

SUPREME COURT

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October 24, 2024

The Honorable Eric J. Holcomb
Governor of Indiana
200 W. Washington Street
Room 206, State House
Indianapolis, IN 46204

Dear Governor Holcomb:

The Indiana Judicial Nominating Commission met on Tuesday, October 22, 2024, and selected its nominees for the upcoming vacancy on the Court of Appeals of Indiana due to the retirement of Judge Terry A. Crone. On behalf of the Commission, and pursuant to Article 7, Section 10 of the Indiana Constitution, I submit to you the three candidates the Commission found to be the most highly qualified: Anna Mandula of Highland; Judge Stephen E. Scheele of Lake Superior Court; and Judge Stephanie E. Steele of St. Joseph Superior Court.

In selecting these candidates, the Commission considered all information pertinent to the non-exclusive statutory factors: legal education and honors; legal writings; reputation in the practice of law; physical condition and health; financial interests; and public service activities, including writings, speeches, and contributions to improving the administration of justice.

With this letter, we are forwarding to your office the nominees' complete applications and letters of recommendation. As required by statute and on the Commission's behalf, I offer the following evaluation of each candidate's qualifications.

Anna Mandula, Esq.

As a skilled practitioner and former business owner, Anna Mandula has been recognized by knowledgeable observers as a person who brings passion, a strong work ethic, and perseverance to any project she undertakes. In addition to these skills, she possesses a demeanor well-suited for the appellate court, having the ability to communicate with a diverse array of people compassionately, thoughtfully, and tactfully. As one colleague noted, "Anna is uniquely blessed with a kind, yet firm, temperament."

Anna Mandula graduated magna cum laude from Loyola University Chicago, earning a Bachelor of Science in Psychology with honors. During her undergraduate studies, she was awarded a Presidential Academic Scholarship, spent the spring of 2001 studying in Rome, Italy at the Loyola University Chicago John Felice Rome Center, and completed an honors thesis concerning health and mental health of low-income, urban African-American youth with a focus on the impact of exposure to violence. Anna Mandula also gave back to her community during her undergraduate years by tutoring Chicago-area students in the neighborhoods surrounding Rogers Park.

Earning a scholarship for academic performance, Anna Mandula enrolled in a dual degree program at Valparaiso University and the Valparaiso University School of Law, receiving her Juris Doctorate and a Master of Arts, with distinction, in Psychology in 2008. During law school, she was a teaching assistant for Legal Writing, and she also worked as a law clerk at Johnson & Bell, P.C. in Crown Point, Indiana.

After obtaining her law license, Anna Mandula continued to work at Johnson & Bell, P.C. as an associate attorney, concentrating on cases involving medical malpractice, negligence, business litigation, product and construction liability, transportation, and insurance coverage. Soon after becoming licensed, she was entrusted with writing an appellate brief on an issue of first impression regarding whether a hospital's statutory immunity for reporting suspected child abuse to authorities extended to its underlying diagnosis. The Court of Appeals of Indiana agreed with her position that this immunity extends to such diagnosis. Then, in 2012, her practical skills were recognized when the Indiana Lawyer named her as one of Indiana's Up and Coming Lawyers.

In November 2015, Anna Mandula left Johnson & Bell, P.C. to become a small business owner-operator of a State Farm Insurance Agency in Hammond, Indiana. In that role, she focused on sales and management of insurance and financial services products. In December 2016, she returned to legal practice, joining Giorgi & Bebekoski, LLC in Crown Point, Indiana, to handle medical malpractice and personal injury cases. She also expanded her practice to include matters involving family law, juveniles, and estate planning and probate. While at the firm, she also provided pro bono services on some family and juvenile law matters. In 2013–2015 and in 2018–2019, Super Lawyers recognized her as an Indiana Rising Star.

In 2019, Anna Mandula left Giorgi & Bebekoski, LLC to work at O'Neill McFadden & Willett LLP in Schererville, Indiana, where she handled personal injury and family law cases. In 2020, she joined Lewis Brisbois Bisgaard & Smith, LLP in Highland, Indiana as a partner. In this current position, she focuses on professional liability, business and commercial litigation, general liability, representation of national association banks in financial services litigation, healthcare and medical malpractice, family law, and estate planning.

Anna Mandula has tried two medical malpractice jury trials, and several bench trials. She has also handled administrative evidentiary hearings before the Indiana Department of Child Services and the Indiana Department of Workforce Development. And her litigation practice over the years has included filing appellate briefs in multiple civil cases.

