

Ruben Castillo

First Hispanic Judge to serve on the Federal Sentencing Commission



Judge Ruben Castillo's distinguished legal career has been filled with many accomplishments and awards, including being the first Hispanic federal judge in Illinois and the first Hispanic judge on the Federal Sentencing Commission. In addition to his service as a judge, Judge Castillo has been committed to improving the criminal justice system and his dedicated to serving the Mexican American community.

Judge Castillo was born in 1954 in Chicago, Illinois, and he grew up in West Town, a blue-collar community on the city's near northwest side. Judge Castillo received his Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from Loyola University Chicago in 1976 and his law degree from Northwestern University School of Law in 1979. Even before graduating from law school, Judge Castillo was involved in the criminal justice system: he served on the editorial board of the *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, and in 1978 he was

appointed a deputy clerk for the local criminal courts.

Upon graduating from law school, Judge Castillo joined Jenner & Block as an associate, becoming the only minority lawyer at the firm. He worked at Jenner & Block for five years litigating both civil and criminal matters before joining the Special Prosecution Division of the Assistant United States Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Illinois in 1984. As a prosecutor, Judge Castillo received numerous awards including the Department of Justice Special Achievement Award and special commendations for exemplary work from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Drug Enforcement Agency, and the U.S. Customs Service.

In 1988, Judge Castillo left the U.S. Attorney's Office to become the Director and Regional Counsel for the Chicago Office of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund ("MALDEF"). As the Director of MALDEF, Judge Castillo served as an advocate for the Mexican American community, initiating actions to end employment discrimination and working to address issues including voting rights, education and immigration. In fact, his advocacy played a key role in the creation of Chicago's first primarily Hispanic congressional district. In addition to his important work with the Mexican American community, Judge Castillo served as an adjunct professor of trial advocacy at Northwestern University School of Law for nearly ten years, from 1989 to 1998. In 1991, Judge Castillo returned to private practice as a partner at the Chicago law firm of Kirkland & Ellis. As a partner there, Judge Castillo litigated several large commercial cases, including complex criminal defense work.

President Clinton nominated Judge Castillo in 1994 to the United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois, which includes Judge Castillo's hometown of Chicago. With his appointment, Judge Castillo became the first Hispanic federal judge in Illinois.

His many years of experience with the criminal justice system were called upon in 1999, when he was appointed by President Clinton to be the Vice-Chair of the Sentencing Commission. The Sentencing Commission is an independent agency in the judicial branch whose purpose is to establish sentencing policies and practices for the federal criminal justice system. Its goal is to assure the ends of justice by making detailed guidelines that set the appropriate sentences for offenders convicted of federal crimes.

Judge Castillo was the first Hispanic judge appointed to the Sentencing Commission since its creation in 1985.

Judge Castillo remains deeply committed to serving the community and ending racial prejudice. In addition, to his responsibilities on the bench, he has served on the Board of Overseers for the Chicago-Kent College of Law and the Board of Directors for the Illinois Institute for Continuing Legal Education. Currently, Judge Castillo serves on the Board of Directors of the Constitutional Rights Foundation of Chicago and on the Board of Trustees for Knox College. Judge Castillo also continues to act as a District Judge for the Northern District of Illinois.