

Rhode Island Women Lawyers: Past, Present, & Future

This series was inspired by Roger Williams University School of Law's annual *Women in Robes* event and was created in alliance with their exciting new project, *The First Women*, which recognizes and honors the first women of the Rhode Island Bar.



Hon. Linda Rekas Sloan
RI Superior Court Associate Justice

From birth, the Honorable Associate Justice Linda Rekas Sloan has been influenced by the dual cultures of her Taiwanese mother and American father. Born in her mother's native Taiwan and given the name "I-Fan," her name was officially changed to "Linda" when the family moved to the United States. As a Navy kid, Judge Rekas Sloan had rich experiences in her young life, including living on the Hawaii Naval Base, as her father's career took them to various parts of the country. Her family eventually settled in her father's hometown, Coventry, Rhode Island, where she matriculated through the Coventry Public School system.

After high school, Judge Rekas Sloan continued her education at Providence College and Boston University School of Law. During her 1L summer, she interned at the Rhode Island Office of Attorney General through the State Internship Program. Then, after her second year at BU Law, she interned at Olenn & Penza, the firm at which she would spend the first four years of her career. There, she practiced insurance defense, gaining foundational litigation skills by trying cases from the ground up.

Judge Rekas Sloan stresses the importance of networking and how it affected her career moves following her time at Olenn & Penza. In relationship-rich Rhode Island, she emphasized

how crucial it was to develop and maintain professional contacts—an essential skill for young attorneys and a skill that could lead to unexpected opportunities. As a relatively new practitioner, she became involved with the Rhode Island Bar Association's New Lawyers Committee (NLC) by attending meetings, CLEs, and participating in volunteer projects. It was through the NLC that she met the managing partner of Salter McGowan, who helped bring her into the firm, where she went on to develop a creditors' rights and insolvency practice.

As she moved further along in her career, Judge Rekas Sloan recognized that a candidate's personal fit within a company's culture can be more indicative of success rather than his or her substantive knowledge of a certain practice area. After all, a lawyer who has a general aptitude for legal thinking and is willing to work hard can master any practice area with appropriate guidance. However, it is also the intangibles—a person's ability to be a supportive team player and a personable coworker—that can really forecast a successful workplace relationship.

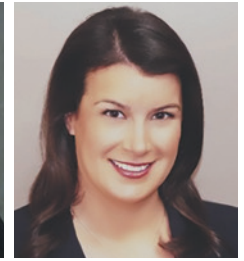
Throughout her insolvency practice, Judge Rekas Sloan and Ted Orson were adversaries on numerous cases; however, he eventually convinced her to join his firm, Orson & Brusini. Once again, another unexpected turn in her career path was presented when she received a call from Christopher Montalbano, where she became an underwriter at Mortgage Guarantee & Title Insurance Company, developing adjacent but distinct skills in the process. As a person who loves taking on challenges and new disciplines, Judge Rekas Sloan took advantage of this next opportunity.

A lifelong learner, Judge Rekas Sloan tackled another area of practice that made her reminiscent of being back in school, where she was constantly exposed to ever-changing topics and ideas. When the title insurance company was bought out, she returned to practice at Salter McGowan, further honing her practice in the insolvency arena.

Judge Rekas Sloan's next major career move came when she thought about setting up her own firm. It was at that moment she faced, once



Jenna Giguere, Esq.



Angela Yingling, Esq.
RI Assistant Public
Defender

again, another unexpected opportunity. She was approached by Fidelity National Title Insurance Group for an exciting underwriting role. However, she was motivated to begin her career as a sole practitioner because she did not want to lose her courtroom experience. Instead of feeling as though she had to choose one opportunity over the other, she negotiated a creative solution that allowed her to have an insolvency practice through her own firm while also working full-time at Fidelity—a combined career that would seem daunting to most but a challenge that she took on with gusto.

Reflecting on her insolvency cases, Judge Rekas Sloan noted that there were very few women who regularly practiced in that area when she was an up-and-coming attorney; indeed, only about three easily came to mind, including the now-Honorable Diane Finkle of the United States Bankruptcy Court. Although a few more women have joined the field in recent years, it remains an extremely male-dominated area of the law. Judge Rekas Sloan recognized that many of the judges on the business calendar were aware of this discrepancy and made concerted efforts to encourage women to join the receivership panel and appoint them to cases. She recalled with gratitude that Judges Silverstein, Stern, and Licht all made sure that she was given the same opportunities as the male attorneys on the list. Judge Rekas Sloan greatly enjoyed receivership work, applying her knowledge of the Uniform Commercial Code and secured transactions to her cases, and found it particularly satisfying when she could implement creative solutions to complex financial problems. She also praised the implementation of the business calendars, which provided a flexible, business-friendly forum for Rhode Island.

