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Haddad to resign after decade on the bench in Cook County

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Cook County's first Arab-American circuit judge plans to resign in September after 10 years in a position he held by order of the Illinois Supreme Court.

Circuit Judge William J. Haddad submitted his resignation letter on Monday and his last day will be Sept. 6.

"It's been great. It's been a rush," Haddad said. "People say I work too hard, but it's like playing baseball. You love it, and get paid for doing it. That's why you put a lot of effort into it — because you enjoy the job."

Haddad, 67, was appointed to the bench in 2003 to fill a vacancy. He narrowly lost his bid to keep his seat in the 2004 primary election.

His term was scheduled to expire at the end of 2004, but the state high court recalled him to the bench for a six-year period. The court recalled him again in 2010 for a three-year period ending Nov. 30.

Haddad's chance to get recalled a third time disappeared when the state high court announced in 2011 that it would no longer recall judges who had not won election.

Circuit Judge William D. Maddux, presiding judge of the Law Division, said he sent letters to the Illinois Supreme Court trying to have Haddad recalled

again, "but to no avail."

"He's one of the finest judges I've ever encountered in the circuit court," Maddux said. "The man is bright, he's able, very intelligent and has sound judgment. ... We're losing a good person."

Though Haddad could have stayed until Nov. 30, he decided to leave early because he is "anxious" to start his new career.

He plans to mediate cases with ADR Systems of America LLC and become active with the American Middle East Voter Alliance, which helps organize Arab-American voters in Cook County "into one cogent group" and will evaluate local candidates' sensitivity to minority issues.

"It's a community that often undervotes and is overlooked by officeholders who have the power to appoint them to positions that otherwise they would not be elected to," Haddad said.

Haddad chose not to run for election in part because he doesn't believe he could win, he said.

When he lost the primary in 2004, he had the backing of many government officials including then-Mayor Richard M. Daley, yet it still wasn't enough, he said.

"I don't want to say men with unusual last names have a difficult time getting elected, but there is some history there," he



William J. Haddad

said.

Since 2005, Haddad has worked in the trial section of the Law Division, handling cases involving medical malpractice, product liability and construction injuries.

"He is a wonderful judge," said Joseph W. Balesteri, a partner at Power, Rogers & Smith P.C., who represents plaintiffs in personal injury cases and has appeared before Haddad. "It's a sad day for Cook County citizens and our trial bar."

For complex, high-dollar trials in the Daley Center, when both sides may request the trial judge, Haddad is often named, Balesteri said.

"He equal to a World Series quality umpire ... It's sad we're losing him. He's a great man."