Aware of the importance that lawyers have in the community, particularly with respect to both family and estate matters, Anna Mandula takes pride in the work she has done on adoption cases, assisting adoptive parents and children through the legal process so that children can be joined with their forever homes. As to long-term planning, in 2020, she wrote "*A Few Estate Planning Strategies for Peace of Mind*," published in the Indiana Lawyer, which included simple and practical considerations and strategies to assist in end-of-life planning. Throughout her career, she has been a speaker at events for civic, charitable, and governmental organizations on estate planning, Indiana's adoption process, and emergency detention orders. She also has spoken to classes at several Northwest Indiana middle schools to promote law as a viable career path.

Anna Mandula is a member of the Indiana State Bar Association, the Lake County Bar Association, the Calumet American Inn of Court, and the Defense Trial Counsel of Indiana. She is also a past president, treasurer, and board member of the Princeton Town Homeowners' Association. While serving as president of the association, the community suffered a fire that destroyed ten homes and damaged three others. As detailed by a fellow board member, Anna Mandula successfully navigated the association through the crisis by spending countless hours listening to affected homeowners, meeting with other members, attorneys, and insurance adjusters, and leading discussions with construction companies for the rebuilding of the homes.

In her free time, Anna Mandula enjoys traveling, gardening, exercising, reading, and working on do-it-yourself home-design projects.

Lake Superior Court Judge Stephen E. Scheele

As a role model, lawyer, and judge, Stephen ("Sam") Scheele has earned a reputation as an intelligent, thoughtful, and empathetic listener who has never lost sight that he is dealing with "real people" who have "real problems [and] real lives." As one practitioner observed, "Judge Scheele truly sees himself as a humble public servant of the people working for the public good, yet his unwavering quest for justice elevates him as a giant above his peers."

Stephen Scheele graduated magna cum laude from the University of Denver in 1993 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science, International Studies, and German. As an undergraduate student, he distinguished himself with various honors and achievements, which included receiving a scholarship to study at the Herder Institute at the University of

Leipzig in Germany, serving as his graduating class's president, and completing an honors thesis assessing mandatory sentencing guidelines. He also served as an intern for the Clerk of the United States Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit and held the positions of treasurer and president at his fraternity, Beta Theta Pi.

Earning his Juris Doctorate in 1996 from the Indiana University Maurer School of Law, Stephen Scheele received various scholastic honors during law school, served as an American Bar Association student representative, and participated in an inmate legal assistance clinic. He was also the managing editor of the Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies and wrote a synopsis of immigration trends that was published. After obtaining his law degree, Stephen Scheele returned to Germany to complete a post-JD Legal Fellowship through the German Academic Exchange Service, Young Lawyer Program.

Upon returning to the United States in 1997, Stephen Scheele became a licensed Indiana attorney and joined Goodman, Ball, Van Bokkelen & Leonard, P.C. in Highland, Indiana as an associate attorney. His practice focused mostly on serving clients in insurance defense litigation. After he formed the legal association of Goodman, Katz & Scheele with attorneys Samuel J. Goodman and J. Michael Katz in 2001, Stephen Scheele's legal practice evolved into general civil litigation and criminal defense work. In 2005, he began working as a part-time deputy public defender in Lake County while maintaining his private law practice. As a private practitioner, his clients included insurance companies, governmental entities, a regional bank, and plaintiffs in personal injury matters. He later expanded his practice to include commercial and residential planning and representing clients before local school boards, local planning commissions, and state licensing boards.

As a lawyer, Stephen Scheele has tried sixteen jury trials, both criminal and civil, in state and federal courts, and he has argued eleven appeals before the Court of Appeals of Indiana and the Indiana Supreme Court. One case of note occurred in 2014 when Stephen Scheele was appointed to represent a parolee—a skilled welder by trade—who had become homeless, hopeless, and saw prison as his only option. With this mindset, the client committed an unarmed bank robbery and then sat nearby, waiting for the police to arrest him in the hope that he would be returned to prison. After his client's plight unexpectedly received regional and national media attention, Stephen Scheele, with the assistance of other community stakeholders, helped his client navigate through the criminal justice system into a well-paying job, a place to live, and contact with long-lost family members.