In addition to her busy legal and underwriting practice, Judge Rekas Sloan also served on the West Greenwich Town Council and is an active member of the local chapter of the Rotary Club. These experiences left her yearning for an even greater role in public service. So, she decided to give it a try and submitted her name for a judgeship position. Judge Rekas Sloan recalled the details of her nomination process, which

took place during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. After a significant amount of time had elapsed since she filed her application, she had essentially given up on the idea. So, when she received the call from Governor Gina Raimondo appointing her to the bench on the Rhode Island Superior Court, she was completely shocked. That moment is forever imprinted in her memory; she even remembers that she was watching an episode of *The Voice* when she received the life-changing call.

Due to the pandemic, Judge Rekas Sloan's swearing-in ceremony included a limited number of people in the Presiding Justice Gibney's courtroom, but it was nonetheless a momentous occasion. While every ceremony is special, Judge Rekas Sloan's elevation to the bench was significant for an additional reason as well: she is the first Asian-American attorney to sit on the Rhode Island Superior Court.

It is now two and a half years later, and Judge Rekas Sloan has served on a flurry of calendars: the Providence Formal & Special Cause Calendar, the Providence Daily Criminal Calendar, the Providence Dispositive Motion Calendar, and the Costs, Fines, and Restitution Calendar. Most recently, she has been sitting in Courtroom 4E in Kent County, presiding over the Daily Criminal Calendar.

To this day, she still remembers the butterflies in her stomach on her first day taking the bench after training with Judge Montalbano and is still grateful to him for whispering helpful hints to her on her first day. Certainly, assuming a judgeship requires an immense amount of learning, even for a seasoned litigator. One must become familiar with new areas of the law, embrace foreign-seeming courtroom procedures, and learn a whole different "lingo." As is her wont, Judge Rekas Sloan approaches the bench with humility; practitioners appreciate that she is not afraid to say she doesn't have an immediate answer or needs more time to get up to speed on a matter. According to several attorneys who practice before her now, the judge's lifelong love of learning, as well as her kindness and understanding, make her particularly well-equipped to handle the challenges of the bench.

Reflecting on diversity, equity, and inclusion, Judge Rekas Sloan praised Krystle Tadesse and the Judicial Nominating Commission for making more direct efforts to get diverse applicants for judgeships, such as reaching out to affinity bar associations. She also highlighted her efforts during her term as President of the Bar Association, including the recommendation that the Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion made to RIBA leadership about implementing a DEI CLE requirement, which will be mandatory in the next reporting year. Judge Rekas Sloan reflects and acknowledges that DEI work is hard and uncomfortable; however, she has seen how progress can be made, often by opening minds incrementally; she especially values one-on-one conversations.

Judge Rekas Sloan was open about experiencing "imposter syndrome" during both her practice and her time on the bench, something that these authors found both reassuring and inspiring. Navigating the challenges of imposter syndrome, which affects all genders but is often felt by those who identify as female, is far from a unique experience. However, it is helpful to hear others' stories and battles and to discuss ways of combating the issue. To this day, Judge Rekas Sloan still experiences times when she feels like an outsider, pinching herself to make sure her judgeship is actually real. She suggested that talking about imposter syndrome regularly—as opposed to avoiding the topic or pretending that it doesn't exist—may be one of the best ways to chip away at those defeating thoughts. Judge Rekas Sloan has benefited from people who have given her sage advice over the years and feels a corresponding desire to "pay it forward." As she recognizes, it is especially important to share advice and knowledge with young lawyers and lawyers from diverse backgrounds. The best—and occasionally worst (but mostly best!)—thing about Rhode Island is its small size, so Judge Rekas Sloan encourages us all to get to know each other better as a legal community, advice that can be taken to heart by both newer attorneys and seasoned practitioners alike. ♦

IOLTA Honor Roll Banks

The Rhode Island Bar Foundation sends its grateful appreciation to the banks participating in our Interest on Lawyers Trust Accounts (IOLTA) Honor Roll Bank program. Many banks in Rhode Island participate in the Rhode Island Bar Foundation IOLTA Program, which is administered by the Rhode Island Bar Foundation. The IOLTA Program funds critical services in Rhode Island communities. Through IOLTA grants, thousands of our most vulnerable citizens receive free or low-cost civil legal services. The RI Bar Foundation would like to especially highlight our IOLTA Honor Roll Bank participants. These financial institutions agree to pay a net yield of at least 65 percent of the federal fund's target rate on IOLTA deposits. Their participation in the IOLTA Program exemplifies their commitment to upholding the Federal Community Reinvestment Act. Participating banks appear below:



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Mariam Alexanian Lavoie, Esq.



*Partnering with clients
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300 Centerville Road
Summit West, Suite 300
Warwick, RI 02886

t: 401.825.7900
f: 401.825.7920
mariam@mlavoielaw.com