

Inquirer Judicial Candidate Questionnaire

Name: **Diane Thompson**

Running for: Philadelphia Common Pleas Court

Political Party: Democrat

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Questions:



1. Why are you qualified and well-suited to serve as a judge on the court for which you are running?

I am qualified to serve as a judge in the Court of Common Pleas of Philadelphia not only because I believe I have an excellent command of the law, but because I have put my training as a lawyer into practice for nearly 19 years. As an attorney I have accumulated thousands of hours of courtroom experience while representing clients in Family Court for custody, divorce, support, adoption, protection from abuse, and juvenile delinquency issues. In addition I have represented more than a thousand clients who were defendants in the criminal justice system. For approximately three years I served as an appointed Discovery Master for complex civil litigation cases. Prior to opening my own practice I served as a law clerk to a judge in the Court of Common Pleas where I learned how to manage a courtroom and to maintain a court docket. As a sole practitioner for the past 18+ years, I have managed my own firm successfully.

I am also well-suited to serve as a judge in the Court of Common Pleas because of my life experience and my temperament. Prior to attending law school, over the course of 15 years, I taught students ranging in age from 3 to 18 years, in inner city schools as well as in the suburbs. I have acquired excellent listening skills throughout both of these careers and as a parent of two children and as a grandparent. Since I was quite young I realized that I have a deep sense of compassion for the less fortunate. I have translated my compassion into action by representing nearly 100 clients on a *pro bono* basis through referrals from VIP, Women Against Abuse, Support Center for Child Advocates, Good Shepherd Neighborhood Mediation project, my ward, Democratic City Committee, and from other attorneys and courtroom personnel. I am blessed that I have been able to become an advocate who translates my compassion into a passion for justice for those who have been wronged.

2. Did you receive a rating of “recommended” or higher from the state or local bar association? If not, why not? YES

3. If you are an incumbent judge, what’s a recent instance in which you acted to preserve your judicial independence? If you are an aspiring judge, how do you plan to remain independent if elected to the bench?

I believe that every judge should have no conflict of interest with either the parties in a matter or with the attorneys who represent the parties in order to maintain independence and avoid even the appearance of impropriety. That is not to say that a judge cannot administer impartial justice if he or she knows either the litigant or the attorneys. If elected to the Court of Common Pleas, I would unequivocally recuse myself should any of my former clients' cases be listed before me. Should any attorneys with whom I have had cases appear before me, I would announce this relationship to both attorneys and their clients and offer them my recusal if warranted. I do believe I can remain impartial and fair regardless of any prior relationship. I realize that a judge must often make decisions that may be unpopular to the public at large or to government. However, a judge must consider all the evidence before her or him and must uphold the law and not succumb to political pressure or pressure from any special interest groups.

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's procedure for selecting judges through elections creates additional hurdles for judicial candidates to maintain independence as most candidates engage in raising funds to promote their campaigns. I believe that judicial candidates should not be informed of any financial contributions from law firms and individuals to avoid any notion of partiality. I require that my campaign staff not disclose this information to me.

4. A number of Pennsylvania judges have been sanctioned for campaign activities, ex parte dealings, and other alleged misconduct. How can the state's judiciary prevent discipline scandals of the type seen recently?

While the state's judiciary does not have any enumerated power to prevent misconduct by any individual judges, each judge has the ability, and should, influence others by example. Judges can and must exert peer influence to prevent judicial misconduct by self-monitoring in order to ensure the trust of the public it serves. In addition, every judge should have a mentor who is an experienced judge who can guide a less-experienced jurist.

The judiciary can increase the public trust by maintaining the values that every judge should aspire to, as described by the ancient Greek philosopher, Socrates : To hear courteously, to answer wisely, to consider soberly, and to decide impartially.”

The Judicial Conduct Board of Pennsylvania must make the public more aware of misconduct by judges. One way this can be accomplished is by publishing misconduct information and by making information regarding judicial ethics accessible to the public.

5. If you believe that gender, racial, ethnic, class or other forms of bias can infect the justice system, how will you work to keep your courtroom as bias-free as possible?

I believe that biases are usually a result of lack of accurate information or experience with persons against whom a particular bias is directed. The justice system is unfortunately not shielded from bias. I believe that I must be the leader in my own courtroom and I will refuse to tolerate any type of discrimination or bias from or towards any individual, whether that person is a litigant, an attorney, a court reporter, court support staff person, court officer, sheriff, or a

member of the gallery. I am a strong believer in education. I believe that if individuals who work with me or appear before me are practicing discrimination or bias, consciously or unconsciously, I would encourage participation in a workshop designed to educate and change that behavior, such as the workshop programs designed by the National Education Association.