



United States District Court District of Connecticut

Consenting to the Jurisdiction of a Magistrate Judge



New Haven



Bridgeport



Hartford

Michael P. Shea
Chief District Judge

Dinah Milton Kinney
Clerk of Court

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United States District Court District of Connecticut

Michael P. Shea
Chief District Judge

Dinah Milton Kinney
Clerk of Court

New Haven Courthouse

141 Church Street
New Haven, Connecticut 06510

(203) 773-2140

Hartford Courthouse

450 Main Street
Hartford, Connecticut 06103

(860) 240-3200

Bridgeport Courthouse

915 Lafayette Boulevard
Bridgeport, Connecticut 06604

(203) 579-5861

A Message from the Chief Judge of the United States District Court

As you embark on civil litigation in the United States District Court for the District of Connecticut - whether as a party to a lawsuit or as an attorney - I encourage you to familiarize yourself with the range of services provided by the court's magistrate judges and to consider consenting to have a magistrate judge handle all aspects of your case, up to and including dispositive motions, jury or court trial, and the entry of judgment. When a new civil case is filed, it is randomly assigned to both a district judge and a magistrate judge. Upon the filing of a written consent by all parties and the approval of the district judge, the case is then transferred to the already-assigned magistrate judge for all purposes, including a jury trial. Parties' consent is not needed for a magistrate judge to preside over pretrial matters upon the referral of a district judge.

The magistrate judges of our district have direct experience with nearly all types of civil matters filed in our court. Because our court is very busy, agreeing to proceed before a magistrate judge often means that the case will be resolved more quickly than if the case remained before a district judge. If the case must be tried, your trial date will be more certain and less likely to be continued to accommodate a felony jury trial. While consent is customarily given soon after a case is filed, parties may consent to have a magistrate judge preside over their case at any point in the proceedings.

As the following biographies demonstrate, the magistrate judges in our district are active in law school teaching, continuing legal education for attorneys and a variety of committees focused on court governance. These judges have years of litigation and trial experience as attorneys, prior to being appointed as judges.

Each has been appointed based on detailed, confidential feedback from the bar and the community, and each is equipped to handle the full range of issues presented to our court. Combined, the District of Connecticut's magistrate judges bring thousands of hours of federal judicial experience to their work at our court.

Michael P. Shea
Chief Judge

How Consent Jurisdiction Works

Under a law passed by Congress in 1976, the parties in a civil action in federal district court have the option of consenting to have the case handled by a United States magistrate judge. Magistrate judges are appointed by the district judges of each district court following a competitive merit selection process and serve for terms of eight years. Magistrate judges may be reappointed only after a rigorous review of their work that includes community input. In contrast, district judges are appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate and serve without term limits.

With the exception of certain types of cases (including capital habeas corpus cases, securities class actions, and bankruptcy appeals), when a civil action is filed in the District of Connecticut, it is randomly assigned to both a district judge and a magistrate judge. A district judge may refer a case to a magistrate judge for pretrial matters, including settlement. In addition, for every case, all parties (that is, all plaintiffs and all defendants) may consent to have the case handled by a magistrate judge for all purposes, including jury selection and trial. All parties' consent is necessary for a magistrate judge to preside over a civil trial and enter final judgment. The parties are encouraged to make a decision regarding magistrate judge jurisdiction as soon as possible and by the first case management conference (about 100 days after the case is filed), but a written consent form can be filed at any time during the pendency of the case.

Laws and Court Rules on Magistrate Judge Jurisdiction

Federal Magistrate Act of 1979,
28 U.S.C. § 636(b), (c)(1).
Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 72
Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 73

If all parties consent to magistrate judge jurisdiction and the assigned district judge approves, then the assigned magistrate judge presides over all aspects of the case and any appeals from the magistrate judge's rulings are made directly to the Court of Appeals.

The district judge may invite the parties at various stages of case, such as the initial case management conference, the summary judgment pre-filing conference, or even the final pretrial conference, to consider consenting to the jurisdiction of a magistrate judge, and the parties may take that opportunity to do so.

