

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**September 18, 2001**

## **ILLINOIS SUPREME COURT FILLS 10<sup>th</sup> JUDICIAL CIRCUIT VACANCY**

SPRINGFIELD -- The Illinois Supreme Court announced Tuesday the appointment of Associate Judge Jerelyn D. Maher as a Circuit Court judge in the 10<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit.

Judge Maher, an associate judge since August 1995, will become the first woman Circuit Judge in the 10<sup>th</sup> Circuit when she is sworn into the office by Supreme Court Justice Thomas L. Kilbride on Thursday, Sept. 20.

The 10<sup>th</sup> Circuit is made up of Tazewell, Peoria, Stark, Marshall and Putnam counties. Judge Maher fills the vacancy created by the retirement of Judge Bruce W. Black. The appointment will terminate when the seat is filled by the November 2002 election. Judge Maher has indicated she will be a candidate to seek election to the full six-year term.

As an associate judge, Judge Maher has heard cases in the Civil Division, the Domestic Relations Division and the Juvenile Child Protection Division. Before becoming an associate judge, she was in private practice in the Law Office of Jay H. Janssen and also with the Peoria firm Vonachen, Lawless, Trager & Slevin.

She concentrated her private practice in all aspects of personal injury litigation including products liability, medical malpractice, construction injuries and appellate practice.

Judge Maher has consistently been devoted to legal scholarship, lecturing to various lawyer groups and has been on several faculties teaching other judges. This year will mark the fifth straight year she has been on the faculty for the New Judge Seminar; and next year will mark the second straight time she will sit on the faculty for the Judicial Education Conference, which meets every two years and is mandatory for all state judges to attend.

Judge Maher has helped develop a program educating judges and courthouse personnel about the special needs of the elderly in the courtroom, and was instrumental in developing the Guardian Ad Litem program in Tazewell County under which children can be appointed an attorney in domestic violence cases. She also created a Visitation Center for the safe exchange of children for visitation as well as supervised visitation.

Judge Maher was appointed to fill the judicial vacancy following an extensive application and evaluation process, which included review, by an independent, bipartisan committee established by Justice Kilbride. The evaluation also took into account results of a Judicial Advisory Poll conducted by the Illinois State Bar Association when she was up for retention as an associate judge in 1999.

That poll included responses from attorneys who had practiced before her and showed unanimous approval among those responding for her management skills and fitness for judicial office. Other poll questions measuring her integrity, impartiality, legal ability, temperament and sensitivity to diversity were all answered with approval by more than 97 percent of those responding.

“I’ve never seen anyone close to getting 100 percent approval, but she did,” said retired Illinois Appellate Judge Tobias G. Barry, who serves as co-chairman of Justice Kilbride’s evaluation committee. “She’s a great woman. She’s top deck.”

Judge Maher also received high praise from Peoria attorney Timothy L. Bertschy, former president of the Illinois State Bar Association who also is co-chair of Justice Kilbride’s screening committee.

“Before she went on to the bench, Judge Maher was a very well respected lawyer in our community,” said Mr. Bertschy. “While on the bench she has gained the respect of lawyers on both sides of cases she has handled.

“She not only has an excellent legal mind, but she has a practical mind that she brings to bear on the matters before her. Further, she shows respect for all the litigants and lawyers who appear before her.”

Judge Maher was born in Peoria of a working class family and grew up in Tremont. She was graduated *magna cum laude* with a Bachelor of Arts degree from Bradley University and received her law degree from Loyola School of Law in 1977.

“It certainly is an honor to become the first woman Circuit Judge in the 10<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit,” said Judge Maher. “I’m very, very appreciative of my 18 years as a trial lawyer, my six years on the bench as an associate judge and my legal scholarship being recognized.

“I am dedicated to this profession and to being a public servant, and I am proud to be a public servant. I am honored and humbled by the fact the Supreme Court recognized my achievements and qualifications in making this appointment. It is really moving to me and it has to make any farm girl feel good.”

Judge Barry and Mr. Bertschy head a 17-person evaluation committee established by Justice

Kilbride to include community input from lawyers and non-lawyers on candidates for the vacancy.

Non-lawyer members of the committee included Chuck Rolinski, a community representative from Toluca; Karen Watkins, a community representative from East Peoria; and Dan Silverthorn and Stanley Valentine, labor representatives from Peoria.

Other members of the committee were Jeff Allen, chairman of the Illinois State Bar Association Judicial Advisory Polls Committee; Judge John Barra, chief judge of Peoria County; Walter D. Boyle, a lawyer from Hennepin; Joseph Dailing, executive director of Prairie State Legal Services which provides legal aid to low income persons across northern Illinois; Timothy Elder, corporate attorney for Caterpillar Inc.; Timothy J. Howard, and Donald R. Jackson, Peoria attorneys; Elizabeth Jensen, assistant corporate counsel for the City of Peoria; Nancy Mermelstein, chief deputy assistant state's attorney for Peoria County; John P. Nicoara, a Peoria attorney; and Patrick E. Oberle, a Pekin attorney.

Under the Illinois Constitution, the Supreme Court is given the authority to fill judicial vacancies which occur in the interim between elections.

Justice Kilbride was elected to the Supreme Court from the Third Judicial District which is made up of 21 counties in north central Illinois. Justice Kilbride was born in LaSalle, raised in Kankakee and practiced law for 20 years in the Rock Island area before being sworn into office Dec. 4, 2000.