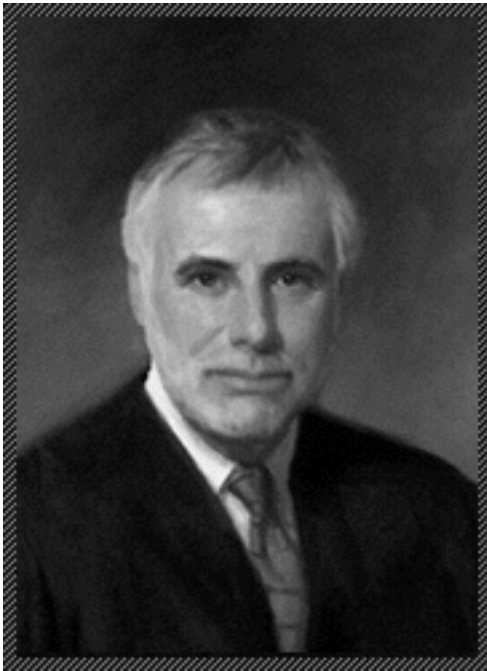


Robert R. Thomas 2000 – Present

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New York native Robert R. Thomas was born in Rochester, the son of a French-born



father who had been a professional soccer player and coach.

“When other kids were playing Little League baseball,

soccer was my first love,” Thomas recalled years later. “I

played soccer starting when I was about eight.”¹ Attending

McQuaid Jesuit High School in Rochester, Thomas lettered

in both football and soccer, then after graduation enrolled at

the University of Notre Dame. By his sophomore year, he

became the starting football place kicker and, in the 1973

national championship Sugar Bowl, kicked the winning

field goal against Alabama. As a senior, he was named an Academic All-American.

Following his graduation from Notre Dame in 1974, Thomas played twelve seasons in the National Football League, ten of them with the Chicago Bears. In the 1977 season, Thomas kicked a 28-yard overtime field goal that sent the Bears to the playoffs for the first time in 14 years, and he remains the fourth leading scorer in Chicago Bears history. While still playing for the Bears, Thomas attended Loyola University School of Law, where he was often seen studying after practice and between games. He graduated and was admitted to the Illinois bar in 1981.

Thomas worked in private practice with several law firms: Bochte & Kuzniar in Elburn; Bochte, Kuzniar & Thomas in St. Charles; John P. Callahan, P.C. and Kasey & Krippner in

Geneva; and Guerard, Kalina, Mucial, Ulrich & Varchetto in Wheaton. In 1988, he was elected circuit judge in the 18th Judicial Circuit, which is comprised of DuPage County. In the jury law division for six years, Thomas presided over more than one hundred jury trials, and from 1989 to 1994 served as the acting Chief Judge. In 1994, Thomas won election to the Second District Illinois Appellate Court, serving for five years.

In 2000, following the retirement of Illinois Supreme Court Justice John Nickels, Thomas declared his candidacy for the Second Judicial District seat. In the three-way Republican race that included Justice S. Louis Rathje, who had filled the term of retired Justice Nickels, Thomas won the Supreme Court primary contest and then the general election. Justice Thomas was elected by his colleagues on the Supreme Court to serve as Chief Justice from 2005 to 2008, making him the first Chief Justice from DuPage County in the Court's nearly 200-year history. "Ours is a position of service, not of power," Thomas said at the time. "The decisions we render are not personal achievements. They are the law, and they belong to the people of Illinois."²

Upon his installation as Chief Justice, Thomas acknowledged the path that had brought him there: "Having served in both the trial court and the appellate court, I will never lose sight of the fact that the decisions rendered by the Supreme Court represent a mere sliver of the work that occupies the Illinois courts. Every day, in courtrooms from Lake County to Alexander County, decisions are rendered that will never be published, will never make headlines, and will never be reviewed by the Illinois Supreme Court. But these decisions are important, nonetheless. For they, as much as any decision rendered by the Illinois Supreme Court, affect the lives of real people." Thomas then committed himself to "serving the cause of justice, to walking humbly, and to never

losing sight of the tremendous privilege that it is to wear the judicial robe, and to serve the people of this State.”

