

News Advisory

From the Rhode Island Judiciary



Acting chief judge is appointed for Workers' Compensation Court

July 24, 2015: Debra L. Olsson, an associate judge on the Rhode Island Workers' Compensation Court, has been appointed interim chief judge of that court effective upon the retirement July 31 of Chief Judge George E. Healy Jr.

The appointment of Judge Olsson was made today by executive order of Supreme Court Chief Justice Paul A. Suttell. Judge Olsson will act as chief judge until a permanent successor is nominated by Governor Raimondo and confirmed by advice and consent of the state Senate.

Judge Olsson, the senior associate judge of the Workers' Compensation Court, has been on the bench since July 1991, just two weeks fewer than Chief Judge Healy. Prior to becoming a judge, she was deputy director and chief legal counsel to the former Department of Workers' Compensation. Since 2001, she has been the lead judge of the appellate division of the Workers' Compensation Court.

Judge Olsson is a graduate of Wellesley College and Suffolk University Law School.

“I have every confidence in Judge Olsson’s ability to lead the Workers’ Compensation Court on an interim basis until a permanent chief judge is appointed by the governor,” Chief Justice Suttell said. “Meanwhile, we wish Chief Judge Healy the very best in his retirement. During his tenure, he exemplified the highest qualities of integrity, leadership, competence, temperament and professionalism – everything any member of the public would want to see in a judge. I am grateful for his service.”

Healy is retiring after 24 years on the court, the last 11 of which he served as chief judge. Prior to his appointment to the bench, he was an active workers' compensation law practitioner. He was a member of the task force which created the court in 1990 and reengineered the entire compensation system in 1992. He was appointed to the court by Governor Bruce Sundlun and as chief judge by Governor Donald Carcieri.

Chief Judge Healy founded the court's Youth Employment Safety (YES-RI) program with a group of lawyers and safety professionals. The popular program teaches teenagers about their rights and occupational safety in the workplace.

Healy was a member of the adjunct faculty of Roger Williams University from 1991 through 2003 and is currently a member of the adjunct faculty of the university's law school. He is on the board of directors for the Institute for Labor Studies and Research and the Roger Williams University Pro Bono Collaborative. He served as co-chair of the Rhode Island Supreme Court Judicial Education Committee from 2003 to 2007. He has lectured and published numerous articles on various aspects of workers' compensation.

He received the Juanita Sanchez Award from the Center for Hispanic Policy and Advocacy for leadership in the pursuit of equality for all workers and was honored as Citizen of the Year by the Rhode Island Association for Justice. Most recently, he was the recipient of the Joseph R. Weisberger Award from the Rhode Island Bar Association, an award that recognizes judicial excellence.

He is a graduate of Northeastern University and Suffolk University Law School. He is admitted to practice law in Rhode Island and Massachusetts.

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