

Former Top San Francisco Judge Joins Signature Resolution

By James Mills

Law360 (February 24, 2025, 1:41 PM EST) -- Signature Resolution, the Southern California-based alternative dispute resolution service, is expanding its services in Northern California, announcing the opening of a San Francisco office and bringing in a former San Francisco Superior Court presiding judge as one of its neutrals.

Recently retired Judge Anne-Christine Massullo, who served 18 years on the San Francisco Superior Court, has joined Signature Resolution, the service announced on Wednesday. She completed her two-year term as the presiding judge in San Francisco at the end of 2024 and retired from the court on Feb. 18.



Anne-Christine Massullo

Signature Resolution will open in San Francisco at 601 California Street, a 22-story skyscraper in the financial district, in April. Massullo will serve as a mediator and arbitrator, but also will help launch the San Francisco office, being "boots on the ground," as she phrased it, helping spread the word about the office's opening and recruiting business for the office.

"I feel very lucky and fortunate to be recruited to head up the San Francisco office. They are just a top shelf firm, and it's exciting," Massullo told Law360 in a Friday interview. "I'm going to be a neutral, but they've also asked me to head this office and that's what I'm doing. The focus is going to be on my developing business and growing the office with the folks down in LA."

Daniel Buckley, a former presiding judge with the Los Angeles County Superior Court who has since retired and joined Signature Resolution, first told Massullo that Signature was looking to open a San Francisco office and suggested she talk to them.

"They didn't have any presence up here [in San Francisco] and that was the connection, but it turned out to be a good one," Massullo said. "I felt more comfortable with the neutrals that they have and their vision for the future than I did with the other firms. It was a good fit. When you know it's the right move, then you make it. And I just knew after talking with the leads and founders. It was right for me."

Dario Higuchi, Signature Resolution founding partner and managing member, said Massullo will be a "foundation of our San Francisco office."

"We are proud to have attracted another former presiding judge of such a significant courthouse to our panel of neutrals. Her experience and leadership skills will be invaluable in assisting her in resolving disputes," Higuchi said in a statement. "Her name recognition and identification with the local bar will

enable her to hit the ground running."

Signature Resolution was founded in 2017 and has six California offices: in downtown Los Angeles, Century City and San Diego, plus the newly opened Northern California locations in Oakland, opened in February 2023; Silicon Valley, opened in fall 2024; and now San Francisco. The firm also offers virtual services.

Massullo explained that expansion into Northern California is necessary because "when you're in a service business, you go where the clients are."

The San Francisco office is a vital linchpin in building a strong presence in Northern California.

"There are clients and businesses in San Francisco that don't necessarily want to go to Oakland. Same thing with Silicon Valley," Massullo said. "It may be only 30 miles, but when you have the convenience of an office in San Francisco with all of the heavy-hitting international law firms that have offices in San Francisco, it's a natural fit."

A native of northern Ohio, Massullo earned her law degree in 1983 at the University of Michigan Law School after earning her bachelor's degree at the University of Notre Dame.

She worked as an associate with the now defunct McCutchen Doyle Brown & Enersen LLP, and later with Jackson & Wallace LLP, handling civil litigation.

In 1989, Massullo became an assistant U.S. attorney in the Northern District of California, staying in that job 17 years, including serving as deputy chief of the Securities Fraud Unit.

In 2006, she became an attorney in the San Francisco City Attorney's office. However, she stayed in that job for only six months, as Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger appointed her to the San Francisco Superior Court.

During her 18 years on the bench, she worked on the State-Federal Judicial Council and was known for her leadership in programs addressing commercially sexually exploited children.

Massullo, who is married to attorney John Hemann, formerly an assistant U.S. attorney in the Northern District of California who is now with Cooley LLP, will handle various complex matters including antitrust, commercial contracts, construction, employment, false claims, family law and securities fraud.

She is happy about her decision to join Signature because it involves aspects of being a presiding judge that she enjoyed.

"I really liked being a presiding judge, seeing something — 'OK, we have an issue here, let's fix it' — making us more efficient, providing better services; these are all of the things that I am hoping my time as a presiding judge I bring to this office," Massullo said. "Developing business, getting a stellar reputation for the office and the neutrals that provide the service in San Francisco, those are all critically important and I think I can help to support those efforts."

But mediation is a passion for Massullo as well, saying settlement conferences were a favorite part of her time as judge.

"I love mediation. I wish as a judge I'd had more time for mediation. I've done hundreds of settlement conferences, that I always enjoyed," Massullo said. "At Signature, it's not like I'm going to be running the office. I'm going to be there and I'm heading the office, but I want to spend as much time as possible doing mediations and arbitrations. That is very much my goal."

--Editing by Robert Rudinger.

All Content © 2003-2025, Portfolio Media, Inc.