Michael M. Cabonargi: Professional Biography

Serving the Community as Cook County's Newest Circuit Court Judge

On June 13, 2025, the Illinois Supreme Court unanimously appointed Michael Cabonargi as an At-Large Judge of the Circuit Court of Cook County following nomination by Justice Joy Cunningham. Judge Cabonargi brings a proven track record of public service, a deep commitment to accessible justice for all communities, and extensive quasi-judicial experience to the bench.

All bar associations found Judge Cabonargi uniformly qualified, including the Cook County Bar Association and the Black Women's Lawyers Association.. The Chicago Council of Lawyers found him Well Qualified, stating: "Mr. Cabonargi has a vast amount of quasi-judicial experience and received praise for being fair with everyone, listening to people and attempting to resolve their disputes, and always explaining reasons for his rulings."

A First-Generation American Committed to Equal Access to Justice

Judge Cabonargi is a first-generation American and the first in his family to attend law school. This background shapes his understanding that equal access to justice requires active work to remove obstacles that prevent communities—particularly communities of color—from receiving fair treatment in our courts.

Currently serving in the Traffic Division, Judge Cabonargi presides over bench and jury trials. He ensures robust language access for all litigants, exercises compassion in granting fee waivers for those facing financial barriers, and creates a courtroom where all individuals feel safe seeking justice regardless of background, economic status, or immigration status.

Breaking Down Barriers to Justice

Prior to his judicial appointment, Judge Cabonargi served as Counsel to the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee (January-June 2025), providing strategic advice on civil rights, criminal justice reform, and immigration policy.

President Joseph R. Biden appointed Judge Cabonargi as Regional Director for the Great Lakes Region at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (January 2023-January 2025). His achievements included:

- **Implementing the largest adult vaccination program in U.S. history**, ensuring communities of color had access to nearly 700 million COVID-19 vaccine doses
- **Addressing the maternal health crisis** disproportionately affecting Black and Latina mothers by supporting expansion of Medicaid postpartum coverage from 60 days to a full year in 47 states
- **Responding to humanitarian needs** by partnering with Cook County Health to ensure migrant families received healthcare when Texas bused thousands to Chicago

- **Building healthcare workforce pipelines** by signing agreements with minority-serving institutions including UIC, Governors State, Chicago State, City Colleges of Chicago, and Rush University—creating pathways for underrepresented communities

Transforming Government to Serve the People

From February 2011 to December 2022, Judge Cabonargi served as Chair and Commissioner of the Cook County Board of Review, leading the nation's largest quasi-judicial appeals forum. He presided over hundreds of contested hearings and made decisions affecting 1.8 million property owners. His transformative leadership included:

- **Opening access for diverse communities** by translating complaint forms into Spanish, Polish, Korean, and Mandarin, and creating online tutorials in these languages
- **Meeting people where they are** by conducting over 250 community outreach sessions reaching more than 1.5 million residents
- **Prioritizing diversity in leadership** by appointing the first African-American Chief Deputy Commissioner and first Hispanic First Deputy Commissioner of the Board of Review
- **Implementing innovative technology** through the Digital Appeals Processing System (DAPS), recognized with a national award
- **Researching racial bias** in residential appraisals and presenting findings to the Chicago Urban League, exposing discrimination in financial processes

Protecting Vulnerable Communities

As a Senior Attorney at the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (March 2005-February 2011), Judge Cabonargi prosecuted financial fraud targeting vulnerable populations, particularly seniors. He received the Chairman's Award and Director's Award for his work recovering billions of dollars for defrauded investors.

As Law Clerk to Hon. William J. Hibbler, U.S. District Court (August 2000-August 2002), he created the District's first pro se help desk—now named the Judge William J. Hibbler Memorial Pro Se Assistance Program Help Desk—earning the Federal Bar Association's Award for Excellence in Public Interest Service.

Education and Community Leadership

Judge Cabonargi earned his Juris Doctorate, *cum laude*, from the University of Illinois College of Law (2000) and Bachelor of Arts degrees in Political Science and Foreign Affairs from Miami University (1993), where he served as Student Body President.

His Democratic Party leadership includes serving as Vice-Chair of the Democratic Party of Illinois (2021-2022), Illinois Democratic State Central Committeeman for the Ninth Congressional District (2018-2023), and Elector for the United States Electoral College (2020). He was a Delegate to the Democratic National Convention in 2012, 2016, and 2020.

Judge Cabonargi has received awards from the Pakistani Physicians Society, Indian American Medical Association of Illinois, Korean American Association of Chicago, United Hellenic Voters of America, and Justinian Society of Lawyers. He served on the Illinois ARDC Hearing Board and serves on the boards of the Lincoln Presidential Foundation, North Suburban Bar Association, Loyola Academy Bar Association, and Milan Committee of Chicago's Sister Cities Program.

A Judge Committed to Justice for All

Judge Cabonargi brings to the bench a career dedicated to breaking down barriers and ensuring equal access to justice. As a sitting Circuit Court Judge, he is committed to treating every person with dignity and fairness, and to making our courts work for everyone—regardless of race, language, economic status, or background.