

Inquirer Judicial Candidate Questionnaire

Pennsylvania Primary 2011

- **Name: Nycole Watson**
- **Judicial post for which you are running: Court of Common Pleas**
- **Current occupation / employer: Attorney/Defender Association of Philadelphia until 3/8/11 when I resigned to run for this judicial office.**
- **Date of birth: 01/11/1972**
- **Political party: Democrat**
- **Campaign e-mail and Internet site: nycole4judge@gmail.com**
- **Daytime phone (will not be published): 267-324-8005**
- **Digital photo e-mailed to judge@phillynews.com ? Yes**

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

I believe that a judge sitting in any capacity must possess the character and integrity which invites the public trust. But more importantly, a judge must be fair, attentive, compassionate and impartial. These are all qualities that I have acquired and demonstrated during my legal career as a student law clerk, a Hearing Officer, an Emergency Trial Commissioner, and as an Assistant Defender with the Defender Association of Philadelphia for over eleven years. All of these positions and experiences coalesce to make me an excellent candidate for judge of the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas.

I have dedicated my career to public service and to advocating for equal justice for all persons under the law. My commitment to equal justice for all persons is exemplified by the more than sixteen years that I have dedicated to the practice of law. Furthermore, I have sat in a quasi judicial role while acting as an Emergency Trial Commissioner and a Hearing Officer; additionally, I have served as a judge/instructor with the Temple University Beasley School of Law LL.M in Trial Advocacy Program. In these roles I have developed the skills that will be critical to a judge in the Court of Common Pleas. Each position required me to preside over legal proceedings, maintain order, and display the proper authority and temperament in resolving the issues presented for my disposition. Thus I feel my demonstrated ability to review and digest case law along with my past experience in presiding over actual legal issues and rendering decisions makes me well-suited to sit as a judge in the Court of Common Pleas.

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

I have not received a rating from the local bar association as of yet as my interview with the Judicial Commission is April 15, 2011.

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?

When elected to the bench, my duty will be to hear and decide the cases before me based upon the facts and evidence presented according to the applicable law. This mandate governs my decision-making even if those decisions are politically unpopular or opposed by powerful interests. As I have mentioned above, I have dedicated my career to public service and to advocating for equal justice for all persons under the law. My goals as an aspiring judge are no different and cannot truly be achieved if I allow myself to become improperly influenced.

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 Pennsylvania judiciary can promote ethical behavior among judges and court staff by leading by example on the appellate level and ensuring that there is a statewide educational program which specifically reinforces the need for ethics and integrity on the bench. Sometimes misconduct begins as a perceived minor transgression that goes unaddressed and then subsequently blossoms into major infractions that can hinder the administration of justice and disparage the public's perception of the integrity of the court. While not all indiscretions can be prevented, many can be avoided if our judiciary sets a standard of excellence and continues to ensure that all court staff including judges and lawyers honor and respect this standard.

One way to promote this standard of excellence is to mandate trainings of all court staff on ethics and integrity in the court on a yearly basis. These yearly trainings will serve to reinforce our state's commitment to honor and integrity in the administration of justice.

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?

In a city as diverse and multicultural as Philadelphia, the opportunity for allegations of bias or discriminatory treatment is possible in the justice system. I believe that consistent training regarding cultural awareness and sensitivity to the rights and needs of others will help to prevent these allegations from occurring in my courtroom. My strategy for providing an impartial and respectful environment for all parties, staff and counsel is to consistently reinforce the need for the respectful treatment of others and to initiate trainings that will prepare my staff to be partners in creating a bias-free environment in our courtroom to the best of our ability.

Please e-mail your completed questionnaire by **Tuesday, April 12** to:

judge@phillynews.com