The magistrate judges of the District of Connecticut handle hundreds of civil cases every year. Each magistrate judge has an assigned courtroom and dedicated staff, including a courtroom deputy and law clerks. Because of their diverse professional experiences before and during their service as judges, this court's magistrate judges are well-qualified to preside over all types of civil litigation.

Magistrate Judge Biographies

New Haven Courthouse

Magistrate Judge **Robert M. Spector**

Magistrate Judge **Maria E. Garcia**

Hartford Courthouse

Magistrate Judge **Robert A. Richardson**

Magistrate Judge **Thomas O. Farrish**

Bridgeport Courthouse

Magistrate Judge **S. Dave Vatti**

MAGISTRATE JUDGE

Robert A. Richardson

Hartford Courthouse

Year Appointed 2016

Magistrate Judge Robert A. Richardson was appointed as United States Magistrate Judge on January 16, 2016. He received his Bachelor's degree from the Pennsylvania State University in 1988, and his Juris Doctor from the Ohio State (Moritz) College of Law in 1991. He was a Managing Editor for the Ohio State Law Journal from 1990-91.

After graduating law school, Judge Richardson joined the New Haven, Connecticut law firm formerly known as Garrison, Silbert & Arterton, P.C., which later became Garrison, Levin-Epstein, Richardson, Fitzgerald & Pirrotti, P.C. His practice focused on representing individuals and employees in employment matters and civil rights matters, in both state and federal courts.

While in private practice, Judge Richardson served on the District Court's Federal Grievance Committee and on a Federal Magistrate Judge Merit Review Panel. He was active in numerous state and local bar activities. He was a Co-chair of the Connecticut Bar Association's ("CBA") Federal Judiciary Committee, served on the CBA's Committee on Professional Ethics, served on the Executive Board for the CBA's Labor & Employment Section, and served on the CBA's Task Force on Multi-Jurisdictional Practice.

He was also a Vice President of the New Haven Inn of Court and a Vice President of the National Employment Lawyers' Association.

Judge Richardson is an elected Member of the American College of Trial Lawyers.

MAGISTRATE JUDGE

Robert M. Spector

New Haven Courthouse

Year Appointed 2018

Magistrate Judge Robert M. Spector was appointed as United States Magistrate Judge on May 1, 2018. Judge Spector received a Bachelor of Arts degree, summa cum laude, from Colgate University in 1993, and in 1996, he graduated with a Juris Doctor degree from Yale Law School. In law school, he was executive director of New Haven Cares, a non-profit organization that provided food and shelter vouchers to homeless individuals in New Haven.

From 1996 through 1998, Judge Spector served as a law clerk for the Honorable Alan H. Nevas in Bridgeport federal court, and from 1998 through 2001, he worked as a state prosecutor in the Appellate Bureau of the Connecticut Chief States Attorney's Office. During this time, he also taught Moot Court and Lawyering Process as an adjunct professor at University of Connecticut Law School.

Judge Spector began as an Assistant United States Attorney with the United States Attorney's Office in New Haven in 2002 and served as a supervisor there, in various capacities, from 2007 through 2018. From 2007 through 2010, he supervised a statewide gang and firearms unit; from 2011 through 2013, he was Deputy Chief of the Appeals Unit; from 2014 through 2018, he was Chief of the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force; and, from 2016 through 2018, he led a task force charged with battling Connecticut's opioid epidemic.

From 2012 through 2016, Judge Spector taught constitutional and criminal law at two different high schools in Hartford, and, from 2016 through 2018, he headed a team responsible for making opioid awareness presentations at middle schools and high schools across Connecticut. In 2016, he was a contributing author to the Connecticut Law Tribune's Connecticut Criminal Procedure Handbook.

MAGISTRATE JUDGE

Thomas O. Farrish

Hartford Courthouse

Year Appointed 2020

Magistrate Judge Thomas O. Farrish was appointed as United States Magistrate Judge on January 8, 2020. He was raised in eastern Connecticut and served as an infantryman in the United States Marine Corps before attending the University of Connecticut, from which he received his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1999. He graduated summa cum laude from the University of Connecticut School of Law in 2005. While in law school, he served as the editor-in-chief of the Connecticut Law Review.

