

# Inquirer Judicial Candidate Questionnaire

**Name:** Patricia E. Coonahan

**Judicial post for which you are running:**  
Montgomery County Court of Common Pleas

**Political Party:** Republican

**Campaign e-mail and Website:**  
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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 have been employed by the Montgomery County District Attorney's Office since 1987, during which time I have participated in thousands of cases brought to trial; my trial experience includes pre-trial motions and discovery, litigation and trial, and post-trial proceedings and appeals.

I am currently Deputy District Attorney and Chief of Appeals. In this position I am responsible for litigating and supervising -- on behalf of Montgomery County and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania -- the most serious and legally intricate criminal cases, including appeals from the imposition of the death penalty. As the chief of appeals, I am also responsible for training assistant district attorneys and law students regarding the rules of evidence and procedure.

This position provides me with experience and insight which is of particular value as a judicial candidate. As a *litigator*, I have complete familiarity with the County's court system. As an *appellate attorney*, I have developed a knowledge of the rules of evidence and procedure, a wide base of experience with legal precedent and research in the Court of Common Pleas, and in the State and Federal courts.

In addition, I have been involved in many civic and non-profit organizations, for instance, as a board member of Habitat for Humanity, the Greater Norristown Police Athletic League, Kiwanis, and Compeer, which give me a greater understanding of people and the issues a person faces in every day life.

Finally, my qualities of excellent intellect, integrity, temperament and, above all, a sense of fairness make me well suited to serve as judge.

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

I have received a recommended rating from the Montgomery County Bar Association

- 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?***

A prosecutor has a special responsibility which extends beyond a duty of zealous advocacy to the greater ideals and responsibilities of fairness and justice. I have served with distinction as first an Assistant District Attorney, and now a Deputy District Attorney, during which time I have always been careful to observe my duties of independence and fairness to the public. I am also mindful of the code of judicial conduct which mandates independence in decision making. I look forward to continuing my career of careful observance as well as the code of judicial conduct while serving the County of Montgomery as judge.

- 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?***

To prevent discipline scandals, the code of judicial conduct containing the canons of ethics for judges must be strictly followed by me as a judge and strictly enforced by the state Supreme Court. The provisions of the rules of procedure of the court of judicial discipline and the rules of conduct for members of the court of judicial discipline also inform me of what is required of a judge – that is, “an independent and honorable judiciary is *indispensable* to justice in our society” and there must be “public confidence in the integrity and impartiality of the judiciary.” These guidelines are set forth in rules 3 and 4 of the Rules of Procedure mentioned above. I believe that knowledge of the code of judicial conduct and enforcement of the code of judicial conduct will prevent discipline scandals.

- 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?***

Ideally, I would like to believe that gender, racial, ethnic, class, or other forms of bias do not infect or affect the justice system. Historically, however, the Supreme Court of the United States as well as the Courts of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania have recognized these pernicious evils and created procedural barriers to prevent their infection of our courts; as judge, I will rigorously enforce these procedures in order to ensure fairness in the courtroom, and in my decision-making. I know that I have never based any decisions in my life, either professionally or personally, on these biases. The voters have my word that I will be fair and impartial in any decision rendered by me.