

Indiana State House Profiles



Name: Loretta H. Rush

Position: Chief Justice of Indiana

Served in the Role Since: August, 2014 / Supreme Court since November 2012

Previous Political Positions Held:

Tippecanoe County Superior Court Judge (1999-2012)

Describe, in general, your role within the Indiana Government.

As Chief Justice, I am responsible for supervising the entire judicial branch in Indiana. My work includes overseeing our state's almost 600 judicial officers, administering and securing funding for statewide programs, hearing cases and issuing opinions, and working with leaders of both the executive and legislative branches of government. I am fortunate to have a central administrative office with multiple agencies under my direction to assist with these tasks and handle everything from caseload measures to admission and discipline of lawyers to technology updates. To this last point, with hundreds of thousands of cases filed each year in Indiana state courts, we constantly look for ways to use technology to improve access and efficiency. One example is the ability to file court documents—lawsuits, motions, briefs, orders, etc.—electronically statewide.

What are some of your most important daily responsibilities?

One of my many daily responsibilities is to review, hear, and decide cases. The Indiana Supreme Court is the highest court in the state and the court of last resort for interpreting Indiana's laws, the Indiana Constitution, and the safeguards expressed in our state's bill of rights. This means, for example, that when we decide a case under the Indiana Constitution, that decision is final—it cannot be overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court. At the same time, we also regularly hear and decide cases that involve claims brought under the United States Constitution. In those situations, the U.S. Supreme Court may decide to review our decision. One recent example is *Timbs v. Indiana*, where the U.S. Supreme Court took a case that we decided and ultimately determined, for the first time, that a U.S. constitutional provision applied to all fifty states.

Aside from deciding cases, I am also responsible for a wide array of tasks and programs. A normal day may include meeting with state leaders, working on administrative matters such as the judicial branch's budget, and preparing for or giving presentations. I also represent Indiana on a national level by serving as President-Elect of the Conference of Chief Justices Board of Directors and as a member of the National Center for State Courts Board of Directors.

How does your position require you to interact with other government officials on a daily basis?

As the head of the judicial branch, I strive to have a collegial and positive relationship with the leaders of the executive and legislative branches. I regularly interact with the governor, the attorney general, and members of both the Indiana House of Representatives and the Indiana Senate. In these interactions, my goal is to ensure that the judicial branch is using taxpayer money effectively and that our state's justice system is operating fairly and efficiently.

What do you think is the most important aspect of Government?

All three branches of government must work together. As the leader of Indiana's judicial branch, I feel fortunate to have a governor and legislative leaders who understand what happens in our courts and who share our vision and commitment to solving the problems people bring to our courts each day. We work together in the spirit of mutual respect with the goal of doing everything in our power to serve the interests of all Hoosiers.

How did you get involved in Government? What made you want to run for office?

After working for a law firm in Tippecanoe County for several years, local lawyers and community leaders asked me to run for office to serve as a trial court judge. So, I did! And I was elected three times as a Tippecanoe Superior Court judge. After serving in that capacity for twelve years, I was again encouraged by community leaders to apply for the Indiana Supreme Court.

Unlike trial court judges, Indiana Supreme Court Justices are not elected. Justices are chosen by a process known as "merit selection" that fosters input from citizens. When there is an opening on our five-member court, qualified individuals from across the state can apply for the position. A seven-member commission, comprised of Hoosiers from across the state, conducts interviews and ultimately recommends three qualified candidates to the governor. From those three candidates, the governor selects who will serve as the new Indiana Supreme Court Justice. The same seven-member commission also selects one of the five justices to serve as chief justice for a five-year term.

I was selected by the commission and the governor for the Indiana Supreme Court in 2012. And I was named chief justice in 2014 and again in 2019.

What advice would you give to young people that are interested in learning more about Government or becoming involved in public service?

I would encourage young people to get involved in their schools or local communities. This may include participating in programs like "We the People" or Indiana Model United Nations; or you can run for student council. If you are interested in the Indiana Supreme Court specifically, we welcome members of the public to attend oral arguments in person at the state house in Indianapolis or by watching online. We also issue an annual report, I provide a comprehensive update on the work of the courts through the State of Judiciary every January, you can keep updated on Twitter @incourts, and you can find even more information on our website.