After graduating from UConn Law, Judge Farrish joined Day Pitney LLP (then Day, Berry & Howard LLP) as an associate in the firm's Hartford office. He became a partner of the firm in 2013 and remained there for the rest of his private practice career. While at Day Pitney, Judge Farrish handled a wide variety of commercial litigation matters, including insurance and reinsurance coverage disputes. He also litigated several pro bono civil rights matters on behalf of indigent plaintiffs. He received the District of Connecticut's Pro Bono Award in 2014.

Judge Farrish has been a member of the American, Connecticut, Hartford County and Tolland County Bar Associations, as well as the Oliver Ellsworth Inn of Court. He served on the boards of trustees of the Harriet Beecher Stowe Center and the University of Connecticut Law School Foundation.

MAGISTRATE JUDGE

S. Dave Vatti

Bridgeport Courthouse

Year Appointed 2021

Magistrate Judge S. Dave Vatti was appointed as United States Magistrate Judge on March 22, 2021. Judge Vatti received his B.A. from Columbia University in 1989 and his J.D. from the University of Connecticut School of Law in 1992. While in law school, he served as a Notes and Comments Editor of the Connecticut Journal of International Law. He is also a past President of the UConn Law School Alumni Association.

After graduating from law school, Judge Vatti was an associate (1992-1999) and partner (2000-2001) at the Bridgeport, Connecticut firm of Zeldes, Needle & Cooper, P.C. where he practiced in the areas of commercial, employment and tort litigation in state and federal courts.

After a two-year period as a sole practitioner in Shelton, Connecticut from 2001-2003, Judge Vatti joined the Office of the United States Attorney for the District of Connecticut in 2004 as an Assistant United States Attorney in the Criminal Division. From 2004 to 2021, he conducted investigations and prosecutions of violent crime matters and interstate drug-trafficking organizations and, from June 2013 to 2021, he served as Chief of the office's Violent Crime and Narcotics Unit.

During his tenure as Chief of that unit, he oversaw the development and implementation of the Career Pathways Collaborative, a partnership between the U.S. Attorney's Office and the non-profit Justice Education Center, in which identified at-risk youth in New Haven and other Connecticut cities were given the opportunity to earn vocational and technical certifications to foster career development. In 2018, the Department of Justice recognized Career Pathways as its most innovative crime prevention program.

MAGISTRATE JUDGE

Maria E. Garcia

New Haven Courthouse

Year Appointed 2022

Magistrate Judge Maria E. Garcia was appointed as United States Magistrate Judge on June 3, 2022. Judge Garcia, although born in the United States, was raised in between Miami and Venezuela. She attended Tufts University, where she received her Bachelor of Arts in International Relations, summa cum laude, Phi Beta Kappa. She then received her law degree from the George Washington University School of Law.

Following her graduation from law school, Judge Garcia joined Pullman & Comley as an associate in the firm's Bridgeport Office where she practiced civil litigation in state and federal courts. She also led an effort to jumpstart the firm's first diversity and inclusion initiative. Judge Garcia clerked for the Honorable Holly B. Fitzsimmons, U.S.M.J. of the United States District Court for the District of Connecticut, whose seat she now occupies. She also clerked for the late Honorable Warren E. Eginton.

After her clerkships, Judge Garcia practiced at various boutique labor and employment firms litigating discrimination, retaliation, and civil rights cases on behalf of individuals.

In 2018, Judge Garcia founded her solo practice where she represented individuals and employers throughout Connecticut in all aspects of employment litigation, negotiations, and advice. Judge Garcia also conducted internal investigations for public and private sector clients.

Judge Garcia has long been an active member of the Connecticut Hispanic Bar Association (past-president), Raymond Baldwin Inn of Court, Connecticut Bar Association, and Connecticut Employment Lawyer's Association.

This brochure is available on the
Court's website ctd.uscourts.gov.

**If you have additional questions about
magistrate judge jurisdiction, please
contact the Clerk's Office:**

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(203) 773-2140

