

Solo Days Over, Lawyer Takes Oath As D.C. Judge



Longtime Washington solo practitioner Michael O'Keefe was sworn in Friday to his post on the District of Columbia Superior Court.

O'Keefe has been hearing cases since August, but Friday's investiture ceremony marked his formal installation on the bench. He sailed through confirmation proceedings before the Senate and was confirmed in May.

At Friday's ceremony, Miriam Buhl, pro bono counsel at Weil, Gotshal & Manges, said O'Keefe's many years of experience handling cases in Superior Court made him a natural fit for the court. O'Keefe's practice was mostly in criminal defense and family law. He had handled more than 2,000 cases in Superior Court and served on the panel of private lawyers appointed by the court to represent indigent criminal defendants.

"Few people know as you do, Judge O'Keefe, how critical fair representation is," said Buhl, a friend of O'Keefe, noting the high percentage of litigants in civil cases in Superior Court without a lawyer. "You have lived this for 19 years."

As is customary for new judges being sworn in, O'Keefe didn't speak at Friday's ceremony. Superior Court Judge John Mott administered the oath. Noting that O'Keefe had appeared before

him in the past as an attorney, Mott said his new colleague had the temperament needed to be a good judge, describing him as "a poised, bright attorney" who was "respectful to all."

As a former solo practitioner, O'Keefe is a rarity on the bench. Most of his colleagues came from firms or public service, according to a previous survey of judicial backgrounds in Superior Court by The National Law Journal.

O'Keefe's first assignment is in the civil division.

There are three open judgeships in Superior Court. Superior Court Magistrate Judge William Nooter was nominated for one of the seats in July. His nomination is pending before a Senate committee that handles judicial nominations to Washington's local courts, along with other D.C. affairs. The White House has yet to announce nominees for the other two seats.

National Law Journal photo by Alex Zank.

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