

CHRISTINE L. ENGEL
STATEMENT OF QUALIFICATIONS:
COMMISSIONER OF WORKERS' COMPENSATION

Biographical statement

Good morning, Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee; it is a privilege to appear before you. I am honored to be Governor Rell's nominee to serve the State of Connecticut as a commissioner of Workers' Compensation. I request, respectfully, that the committee confirm my nomination. I will work competently and conscientiously as commissioner and, by doing so, will sustain the high standards and the critical function of the Workers' Compensation Commission.

[Before I describe my qualifications to be a commissioner, I would like to provide brief biographical information to you for context.]

I have lived in Connecticut for 40 years. During most of this time, I have resided in New Preston with my loving and supportive husband, a public school educator to whom I have been married for 30 years. I was born, however, in Philadelphia and attended school there until I was 15. My father worked for Univac, which was a prominent American company during the early years of the computer era. My mother stayed at home to raise my brother and me. She entered the work force when my father died 34 years ago at an early age. She is now retired.

When I was 16, my father was transferred by his company to Frankfurt, Germany. My brother and I continued our schooling there; I graduated from Frankfurt American High School. Our family traveled extensively when we lived abroad, experiencing directly the culture and the governments of many countries. On one occasion, we entered East Germany through Checkpoint Charlie; on another, we toured the remains of Auschwitz. These experiences instilled in me a deep respect for the freedom we enjoy in the United States and an appreciation for the voice of U. S. citizens in the conduct of their government.

I returned from Germany to attend Penn State University on scholarship. I majored in art with the hope of becoming a teacher. After I graduated from college, I was hired at Woodbury Middle School, which was relatively close to my family's new residence in Madison. I taught art there in grades six, seven, and eight for 17 years; during that time, I was also the advisor of the school's student council. Teaching in public school was a wonderful, fulfilling experience. My mission was to guide students in discovering the joy of learning, in developing the discipline to achieve it, and in understanding the importance of character and kindness. In turn, my students educated me about the dreams and the worries of the next generation. Of course, they also taught me the new dances and the new fashions.

During my employment in Woodbury, I completed a Master's Degree in art education, a Sixth Year Degree in educational leadership, and a law degree. I attended law school at the University of Connecticut as an evening student. I perceive becoming an attorney 17

years ago as an extension of my teaching career. I believe that competent and effective attorneys are, first and foremost, excellent teachers. They assist their clients and, often, members of the jury to understand the substance and the procedures of law. They educate them about the merits of a case. During law school, I was a member of the Moot Court Team. I received excellent oral scores in competitions. The greatest contributing factor to my success in these competitions was my experience as a public school teacher whose primary responsibility was to communicate clearly to others.

During the last 15 years, approximately 80 percent of my law practice has been in workers' compensation. I have presented at all offices of the Workers' Compensation Commission in the state. I have appeared before all of the commissioners. My practice includes work on behalf of claimants and respondents. However, the majority of it involves representing claimants. In 2003, I passed the Connecticut examination for certification as a Workers' Compensation Expert. I am in the relatively small number of attorneys in Connecticut who are certified as expert. In 2007, I was invited to become a member of the Connecticut Bar's Executive Committee on Workers' Compensation.

In addition to my practice in workers' compensation, I have many years of experience in social security, personal injury, family law, and real estate. I have served as a fact finder and arbitrator for the Superior Court since 1996; I have also served the court as a Special Master in contested family cases since 1996. For many years, I have performed pro bono work. I have been a mentor for students in inner-city public elementary schools. I have donated time every year since 1995 to assist middle school students to prepare for Moot

Court competitions. I have judged these competitions on the middle school and high school levels for the Connecticut Consortium for Law and Citizenship Education. In the area of family law, I have represented disadvantaged clients referred to the non-profit Connecticut Pro Bono Network of the Connecticut Bar Association.

My seventeen-year practice of law, particularly my extensive experience in all aspects of workers' compensation, constitutes comprehensive preparation for the position of commissioner. I pledge my knowledge, my experience and my integrity to fulfill the responsibilities of commissioner with competence and with fairness. I will diligently serve the State of Connecticut. I thank the committee for its attention, and I request its confirmation.