

Inquirer Judicial Candidate Questionnaire

Harry J Levant

Court of Common Pleas

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

As a lawyer for 22 year, with an active trial practice I have handled cases in the civil, criminal and family divisions of Common Pleas Court. On my first day as judge I will be prepared to serve in any of the 3 branches of the court as I have personally tried and/or handled cases ranging from complex medical malpractice to small business disputes and juvenile delinquency. With my extensive experience and knowledge of the inner workings of the courtroom, I understand what is required to keep cases moving forward in a fair and time efficient manner.



I am a life-long Philadelphian with a record of service to my city. My wife and I are proud Philadelphia Public School parents. Our 3 children attend Shawmont Elementary in the Roxborough/Andorra section of the city. Our oldest will start CAPA in the fall. I spent 9 years on the Shawmont Home and School executive board and served 4 years (term limit) as president. During that time I formed the *Shawmont One: One School, One Family, One Purpose* program and we utilized this program to unite the school family and business community. We successfully raised enough money to purchase *Internet Smartboards* for the school. As a result of our efforts, each classroom third through eighth grade now has an *Internet Smartboard*.

I believe a disconnect exists between the court and our community. I believe this disconnect is a contributing factor to the complex and critically important issues surrounding witnesses intimidation. In my view it should be the responsibility of judges to engage the community outside the courtroom in an effort to bridge this gap. Therefore, when I am elected I will work with the School District of Philadelphia to create a program where judges volunteer to give up a minimum of one “chamber week” per year and serve in a Philadelphia high school classroom teaching a class as part of the curriculum. This will permit judges to give back to the community they serve and allow students to interact with the court system in a positive manner. I look forward to explaining my vision for this program in more detail when we have the opportunity to meet in person.

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?

The Canons Of Judicial Ethics provide a framework to ensure independence. The problems arise when judges fail to adhere to the true intent of the ethical rules. The Canons mandate that judges avoid even the appearance of impropriety in their activities and judicial actions. I believe this means that a judge must remain ever vigilant of how his/her conduct will appear to the public. It isn’t enough that a judge subjectively think that his/her actions are appropriate; rather the critical issue should be whether an independent objective observer would perceive involvement in a case as a violation of the duties of independence and impartiality I would invoke my power of recusal whenever a situation arose that might lead an objective observer to perceive a conflict.

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 promote ethical behavior among judges and court staff?

The Supreme Court Of Pennsylvania should look to educate judges by implementing mandatory continuing legal education requirements for all judges in Common Pleas and Municipal Court with particular emphasis on issues related to political activities and interaction with counsel

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?

It is a sad reality that gender, racial, ethnic, class and other forms of bias exist in our society. As a result it is naïve to believe that our courts would be immune. I will handle my courtroom in the exact manner that I live and that is with a zero tolerance policy for any type of discrimination. As a judge I will work tirelessly to ensure that I preside over a courtroom free of even a mere appearance of bias or discrimination. I would encourage periodic outside review of court system data by independent criminologists with particular emphasis on sentencing patterns to reduce and eliminate any bias or inequality.

I was fortunate to grow up in Philadelphia in the 1960’s and 1970’s. I was even more fortunate to learn from my parents at a very young age that

racism has no place in a civilized society. As stated in the musical *South Pacific*: “racism is not born in you! It happens after you’re born.” Racism and bias are not born in the court system, however, all too often they appear and are tolerated. This will not happen in my courtroom. The journey to true equality is a marathon and not a sprint.

