

Illinois Special Education Due Process Hearing Officers

Beatriz A. Diaz-Pollack	<p>Beatriz A. Diaz-Pollack is a licensed attorney in the states of Illinois and Wisconsin. She began her legal career in civil legal services, providing representation primarily in family, landlord-tenant, and consumer law matters to individuals living below the poverty line. Subsequently, Ms. Diaz-Pollack entered an alternative teaching certification program and taught elementary school in the Chicago Public Schools while also pursuing a Masters in Education. Most recently, she worked as an Assistant General Counsel for the Illinois State Board of Education, concentrating primarily on state funding and special education issues. Currently, Ms. Diaz-Pollack focuses on raising a toddler daughter and enjoys working as a teaching assistant and research coach for courses in Northwestern University's School of Education and Social Policy.</p> <p>Ms. Diaz-Pollack holds a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, a Juris Doctor from the the University of Wisconsin Law School and a Masters of Science in Education and Social Policy from Northwestern University. As a law student, she was proud, along with her participation in a number of student organizations and clinical programs, to be named the Latino/a Law Students' Association Student of the Year and receive the Brown v. Board of Education Award for outstanding commitment to Public Education and Poverty Law in 2001.</p> <p>Ms. Diaz-Pollack became a hearing officer in April, 2013 and is excluded from taking cases in Elgin School District #U-46.</p>
Kathleen Fuhrmann	<p>Ms. Fuhrmann is a practicing attorney licensed by the State of Illinois. She received her Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education in from Governors State University in 1986 and her Juris Doctorate from Illinois Institute of Technology Chicago Kent College of Law in 2002.</p> <p>Ms. Fuhrmann is a former teacher with experience as a general and special education teacher. As an attorney, she was an Assistant State's Attorney prosecuting in juvenile court in the areas of truancy, abuse/neglect and dependency and delinquency. Ms. Fuhrmann also served as a court monitor of the Chicago Public Schools under the Corey H. consent decree for the Illinois State Board of Education. Prior to going into private practice, Ms. Fuhrmann served as a civil legal services attorney serving families at or below the poverty line in the areas of disability, family, consumer and landlord tenant law.</p> <p>Ms. Fuhrmann is currently a private practitioner in Kankakee County. She restricts her practice to the areas of family law, probate (primarily guardianship of disabled adults and minors), and social security disability. She is an active member of the Kankakee County Bar Association and a member of the Illinois State Bar Association. Ms. Fuhrmann also serves as a child custody mediator and guardian ad litem for children and disabled adults in the Twenty-First Judicial Circuit Court. In addition, Ms. Fuhrmann is an adjunct professor for Concordia University who periodical teaches school law and special education law.</p>

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	<p>Ms. Fuhrmann became an active hearing officer in March of 2015 and is excluded from taking cases in Kankakee School District 111, and Manteno School District 5.</p>
<p>Jennifer Leisner</p>	<p>Jennifer A. Leisner received her BA from Northwestern University in 1985 and her Juris Doctor from Loyola University of Chicago Law School in 1988. Ms. Leisner has spent the last 15 years of her career focusing almost exclusively on school related and special education practice as a parent attorney, a state-sponsored mediator and most recently representing public schools and special education cooperatives. Ms. Leisner is also a certified divorce mediator, and is currently in private practice. Although not currently serving on any non-profit boards of directors, Ms. Leisner has in the past been a Board Member for Day One Network and was on the Professional Advisory Committee for the Illinois Autism Society.</p> <p>Ms. Leisner became a hearing officer in July, 2014 and is excluded from taking cases in St. Charles Community Unit School District 303.</p>
<p>Janet Maxwell-Wickett</p>	<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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	<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>
Phil Milsk	<p>Phil Milsk is in private law practice with offices in New Lenox and Springfield. He is the governmental relations counsel for several non-profit organizations and professional associations. Prior to starting his own practice in 1995, Mr. Milsk served as director of the state support program for civil legal services organizations in Illinois, and as directing attorney of a civil legal services office that served 13 counties in Southern Illinois.</p> <p>Mr. Milsk is an active member of the Illinois State Bar Association, serving on 2 standing committees and one section council. He is a graduate of the University of Illinois-Chicago and DePaul University College of Law.</p> <p>Mr. Milsk became a hearing officer in April of 2013 is excluded from hearing cases involving New Lenox School District 122 and Lincoln Way High School District 210.</p>
Alan Schuster	<p>Alan Schuster is a licensed and practicing attorney having attended and received his Juris Doctorate (J.D.) degree from the Illinois Institute of Technology/Chicago-Kent College of Law in 1980. His fields of practice are broadly based which includes federal and state court litigation in the areas of contract, tort, family law, real estate, construction, criminal, debtor/creditor rights, probate, mental health, and commercial transactions. His educational background is multi-disciplinary which includes having received his bachelor of science degree in engineering (B.S. M&ME) from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1977 and his Doctor of Psychology degree in clinical psychology (Psy.D.) from the Illinois School of Professional Psychology in 2002.</p> <p>Mr. Schuster was admitted to the trial bar of the United States Federal District Court for the Northern District of Illinois in 1993. The same year Mr. Schuster received his mediator certification from the Center For Conflict Resolution and also received certification as an approved arbitrator from the 19th Judicial Circuit, Lake County, Illinois to adjudicate various civil matters. Mr. Schuster is also on the Illinois State Board of Education approved list of mediators to address issues underlying formal Request For Due Process brought under the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act and has been active in this practice area since 2004.</p> <p>Mr. Schuster became a hearing officer in May of 2016 and is excluded from hearing cases involving North Shore School District 112 and Township High School District 113.</p>
Mary Schwartz	<p>Mary Schwartz has worked with children with disabilities and their families throughout her career as an attorney and a licensed clinical professional counselor. She received her master's degree from the University of Chicago in educational psychology and her juris doctorate from Valparaiso University School of Law.</p>

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	<p>As Legal Director for the Center for Disabilities and Elder Law in Chicago, she worked extensively on programs to address the needs of children with disabilities, including the programs on special education and Social Security. She also has represented children and families in adoption, mental health, guardianship and family law matters. Additionally, she is a trained divorce mediator, concentrating in mediating child custody and parenting agreements.</p> <p>Ms. Schwartz's work in mental health includes experiences across the mental health continuum, including hospital based outpatient treatment, residential treatment, community-based mental health agency, and private practice. She also has worked as a consultant and in-service training provider for private schools in the metropolitan Chicago area and has presented at local, state and national conferences on many mental health, disability, and legal issues. She has served on community boards, including the Disability Ethics Board at the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago, the Association of Child Psychotherapists, and the Geriatric Advisory Council to the Illinois Department of Human Services.</p> <p>Mary Schwartz became a hearing officer in July 2005 and resides in the City of Chicago.</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 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>