While in private practice, Stephen Scheele regularly served as judge *pro tempore* in the Lake Superior Court, County Division, and in municipal courts in Lake County. From December 2016 to June 2019, he served as Lake Circuit Court's Domestic Relations Magistrate. Then, on June 26, 2019, Governor Holcomb appointed Stephen Scheele as Judge of the Lake Superior Court, Civil Division, and he was retained for a six-year term in November 2022. His docket includes cases involving torts, contractual issues, real estate, family law, and estates. During his tenure on the bench, he has heard numerous bench trials,

presided over eleven civil jury trials, and reduced the court’s pending caseload by nearly 60%.

Judge Scheele’s commitment to improving the administration of justice is further demonstrated through his committee work and rulemaking efforts. While serving as Chair of the Indiana Supreme Court’s Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Committee, the Committee supported the Indiana General Assembly in amending the Indiana Code in 2023 to allow ADR Plan Funds to be used for Guardian ad Litem services. Since 2023, Judge Scheele has served on the Indiana Supreme Court’s Innovation Committee and was recently appointed to the Court’s Strategic Planning Committee. And earlier this year, he was appointed to the Education and Outreach Subcommittee of the Indiana Supreme Court’s Commission on Race and Gender Fairness, which is charged with addressing attorney shortages throughout the state. He also previously served on the Pathways to the Bench and Bar Working Group for the Commission on Equity and Access in the Court System and is a former member of the Local Rules Advisory Committee for the United States District Court of the Northern District of Indiana.

Dedicated to his community, Judge Scheele actively participates in efforts to improve the lives of local youth. A self-described “labor of love,” his service with his local troop of the Boy Scouts of America—as an Assistant Scout Master, Outdoor Excursions Coordinator, and Executive Committee Secretary—includes weekly meetings, monthly campouts, and various philanthropic and community events. Judge Scheele also has engaged in youth outreach by teaching elementary students about government and civics through the Indiana Bar Foundation’s “We the People” program and by hosting K-12 students in the courtroom so that they can observe court proceedings or conduct mock trials. He also previously served as a volunteer firefighter with the Lake Hills Fire Department and is a current member of the Indiana Chapter of the Walnut Council, a nonprofit organization that promotes sustainable forest management and use of American hardwoods.

Stephen Scheele is a member of the Calumet American Inns of Court (President in 2021), the Indiana State Bar Association, the Indiana Judges Association, and the Lake County Bar Association (Board of Managers from 2000–2011). And he is currently in the Graduate Program for Indiana Judges. Throughout the years, Stephen Scheele has been a panelist or speaker on assorted topics involving the law and legal system, including a recent session on climate science and the law at the 2023 Spring Judicial College.

In his free time, Judge Scheele is an avid hiker and camper. And he enjoys spending time with his family on their 140-acre farm.

St. Joseph Superior Court Judge Stephanie E. Steele

A trailblazer and impressive servant-leader in her local community, Stephanie Steele possesses a keen intellect, conscientious work ethic, and remarkable ability to manage challenging tasks with grace and precision. As one knowledgeable observer noted, “Her ability to create a humane environment in the courtroom stems from her experience as a teacher and her deep understanding of the diverse needs and perspectives of those she serves.”

Stephanie Steele earned Bachelor of Arts degrees in Psychology and Political Science from the University of Michigan in 2002. Upon graduation, she worked in the Baltimore City Public Schools while obtaining her teaching certificate through studies at Johns Hopkins University and Coppin State University. In 2005, Stephanie Steele joined Teach for America (an organization aimed at addressing educational inequity), working in Los Angeles, California, and later in New York City, New York.

Earning a scholarship from her AmeriCorps participation, Stephanie Steele attended the Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law at Arizona State University, graduating with Pro Bono Distinction in 2009. During law school, she served as a legal writing assistant and as a tutor for a legal theory class. In these roles, she reviewed other students’ completed exams and writings to provide the students with feedback for improving their writing and essay responses.

A native Hoosier, Stephanie Steele returned to Indiana after law school and joined the St. Joseph County Prosecutor’s Office in 2011 as a deputy prosecuting attorney. She first handled a high-volume misdemeanor caseload but was later promoted to felony deputy in the Special Victims Unit where she handled violent-and-sex-crimes cases. She also represented the office on the St. Joseph County Child Protection Team, CASIE Center Case Review Sessions, and at community outreach and awareness events. As a lawyer, Stephanie Steele tried about 25–30 jury trials and numerous bench trials on criminal cases.

