

## Retired San Mateo County Judge Joins Signature Resolution

By James Mills

Law360 (August 29, 2025, 9:21 AM EDT) -- Alternative dispute resolution service Signature Resolution is bringing in a recently retired San Mateo County judge to join its panel of neutrals.

Jonathan E. Karesh, who retired from the bench in late June upon turning 65, has joined Signature Resolution, the service announced earlier this week. He spent 24 years on the San Mateo County Superior Court bench and 11 years before that as a deputy district attorney with the San Mateo County District Attorney's Office.



Jonathan E. Karesh

Karesh will work out of Signature's new Silicon Valley office in Santa Clara, California, but will also handle virtual cases as well.

In a Thursday afternoon interview, Karesh told Law360 he originally planned to just retire, spend more time with his husband and get more active in his church. However, two months before his retirement, he was contacted by Dario Higuchi, Signature Resolution's founding partner and managing member.

"I met with him, learned a lot about the organization. I did my due diligence, talked with a number of judges who worked with Signature and found that it was just a first-class organization," Karesh said. "Dario presented me with a very exciting opportunity, and I jumped on it quickly."

Karesh is excited about the possibilities Signature offers, including handling mediations on a variety of topics with lots of different people.

"I am very much looking forward to using some of the civil experience that I had through the years, when I was the presiding judge, when I was the civil law in motion judge, and some of the civil trials I had through the years," he said.

Karesh plans to handle personal injury cases, construction defect cases, employment cases, business disputes and even product liability cases. He also is open to handling elder abuse and sexual assault cases, both areas he had experience with while on the bench.

Knowing there are subtle differences between being a judge and being a neutral, he's been shadowing some Signature Resolution neutrals.

"One of the things that I've been doing is shadowing a bunch of mediations with experienced Signature judges during the last couple of weeks," Karesh said. "They were all by Zoom and they were just fascinating to watch."

Signature Resolution was founded in 2017 and has seven California offices: downtown Los Angeles, Century City, Bakersfield, San Diego, Oakland, Santa Clara and San Francisco, plus virtual services.

"Judge Karesh brings a rare combination of judicial leadership, practical civil litigation expertise, and an inclusive, people-centered approach to dispute resolution. His ability to manage complex legal issues, whether leading a court through a public health crisis or presiding over high-stakes civil trials, sets him apart." Higuchi said in a statement. "We're honored to welcome a neutral of his caliber to our panel and know that his presence will be an incredible asset to the attorneys and clients we serve."

Karesh, who grew up in San Francisco, earned his law degree in 1985 from the University of California, Berkeley School of Law after earning his bachelor's degree in history there.

He worked as an associate with the now defunct Sedgwick Detert Moran & Arnold LLP, then in 1990 joined the San Mateo County District Attorney's office.

In 2001, Gov. Gray Davis appointed him to the San Mateo County Superior Court. In 2019, he was elected presiding judge of the San Mateo County Superior Court.

During the second year of his term as presiding judge, Karesh guided the court through the COVID-19 pandemic. During that time, he used the pavilion halls of the San Mateo County Fairgrounds as temporary courtrooms for jury selection, since that space was big enough to allow for social distancing to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

"We used three different pavilions used for the county fair. We built courtrooms in them. The chairs were literally six feet apart. We would select the jury there," Karesh said. "Once we got the jury, we would go back to the courthouse and the jury would sit in the gallery spaced about six feet apart while the attorneys would sit, spaced apart, in the jury box. So, it was a really interesting way that we devised to keep everybody safe, but it worked out very well. Because of that, San Mateo County did not have much of a backlog of cases."

Karesh publicly came out as a gay man in 2006, and in 2019 became the second openly LGBTQ judge ever elected to be the presiding judge of the San Mateo County Superior Court.

"Back in 2006, there weren't many openly gay judges and now we're everywhere," Karesh said. "There's a very robust LGBTQ subcommittee of the California Judges Association. There's quite a few of us. Being an openly gay judge is not a big deal."

He said coming out in 2006 was a good experience for him.

"I had nothing but positive responses from everybody, my colleagues, the attorneys, everybody was welcoming me with open arms," Karesh said. "Then within about a week, everybody just kind of forgot about it; everybody knew, but nobody really cared. It was a very good experience when I came out. I no longer had to put a wall between my personal life and my work life because that was draining."

Karesh is the son of the late Joseph Karesh, a rabbi turned attorney who served as a judge on the San Francisco County Superior Court from 1960 to 1978, then served as a pro tem judge on the Alameda County Superior Court until 1995.

--Editing by Alyssa Miller.

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