

23-Year Cook County Judge Joins JAMS In Chicago

By Jack Rodgers

Law360 (May 23, 2023, 3:39 PM EDT) -- JAMS has hired a former Illinois state judge who spent 23 years handling family law disputes and other domestic cases in Cook County, it announced in a Monday news release.

Former Judge Mark J. Lopez is JAMS' new arbitrator, mediator and special master or referee, and will be based in its Chicago Resolution Center, helping to resolve family law disputes. At the Cook County Circuit Court, he worked at its Child Protection and Domestic Relations divisions, and has presided over a packed calendar both in-person and remotely, according to the release.



Judge Mark J. Lopez

A Northern Illinois University College of Law graduate, Judge Lopez started his career as an assistant state attorney in Cook County, according to his [LinkedIn](#) profile.

Judge Lopez then moved to private practice as a partner with Honoratus Lopez & Associates, according to his [LinkedIn](#) profile, before returning to public service in the [Illinois Attorney General's Office](#). There, he became chief of the Industrial Commission Bureau, according to his [LinkedIn](#) profile.

Other roles Judge Lopez held at the office include assistant attorney general, director of the Southwest Regional Office and assistant attorney general of the industrial Commission Bureau, according to his [LinkedIn](#) profile.

Judge Lopez was seated on the Cook County bench in 1999, according to his [LinkedIn](#) profile. He previously worked at the court's Municipal Division, and in total he has nearly four decades of legal experience.

JAMS noted in its release that Judge Lopez was instrumental to the 2016 revision of the Illinois Marriage and Dissolution of Marriage Act, as well as the Illinois Parentage Act.

Those laws helped streamline the progression of divorce proceedings and helped update the ways in which the state determined parentage of children, along with recognizing civil unions and same-sex marriages, according to JAMS' news release.

In an interview with Law360 Pulse Tuesday, Judge Lopez said he stepped away from the bench in January 2022 and had been attending to some personal matters before figuring out where to take his career.

Judge Lopez's new role as a JAMS neutral will allow him to continue working with family law issues that he's worked with his entire career, he said, which was one of the reasons he took on the new role. He said his nearly two decades of experience with family law issues has taught him how to best mediate between parties that are often frustrated or emotional, to help them find amenable solutions.

"They're there for a reason, they still need help," Judge Lopez said. "Going to JAMS gives me the opportunity to continue to provide that kind of assistance to people who need it."

Judge Lopez also told Law360 about his role in helping to revise the Marriage and Dissolution of Marriage Act as well as pass the Parentage Act. He noted that the Parentage Act was the first update of those laws since the 1980s.

"Since the 80s to the present, you now have same-sex marriages, you have in vitro fertilization, you have all kinds of ways of being parents today that you didn't have," Judge Lopez said. "A lot of the Parentage Act had to do with scientific changes allowing for DNA testing and different things that were in their infancy back then and now, they're very commonplace."

Judge Lopez added that the revision largely made the legislation more inclusive. Speeding up divorce proceedings was also essential so that families financially dependent on one spouse didn't have problems early on in those hearings, he said.

Chris Poole, CEO of JAMS, said in a statement that the group was thrilled to have him aboard and that members were looking forward to his role "in these delicate family law matters."

"Judge Lopez is highly regarded and known for his active listening skills, his patience and his ability to understand and get to the heart of any dispute in order to find a resolution," Poole said in a statement.

Several former Cook County judges have gone on to work with JAMS, the largest private provider of alternative dispute resolution services, in the past year.

Judge Moshe Jacobius joined JAMS in January 2022, shortly after retiring from 31 years on the bench. Former Cook County Judge Grace G. Dickler, who presided over Cook County's domestic relations division for almost 11 years, joined JAMS in November.

Judge Lopez noted that Judge Dickler had worked as his presiding judge for the last decade of his career, and that Judge Jacobius had served as his presiding judge for the first decade of his career. Before Judge Jacobius had served as his presiding judge, he was also Judge Lopez's mentor, he said.

Their move to JAMS was one of many reasons Judge Lopez took on his new role as a neutral, he said.

"We go back a long way and because of them and other people there," he said. "I just have the utmost respect for them, and I'm happy to be associated with them."

--Additional reporting by Celeste Bott and Isaac Monterose. Editing by Adam LoBelia.