

Chicago Park District

Attorney Biographies

Maria Guadalupe Garcia – General Counsel

Lupe Garcia oversees the operations of the Park District's Law, Risk Management, and Legal Investigations departments. She manages the nine attorneys and support staff of these departments. Additionally Lupe Garcia manages the engagement of outside legal counsel representing the District. She received a Bachelor's of Science in Public Administration from Loyola University of Chicago, and a law degree from Loyola University's School of Law in 1989. She was awarded a commendation from the law school for Leadership and Service. In 2008, Lupe Garcia received the Lawyers Lend-A-Hand Judge Marovitz Program's "Making a Difference Award."

Lupe Garcia practiced law in the Cook County Public Defender's Office and the private sector prior to joining the Park District. She handled a variety of legal matters including criminal defense, personal injury, corporate transactional matters, Worker's Compensation, employment, product's liability, and insurance defense. In 1996 she joined the Mayor's Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, and subsequently was named an Assistant Commissioner in the Department of Human Services. In 1999, she became the Director of Intergovernmental Affairs with the Park District, and in June 2002, she was appointed by the Board of Commissioners to serve as the District's General Counsel.

Hon., David R. Donnersberger (Ret.) – First Deputy General Counsel

Judge Donnersberger graduated from St. Bonaventure University with a Bachelor's of Arts in 1963. He attended DePaul University where he received his Masters of Arts in 1967 and his J.D. in 1972. Following graduation, Judge Donnersberger was admitted into the Illinois and Florida Bar and joined the firm of Kvistad & Dunn until 1975. Judge Donnersberger then joined the Cook County State's Attorney's Office as a Felony Trial Assistant before becoming a sole practitioner from 1978 to 1989. Judge Donnersberger joined the bench in 1989 and served as Motion Judge for the First Municipal District, Trial Judge for the Domestic Relations Division, and Motion Judge of the Law Division until 2001. He then served as Judge for Law Division's Commercial Litigation Section until 2003 and then as Judge for the Cook County Chancery Division, until 2006. Following his retirement from the bench, Judge Donnersberger joined the Chicago Park District as First Deputy General Counsel handling a variety of complex litigation matters. Judge Donnersberger has extensive experience in business/commercial, personal injury, employment, and statutory interpretation cases. As an attorney he has tried over 250 misdemeanor bench trials, approximately 100 felony bench trials, 30 criminal jury trials, and 6 civil jury trials.

Miluska L. Novota, Deputy General Counsel

Miluska L. Novota is the Deputy General Counsel at the Chicago Park District. Her areas of practice include contracts, intergovernmental agreements, municipal finance and environmental law. After completing undergraduate studies at Augustana College, Ms. Novota received a Master's degree from the University of Chicago and a law degree from Northwestern University.

Nelson Brown, Senior Counsel

Mr. Brown attended Michigan State University where he graduated with a Bachelor's of Science in Political Science, History and Philosophy in 1967. Following graduation Mr. Brown was a Masters Degree Candidate in American History at Michigan State University from 1969-71. Mr. Brown attended Cooley Law School where he earned his J.D. in 1978. Prior to joining the Chicago Park District Mr. Brown worked for the Legal Assistance Foundation of Chicago from 1979 to 1989 where he represented low-income clients in civil matters such as housing, consumer and public benefit problems, and related appeals in state and federal courts. Mr. Brown joined the Chicago Park District in 1989 as Senior Counsel. He represents the Park District in a variety of civil litigation matters including numerous trials in such areas as tort claims, employment discrimination, civil rights, administrative proceedings, administrative reviews and related appeals in both state and federal courts. He has argued cases before the First District Appellate Court and before the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals. He has also represented the Park District before the Illinois Supreme Court in *Buchelers v. Chicago Park District*, a leading case concerning a landowner's lack of duty to protect people encountering open-and-obvious dangers, such as diving into natural bodies of water.

