

Dana M. Catanzaro

340 East 51st Street, Apt. 9E, New York, New York 10022

danacatanzaro@gmail.com

(917) 335-7639

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/danacatanzaro/>

1) What are your qualifications for the position of Civil Court Judge?

Thank you for the opportunity to shed light on my professional experience and characteristics that render me qualified to serve as a Civil Court Judge. My diverse legal background, the lessons I have learned while leading multiple organizations, and my personal integrity have prepared me for this pivotal moment in my legal career.

I have been litigating in New York City courthouses on a daily basis for the entirety of my legal career. I have prepared cases for trial, argued dispositive motions and appeals, and spent countless hours in the courtroom conferencing discovery issues. Presently, as a partner at my firm, I litigate high-exposure personal injury cases, and train and supervise associates in our construction litigation group.

My well-rounded educational and employment history allowed me to gain "hands on" experience early on in my career, and that helped to shape my decision to pursue a judgeship. While attending law school in Tribeca, I interned in a boutique law firm that handled criminal defense work, matrimonial, probate, landlord/tenant, and commercial litigation. During that internship, I quickly learned how to navigate the Centre Street courthouses, often filing papers in the Clerk's office or obtaining arrest charges in between classes. This unique opportunity led to another; after litigating a commercial matter during my internship, the partners suggested that I argue the resulting First Department appeal - just one month after being admitted to the Bar.

I also volunteered for a matrimonial judge in New York County, which allowed me to not only gain an understanding of matrimonial law, but more importantly, recognize the impact that one decision can have on all those involved. Every hearing, conference, or oral argument had a momentous impact on the rights and futures of plaintiffs, defendants, and children of the marriages being litigated before the Court. Seeing litigants escorted out in handcuffs or exiting the courtroom in tears was an eye opening experience. This experience showed me the importance of patience, empathy, and respect for the *pro se* litigants and attorneys alike.

On a more personal note, I am a native New Yorker and first generation attorney. To honor my Italian heritage and the challenges my ancestors overcame in immigrating to this country, I became involved with the Italian bar association in New York City (Columbian Lawyers Association, First Department). I was met with enthusiastic mentors and opportunities to share experiences and ideas – cultural and legal alike. I was honored to become one of the youngest presidents of the organization, and I am excited to begin my third year in this role. I proudly facilitate collaborations with numerous bar associations across the city, opening up doors for new and aspiring attorneys to network, and putting forth unique Continuing Legal Education seminars for anyone to attend.

In addition to coming up with new ideas to collaborate with other bar associations, I have made myself available to law students interested in mentorship in order to “pay it forward.” By connecting with other bar leaders, I became aware of and participated in legal volunteer opportunities which provided not only an opportunity to learn new skills, but also the personal fulfillment that comes with helping others.

My involvement with the New York City Bar Chorus and American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (“AFSP”) have provided me other, non-legal, outlets to use my skills and talents to help the residents of our city in a meaningful way throughout my career. I have been singing with the Chorus since law school – performing for NYC senior residences, cancer and AID patient residences, substance abuse rehabilitation centers, and facilities for troubled teens, among others. As a volunteer and fundraiser with the AFSP, I have educated myself and others about suicide prevention, which is a cause that hits very close to home for me.

I am eager to continue on this journey by making the ultimate commitment to my community as a Civil Court judge. My legal and personal experiences have equipped me with the knowledge, leadership skills, patience, and compassion needed to best serve the Court and all of the individuals that appear before it. I thank the Village Reform Democratic Club for its time and consideration, and welcome one-on-one conversations with its members.

2) If elected, what reforms, if any, would you make in civil court rules and/or procedures?

If elected, I would ensure that my courtroom is a safe space for all people seeking access to justice. Changes have to start from within. I would ensure that the entire courtroom staff (law secretary, clerks, and officers) are aware of my judicial philosophy. To this end, I would take advantage of all of the training programs the courts have to offer, especially implicit bias training. Education and self-awareness are the first steps in recognizing our individual biases – all employees of the court should be sufficiently educated about issues surrounding disabilities, perceived disabilities, biases, and the like. In addition, access to interpreters and assistance for self-represented litigants are not optional; they are necessary. No one should come to court to have more problems added to their plate – they are in court to find solutions. I will do everything in my power to ensure that the rules and procedures of my courtroom assist in reaching these solutions.

3) In certain circumstances the law gives judges:

- a. the discretion to act in the interest of justice to achieve an outcome which would otherwise not happen**
- b. the power to sanction parties for frivolous conduct**
- c. the discretion to correct technical defects**

Do you believe that these powers should be exercised often or sparingly, and can you give examples of some circumstances in which you anticipate using any or all of these powers?

Judges should exercise their discretion to act in the interest of justice all day, every day. The judge has the ability, and the moral obligation, to ensure that justice is achieved, even when that may be difficult. One instance where I have observed judges exercise this discretion is while observing criminal court, where a judge sealed a disposition of ACD (adjournment in contemplation of dismissal) - based on marijuana possession - in 24 hours as opposed to six months (the length of time of the adjournment). Doing so enabled the person in the criminal justice system to continue pursuing an employment opportunity. Exercising this discretion in this type of situation reaches the right result, and the judge has this discretion for a reason.

With respect to sanctions, I believe they should be issued sparingly and only as a last resort. If a litigant’s frivolous conduct is disrupting the court’s progress, this should be addressed in a manner that will reduce, not amplify, the underlying issue. Lawyers are just people with personal lives outside of the courtroom; I would prefer to address an attorney’s frivolous conduct privately to get to the root of the problem. If someone is dealing with an illness or personal issue, second-calling the case might give them some time to regroup. If an attorney is acting in a manner that could harm the rights of their clients, especially in criminal

or family court proceedings, I would pull them aside and figure out a solution – whether that is having another attorney fill in for them, a short adjournment, or a brief recess.

A judge should absolutely correct technical defects when there is no harm to the other parties involved. For instance, if someone dated their papers 2021, not yet accustomed to writing 2022, where there is no prejudice to the other side, I would correct this *sua sponte*.

4) Some judges are more lenient than others when it comes to granting adjournments. What do you expect your policy to be with respect to granting adjournments?

Adjournment requests at the request of one side should be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. If both sides consent to the adjournment, then there is no reason not to grant the adjournment if that will enable the parties to potentially resolve the matter without the court's intervention and time.

Adjournments in criminal and family court directly impact a person's civil rights, or a child's safety, and should be granted only when necessary and in the best interest of preserving the rights of the litigants and others affected.

Short adjournments that will benefit all parties (such as a week adjournment of a settlement conference so that a party can return with settlement authority), or where the benefit outweighs the harm to the other side (such as a self-represented litigant's advance request for an adjournment so they do not miss a day from work) should be granted. These factors, along with standards and goals, the age of case, and type of appearance for which the adjournment request, should all be considered.