

Illinois Special Education Due Process Hearing Officers

John Gaffney	<p>John Gaffney attended The John Marshall Law School in Chicago, graduating in 1989. After law school, he served as Law Clerk to the Honorable Judge Charles R. Norgle in Federal District Court in Chicago. Afterward, he continued in public service as an Assistant State's Attorney in the McHenry County State's Attorney's office, handling felony narcotics and gang cases for six years. After leaving the States Attorney's office Mr. Gaffney went into private practice in 1998, practicing as a solo attorney handling criminal trials, appeals and school law cases.</p> <p>Mr. Gaffney has served as a mediator with the Illinois State Board of Education since 2019 and began his tenure as due process hearing officer in March 2023. He is excluded from taking due process matters involving Harvard Community Unit School District 50.</p>
Janet Maxwell-Wickett	<p>Janet Maxwell-Wickett is in private law practice with her primary office in Rolling Meadows, Illinois. She is licensed to practice law in Illinois and is also admitted to practice before the United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois. She received her bachelor's degree in Business Administration from the University of Michigan in 1991 and her Juris Doctorate from DePaul University College of Law in 1997. She practices primarily in the area of family law litigating divorce, parentage, and child custody and support issues. She has also represented families with children with special education needs. She is an active member of the Chicago Bar Association, Northwest Suburban Bar Association, and Illinois State Bar Association.</p> <p>Ms. Maxwell-Wickett began her legal career as an Assistant State's Attorney in McHenry County where she prosecuted traffic, misdemeanor criminal, and domestic violence offenses. She served as a staff attorney to the Hon. Joseph J. Urso and the Hon. Colleen McSweeney Moore in the Circuit Court of Cook County's Criminal Division and as an Assistant Corporation Counsel in the City of Chicago's Municipal Prosecutions Unit. She previously served as an impartial hearing officer for the State of Illinois, Department of Human Services, Home Services Program.</p> <p>Ms. Maxwell-Wickett works as a pro bono attorney with Chicago Volunteer Legal Services and Legal Assistance Foundation of Chicago. As a volunteer attorney with Chicago Volunteer Legal Services, she served as counsel in divorce cases and as a child's representative, representing children in disputed custody cases. She has also served as counsel in guardianship cases for disabled children and adults. As a volunteer attorney with Legal Assistance Foundation, she has represented families of children with special education needs. Ms. Maxwell-Wickett is an active volunteer in Park Ridge/Niles School District 64 where she served on the Executive Board of the Franklin Elementary PTA and served as a Trustee on the Board of District 64's Elementary Learning Foundation.</p> <p>Ms. Maxwell-Wickett became a hearing officer in July 2014 and is excluded from taking cases in Park Ridge/Niles School Districts 64 & 207.</p>

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D. Michael Risen	<p>Dr. Risen comes from a K-12 Public Education background where he served as an elementary teacher for six years and a building administrator for 15 years. He also served 15 years as Superintendent of Schools. Dr. Risen holds three Illinois teaching certificates, including high school, a type 75 for school administrators and the Illinois Superintendent's Endorsement. Finally, Dr. Risen has previous experience as an impartial hearing officer for the State of Illinois resolving disputes between parents and school districts regarding special education services for their children. Dr. Risen also spent 15 years at Bradley University. While there, among other courses, he taught courses related to <i>Special Education Law</i>, <i>American Public School Law</i>, <i>Legal and Social Justice</i>, and <i>The Principalship</i>. While at Bradley, Dr. Risen published numerous research articles and special education due process hearing decisions. Additionally, Dr. Risen published a chapter in the book <i>Interdisciplinary Connections to Special Education: Important Aspects to Consider</i> and he was the co-author for a text titled <i>Special Education Due Process Litigation</i> which was a text published for Illinois Institute for Continuing Legal Education (IICLE) in 2016 that provides guidance to attorneys who must litigate special education due process.</p> <p>Dr. Risen previously served as a hearing officer from 2008 to 2016 and began his current tenure as a hearing officer in March 2023. He is excluded from taking cases in Metamora Community Consolidated School District 1 and Germantown Hills School District 69.</p>
Mary Jo Strusz	<p>Mary Jo Strusz received her Juris Doctorate from Loyola University College of Law in 1982. Prior to that she obtained a bachelor's degree from Loyola University majoring in History/Political Science/Archeology. She is licensed to practice law in Illinois and is admitted to practice before the United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois.</p> <p>In 1983, she began a private practice in Chicago, concentrating in the areas of financial law (bankruptcy, probate, corporate and real estate) and family law (representing divorcing parties and children). She has litigated in the Federal courts and Circuit Court of Cook County. Currently her private practice is solely in the area of real estate. In 2006, she was appointed by the City of Chicago as an Independent Administrative Law Judge. In that capacity, she has conducted hundreds of contested hearings in all areas of administrative practice (except taxation).</p> <p>She is married and is the mother of three adult children. Two of her children needed educational assistance during their grade school and high school years. During her children's school years, she was a Girl Scout Leader, community organizer and President of the School Board. Currently, she is a volunteer Catechist and Leader of the RCIA program at her Church. She enjoys volunteering with high school and college students in Mock Trial competitions.</p> <p>Ms. Strusz became a hearing officer in May of 2016, and she resides in the City of Chicago.</p>

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Leah Trinkala	<p>Leah Trinkala is a licensed attorney in Illinois. She has been an independent Administrative Law Judge with the City of Chicago, Department of Administrative Hearings since 1996. Ms. Trinkala, also, conducts formal hearings involving grievances the tenants have filed against the Chicago Housing Authority. Previously, Ms. Trinkala was employed as a Hearing Officer with the City of Chicago, Department of Consumer Services from 1991 to 1996.</p> <p>Ms. Trinkala has an MBA from DePaul University Kellstadt School of Business and has a law degree from DePaul University College of Law. She received her B.A. from the University of Pittsburgh and graduated Cum Laude.</p> <p>Ms. Trinkala is very concerned about the welfare of animals and has been actively involved with the Anti-Cruelty Society for over 14 years. She was recently appointed as the Secretary of the Development Council Committee of the Anti-Cruelty Society. She, also, has Persian cats of her own.</p> <p>Ms. Trinkala became a hearing officer in May of 2016 and resides in the City of Chicago.</p>
Rhonda Walker	<p>Rhonda Walker has been an Illinois licensed attorney since 1984. She received her Juris Doctor from the John Marshall Law School and completed a Bachelor of Science degree in political science at Southern Illinois University. Her private practice has been concentrated in civil litigation in the Circuit Court of Cook County.</p> <p>Ms. Walker has served as an Administrative Law Judge with the City of Chicago Department of Administrative Hearings since 2001 where she hears administrative violations in the parking, consumer, environment, impoundment and police divisions. Additionally, she is a hearing officer for the Chicago Housing Authority hearing matters related to rules violations.</p> <p>Ms. Walker became a due process hearing officer in March 2023 and resides in the City of Chicago.</p>