

Retired Federal Judge Joins JAMS In San Diego

By James Boyle

Law360 (May 23, 2024, 4:08 PM EDT) -- A federal magistrate judge has retired from the bench in the Southern District of California to oversee arbitration and mediation as a new member of alternative dispute resolution services provider JAMS in its San Diego office.

Retired Magistrate Judge Bernard G. Skomal joined JAMS' panel of case managers and will serve as a mediator and arbitrator for clients in the San Diego Resolution Center, the company announced Wednesday. Judge Skomal told Law360 Pulse in emailed responses to questions Thursday that his decision to join JAMS was helped by conversations with his friend and former judicial colleague, retired U.S. District Judge Irma Gonzalez, who joined JAMS in 2013.



Bernard G. Skomal

"I wanted to use my magistrate judge experience after retirement," Judge Skomal said. "I chose JAMS because it was highly recommended to me, has a national and international footprint, and I liked the way they treated me."

He noted that his colleagues went to other ADR services providers, and he wanted to take a different path.

As a member of JAMS, previously known as Judicial Arbitration and Mediation Services, Judge Skomal will perform his role as a neutral evaluator and overseer in mediation and arbitration in a variety of cases involving matters such as commercial litigation, civil rights, class actions, insurance claims, personal injury and intellectual property. His sessions will be offered in-person and virtually, JAMS said in a statement.

Judge Skomal added that experience such as his 14 years on the federal bench is essential for an effective mediator. He has spent more than a dozen years helping both sides in legal disputes find acceptable solutions through the early neutral evaluation, or ENE, program, the federal courts' ADR service.

"The ENE program was particularly helpful in that I held a settlement conference before the case management conference," the retired judge elaborated. "Many cases settled before the civil litigation even began. I'm also a good listener and prepare for each case as if it was my only one. Prior preparation prevents poor performance."

After earning his law degree from Suffolk University Law School in 1984, Judge Skomal started his legal

career with the Federal Defenders of San Diego Inc., a public defenders organization that offers services in Southern California federal courts. After more than five years at Federal Defenders, he went into private practice with his own firm, which he managed until becoming a judge in 2010.

"Judge Skomal is highly respected in the San Diego legal community and beyond for his impartiality, judgment and ability to work effectively with parties to help resolve their disputes," JAMS CEO Chris Poole said in a statement. "With decades of experience, he possesses an aptitude for navigating complex cases and meticulous attention to detail."

--Editing by Covey Son.

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