Brian J. Flores, Counsel

Mr. Flores graduated from the University of Illinois at Chicago in 2005 with Bachelor's degrees in Psychology and Spanish. He then attended the John Marshall Law School in Chicago, Illinois where he received his J.D. in 2008. During law school, Mr. Flores completed an internship for the Park District and later joined its Law Department in 2009. He represents the Park District in various labor and employment matters, including administrative hearings and appeals, matters before the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the Illinois Department of Human Rights, the Chicago Commission on Human Relations, and the Illinois Department of Labor.

Sarah H. Greene, Counsel

Ms. Greene graduated from the University of Michigan with a Bachelor's of Arts in English and Religious Studies in 2000 and a J.D. from DePaul University College of Law in 2004. Ms. Greene joined the Chicago Park District in 2005 as Counsel handling litigation and transactional issues. She represents the Chicago Park District in a variety of tort litigation matters, including several arbitrations, bench and jury trials, in the Administrative, Municipal and Law Divisions. She also serves on the Park Enhancement Committee reviewing art submissions for Constitutional First Amendment, copyright issues and liability issues. Outside the District, Ms. Greene is a member of the Chicago Bar Association, serving on the Judicial Evaluation Committee, and is also active in the Women's Bar Association of Illinois and the Illinois Association for Defense Trial Counsel.

Leon Pawlykowycz, Senior Counsel

Mr. Pawlykowycz graduated from the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle in 1972. He then attended John Marshall Law School and received his J.D. in 1978. Prior to joining the Chicago Park District, Mr. Pawlykowycz worked for the Illinois Attorney General's Office and the City of Chicago Corporation Counsel's Office. Mr. Pawlykowycz joined the Park District in 1992 as Workers' Compensation Defense Attorney.

Erika B. Saltzman, Senior Counsel

Ms. Saltzman graduated from Grand Valley State University in 1990 with a Bachelor's of Science in Health Sciences. She attended IIT Chicago-Kent College of Law and received a J.D. in 1998. Ms. Saltzman is Senior Counsel at the Chicago Park District, where she practices in the areas of contracts and public finance.

George P. Smyrniotis, Senior Counsel

Mr. Smyrniotis received his J.D. from Chicago-Kent College of Law in 1989. Mr. Smyrniotis is Risk Management Senior Counsel for the Chicago Park District. In this role, Mr. Smyrniotis provides counsel to the Director of Risk Management regarding the District's insurance-related and risk transfer matters in addition to providing counsel on a wide range of other day-to-day issues faced by the District. He is an accomplished litigation attorney with over 18 years experience in State and Federal courts throughout the United States. Mr. Smyrniotis has litigated many different types of claims including construction-related, employment, civil rights, product liability and direct tort liability. He has considerable experience in first and third party insurance disputes. He also has experience litigating construction defect, fire and fire protection failure claims in addition to developing subrogation recovery strategies for such claims. Mr. Smyrniotis has been involved in many complex negotiations, including settlement of high profile, catastrophic injury and multi-party litigation matters. He has been admitted to practice in Illinois and in United States District Courts for Northern, Central and Southern Illinois and Northern Indiana.

Erik A. Varela, Senior Counsel

Mr. Varela attended Michigan State University where he graduated in 1995 with a Bachelor's of Arts in Business Administration and Pre-Law, and received his J.D. from DePaul University College of Law in 2002. Following law school Mr. Varela worked as an Assistant Public Defender for the Law Offices of the Cook County Public Defender where he was assigned to the Legal Resources Division responsible for representing indigent clients on Appeals and Post-Conviction Petitions. Mr. Varela joined the Chicago Park District in 2005 in the Department of Legislative and Community Affairs, most recently serving as Deputy Director. He began working as Senior Counsel in the Law Department in 2008 representing the Park District in a variety of civil litigation and administrative matters. His duties also include reviewing and drafting contracts and agreements with various public and private organizations, and overseeing all requests made under the Freedom of Information Act that are received by the Park District.