In 2015, Stephanie Steele left the prosecutor’s office to work as an assistant city attorney for the City of South Bend. Her duties included representing multiple city agencies, updating city agencies’ policy manuals, and amending or drafting resolutions, ordinances, and executive orders. She also acted as the city’s chief negotiator in union negotiations with the police and fire departments and helped secure South Bend’s first concurrent four-year agreements between the city and the unions. Elevated to Corporation Counsel in 2017, Stephanie Steele was responsible for managing all the city’s legal affairs. During her tenure, she reduced South Bend’s litigation expenses by 50% and led a proactive litigation strategy to secure \$1,000,000 to aid the city in its environmental remediation efforts. As she continued to hone her professional skills, she also received, in 2018, a scholarship to attend the Senior Executives in State and Local Government Program at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government.

In April 2021, Governor Holcomb appointed Stephanie Steele as Judge of St. Joseph Superior Court. She originally oversaw a high-volume felony criminal docket and currently oversees a general civil docket. Judge Steele has presided over thirty-five jury trials and five bench trials on various criminal cases. And she also presides over the St. Joseph County Drug Court and the St. Joseph County Commercial Court. To help reduce the anxiety Drug Court participants experience in court, Judge Steele trained and utilized the county's first drug-court dog.

Dedicated to improving access and equity within the legal system, Stephanie Steele began working with the Coalition for Court Access in 2020. She is the current chair of the Coalition's Self-Help and Court Access Working Group, which is designed to ensure that easy-to-use resources are available for the self-represented. She also participates in the Coalition's Rural Legal Services Working Group, which strives to ensure judges, attorneys, and litigants in rural areas have access to needed materials and services. Judge Steele also assisted in amending the local rule on the St. Joseph County court system's case allocation plan to create an even distribution of cases among felony courts. And, in 2022, Judge Steele co-authored an article for the American Bankruptcy Institute Journal (ABI), which reminded judges and attorneys about the important intersections between bankruptcy and criminal law, the Fifth Amendment, and the notification of rights. The article was later included in the American Bankruptcy Institute's Best of ABI 2022: The Year in Consumer Bankruptcy.

Judge Steele currently serves on the Board of Directors of the Judicial Conference of Indiana and is a member of the Judicial Conference's Community Relations Committee. Recently, Judge Steele was added to the Technology Applications Workgroup of the Indiana Supreme Court's Commission on Indiana's Legal Future. The workgroup's mission is to identify and make recommendations on ways to safely and ethically utilize emerging technologies, such as generative artificial intelligence and online dispute resolution, to fill gaps in legal representation. Judge Steele has also been active on the Commission for Continuing Legal Education and volunteers with the Judges and Lawyers Assistance Program.

A frequent speaker for civic organizations and schools in her community, Judge Steele has presented on various topics, including a nonpartisan explanation of the history and relevance of voting in the United States, conversations on ethics and race, and discussions about the value of public service. Continuing with her passion for education, Judge Steele annually participates in Constitution Day, which allows her to teach elementary students about how the three branches of government work together.

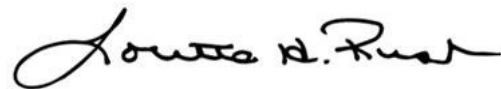
Since 2019, Judge Steele has been a board member of the Salvation Army Kroc Center, which operates a South Bend food pantry and focuses on providing opportunities, activities, and utility assistance to those in the community. She is also a board member of the Indiana University South Bend Arts Foundation, a past board member and officer of

the Memorial Hospital Board of Directors, a past board member of the Youth Service Bureau of St. Joseph County, and she served on the Homes for Hope Taskforce (a collaboration of volunteers working to provide stable housing for victims of domestic violence). Judge Steele is a current member of the Robert A. Grant Inn of Court and has served in a number of leadership roles for the St. Joseph County Bar Association, including member of the Board of Governors (2013–2020), Vice President (2017), President-elect (2018), President (2019), and Representative to the St. Joseph County Bar Foundation (2017–2021). And she is a graduate of the Indiana State Bar Association’s Leadership Development Academy.

In her spare time, Judge Steele enjoys traveling, ballroom dancing, and watching movies with her family.

I would be pleased to discuss any of these candidates with you in greater detail. And I am confident that you will similarly conclude that all three nominees are of a high caliber and any of the three would be a lasting credit to the Court of Appeals of Indiana.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Loretta H. Rush". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, flowing initial "L".

Loretta H. Rush
Chief Justice of Indiana