2027
- One Court Hearing Committee – Chair, 2021–2023
- Minnesota Judicial Council – 2017–2021
- Court Operations Committee – Chair
- Minnesota Defense Lawyers Association – President, 2001–2002
- Minnesota Board of Continuing Legal Education – 2003–2009
- Minnesota Board of Legal Certification – 2009–2015
- Minnesota District Judges Association Civil Jury Instruction Guide Committee – 2004–Present; Chair, 2012–2021

HONORS & DISTINCTIONS

- Minnesota Chief Justice Award – 2024
- American Board of Trial Advocates Professionalism Award – 2022
- American Board of Trial Advocates Judge of the Year – 2019
- Minnesota District Judges Association Judge of the Year – 2018
- ASTAR Fellow – Advanced Science and Technology Adjudication Resource Center, 2013
- Minnesota Defense Lawyers Association President's Award – 2004
- Defense Research Institute Exceptional Service Award – 2002
- Northern Michigan University Distinguished Alumni Award – 2002
- Minnesota Lawyer, Lawyer of the Year – 2001
- Minnesota Civil Trial Specialist – 1994–2026
- American Bar Foundation Fellow



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