



STATE OF NEW JERSEY
 GOVERNOR PHIL MURPHY



Governor Murphy Announces Intention to Nominate Michael Noriega to Serve on the New Jersey Supreme Court

05/15/2023

Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

Last summer when Justice Barry Albin reached the mandatory retirement age, our Supreme Court lost a legend. I want to thank him for his service, and I must also thank Judge Jack Sabatino, who has honorably filled his shoes on the Court over the last nine months.

When Justice Albin joined the Court in 2002, there wasn't much of a learning curve. As his longtime colleague Justice Jaynee LaVecchia said of him, "In terms of the law, his breadth of legal knowledge was vast. That came from his past experience as a litigator in a great variety of civil matters, and as a prosecutor and criminal defense attorney." Justice Albin brought all those experiences to bear during his tenure on the Court. While there are few people who have had as varied a career as Justice Albin, as I have made my selections for our Supreme Court, I have sought to ensure the Justices I nominate represent each aspect of our legal system.

I have chosen...

A federal prosecutor and law firm leader in Fabiana Pierre-Louis...

An experienced appellate and civil rights lawyer in Rachel Wainer Apter...

And a civil litigator and distinguished trial and appellate judge in Doug Fasciale.

As I undertook the search to find Justice Albin's successor, I wanted to ensure that his perspectives as a trial practitioner and criminal defense attorney would not leave the Court with him.

I wanted someone who didn't just learn how our judicial system works in a textbook, but had the real-world experience of fighting for their clients and giving them the representation they are entitled to under the law.

After an exhaustive search, I am pleased to announce I have found that person. Today, I am honored to nominate Michael Noriega to serve as Associate Justice of the New Jersey Supreme Court.

Michael is an experienced criminal defense and immigration attorney who is a partner at the law firm of Bramnick, Rodriguez, Grabas, Arnold, and Mangan, which represents individuals throughout our state who are hurt, sick, or in trouble.

He also serves as the President-elect of the Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers of New Jersey, a clear signal of the respect the members of the criminal bar have for him. And in this, he follows in the footsteps of Justice Albin, who served as President of that association just before he was appointed to the Supreme Court.

If confirmed, Michael would make history as the first former public defender to sit on our state's Supreme Court.

In this he would follow in the footsteps of a different Justice – Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson, who became the first former public defender to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court last year.

Folks, that experience matters. Public defenders see firsthand how the law impacts ordinary people. A public defender does not get to choose their clients. More often than not, they represent individuals from our most marginalized communities in their greatest moment of need.

Regardless of their own personal beliefs or opinions, public defenders represent their clients to the best of their ability. That is their sworn obligation as officers of the court.

That is an obligation we hold sacred because in America every defendant is guaranteed legal representation regardless of their ability to pay.

It doesn't matter if you're rich or poor, powerful or powerless. Whether you're struggling to make ends meet or the former President of the United States, it's your Constitutional right to get a fair shot in court.

Michael understands that because he has lived it. During his five years as a public defender in Essex County, he represented thousands of clients in all manner of cases, and tried roughly 25 jury trials.

This perspective will be an important complement to the other Justices on the Court who have served as prosecutors. And their combined experiences will help the Court develop fair and just criminal jurisprudence.

But Michael's experience extends far beyond his time as a public defender. He is also a seasoned immigration attorney and personal injury lawyer. He has argued over half a dozen appeals at the Appellate Division, and two cases before the New Jersey Supreme Court. And Michael spent eight years as an adjunct professor at the Seton Hall School of Law training students in appellate advocacy.

While he is currently a partner at one of New Jersey's leading law firms, Michael also ran a successful solo practice for six years, where he continued to try cases, including jury trials. So he understands the rewards and challenges that the thousands of solo practitioners throughout our state face on a daily basis.

His story is a quintessentially Jersey story. The son of Peruvian immigrants, Michael was born in Weehawken and raised in Union City. He graduated from Rutgers University and received his law degree from Seton Hall.

His values are quintessentially Jersey values. After finding opportunity himself, he has dedicated his life to standing up for others – not just in his career, but in his spare time.

For seven years, he provided pro bono representation to young victims of human trafficking facing deportation – some of them only children. And he is currently the board president of Sanar Wellness Institute, a non-profit in Newark that helps victims of human trafficking, domestic abuse, and other forms of violence.

To borrow Michael's own words, he works with those at the most unimaginable crossroads. He only strives to help.

In recognition of his compassion and extraordinary talents, in 2019, Michael was named Professional Lawyer of the Year by the New Jersey State Bar Association.

Today, Michael is a proud resident of Fanwood, and an active member of the Union County Bar Association. Perhaps most importantly, he and his wife Melissa, a school psychologist, have four daughters – Emma, Abigail, Rebecca, and Kathryn. As the parent of four children myself, I know there is no greater challenge and no more satisfying reward.

During the vetting process, we heard from a number of Michael's former colleagues from throughout his career. Every single one said they could think of no one with higher character or more integrity. They all noted not only his commitment to justice, but also his fundamental kindness and decency.

My Judicial Advisory Panel, chaired by former Chief Justice Zazzali, was proud to unanimously recommend him. I look forward to the review of the State Bar's Judicial and Prosecutorial Appointments Committee prior to submitting his formal nomination to the Senate.

I know the individuals I nominate to serve on the New Jersey Supreme Court will shape the state for future generations long after my time in office has come to an end. I can think of no responsibility more solemn than finding the right Justices to strengthen our Supreme Court's tradition of excellence.

I am very proud of my prior nominees – both for their credentials and their character. I am equally proud to put Michael's name forward today, and I am certain he will make an outstanding Justice.

And now it's my privilege to hand things over to the man himself. Ladies and gentlemen, our nominee for Associate Justice of the New Jersey Supreme Court Michael Noriega.

Governor Phil Murphy

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