One of the major accomplishments during Thomas’ tenure as Chief was the establishment of the Supreme Court Commission on Professionalism, an outgrowth of the Special Supreme Court Committee on Civility, which was formed in 2001. The Commission promotes principles of integrity and civility among all Illinois lawyers and judges. “You hear a lot about how the practice of law is different now than in days past when a lawyer’s handshake meant something and a lawyer’s word was his bond,” Justice Thomas said. “That may be an oversimplification, but in this day and age with competition in the profession for dollars and clients, activities sometimes degenerate into a Rambo-style, win-at-all cost attitude by attorneys.”

Also during Justice Thomas’s tenure as Chief Justice, the Court gave special attention to the implementation of information technologies that advance the services and functions of the Illinois courts. Among the most visible improvements was the streaming of the Court’s oral arguments in video and audio format on the Court’s website. The arguments are posted on the website shortly after they are formally heard by the Supreme Court. Justice Thomas’s tenure as Chief Justice also saw the Illinois Supreme Court implement for the very first time a program of mandatory continuing legal education for all active Illinois lawyers and judges.

In his time on the Illinois Supreme Court, Justice Thomas has authored numerous notable opinions, including *People v. Lerma* (2016),³ which held that expert testimony concerning the reliability of eyewitness identifications is appropriate in certain cases; *DeHart v. DeHart* (2013), which for the first time recognized the theory of equitable adoption in Illinois; and *Ryan v. The Board of Trustees of the General Assembly Retirement System* (2010), which held that, as a result

of his multiple federal felony convictions, former Governor George H. Ryan had forfeited the pensions he earned while serving in the General Assembly and as Lieutenant Governor.

In *People ex rel. Madigan v. Snyder* (2005), the case involved the 2003 decision by Governor George H. Ryan to grant “blanket clemency” for all 167 death row inmates, commuting their sentences to a maximum of life imprisonment. Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan sought a writ of mandamus ordering Department of Corrections Director Donald N. Snyder, Jr. and two correctional facility wardens to ignore the Governor’s commutation order. In a unanimous decision, Justice Thomas wrote that Ryan’s blanket clemency grant did not violate the constitutional principle of separation of powers. “The 1970 Illinois Constitution does not provide that the Governor’s power to grant clemency is subject to the legislature’s regulation of the application process,” Thomas wrote, and thus, the power of executive clemency is “essentially unreviewable.”⁴

In 2006, a Kane County jury awarded Justice Thomas \$7 million in damages for a series of defamatory newspaper columns authored by *Kane County Chronicle* columnist, Bill Page. The case later settled for a reduced amount after Page and the newspaper issued a statement apologizing to Justice Thomas for “publishing statements that the jury found to be false and in relying on sources who, based on the jury verdict, provided information that was not true” about Justice Thomas.⁵

Thomas won his retention election in 2010 with 81 percent. He was named DuPage County Bar Association's Lawyer of the Year in 2001. In 2005, the Illinois Judges Association honored him with their "Professionalism Award." He received Loyola University's Distinguished

Jurist Award in 2006, and was named "Judge of the Year" in 2008 by the Illinois Chapter of the American Board of Trial Advocates.

In 1999, the NCAA Honors Committee selected Justice Thomas for the prestigious NCAA Silver Anniversary award, which recognizes former student-athletes who have distinguished themselves since completing their college athletics career 25 years ago. In September 2012, he was inducted into the Chicagoland Sports Hall of Fame. Justice Thomas and his wife, Maggie, reside in Glen Ellyn, Illinois. They have three children and five grandchildren.

¹ articles.chicagotribune.com/1995-10-22/sports/9510220426.

² *Chicago Daily Law Bulletin*, 8 September 2005.

³ *People v. Lerma*, 2016 IL 118496; cwcblog.law.northwestern.edu/2016/01/22/Illinois-embraces-eyewitness-expert-testimony.

⁴ *People ex rel. Madigan v. Snyder*, 208 Ill. 2d. 457 (2004); dcba.org/mpage/vol160404art5.

⁵ articles.chicagotribune.com/2007-10-12/news/0710111023; ballotpedia.org/Robert_Thomas.