

Learn About Your Judicial Candidates

Judicial candidates do campaign. Even with the limits on judicial campaigning there is much that they may want to convey to the voters. They may, for example:

Present their records of public service and other relevant experience and qualifications.

Discuss their general views about the administration of justice.

Listen to your concerns and questions about our system of justice.

Where to Find Information

While judicial elections often do not get the media attention that other elections do, many candidates have websites and facebook pages. There are other ways to learn about your candidates:

Many communities have candidate forums, sometimes for all candidates and sometimes just for judicial candidates.

If you belong to an organization, consider inviting judicial candidates to speak.

In some communities, local bar associations rate candidate qualifications. The OSBA's Commission on Judicial Candidates provides statewide information.

In some communities, civic groups publish candidate information.

It is important to remember that a judge's decisions are not a record of his or her personal views. Judges apply the law to the facts of cases and decide as they believe the law requires.

Other Websites:

www.judicialvotescount.org

www.judge4yourself.com (Cuyahoga County)

www.ohiobar.org

my.lwv.org/ohio

Ohio's judges are elected —

and like other candidates for office, candidates for judge want to tell you, the voter, about the difference they can make in the life of the community.

But to preserve a judge's ability to render fair and impartial judgments, judicial candidates must follow strict limits on how they campaign.

This means that judicial campaigns do not usually provoke headlines and extensive media coverage. So it may take a little extra effort to learn about judicial candidates.

Judges are a crucial link in our system of government. Take a moment to become familiar with the candidates for judge.



ELECTING JUDGES

A CITIZENS GUIDE



AND THIS ELECTION...
CAST AN INFORMED
VOTE TO HELP CHOOSE
YOUR JUDGES.

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JUDGES MUST BE IMPARTIAL AND INDEPENDENT

Judges are central to our republic. Judges resolve disputes between people peacefully and fairly, protect citizens from the power of the government, and apply our laws to protect or punish people.

For our constitutional republic to function, judges must carry out their tasks impartially and independently. Judges' decisions should not simply follow public opinion or promote special interests or even reflect their personal beliefs. Judges should not bow to pressure from large corporations or powerful government institutions.

Instead, judges should act on their best informed understanding of what the facts are and what the laws require. Judicial impartiality protects fair trials and upholds the rule of law.

JUDICIAL CANDIDATES ARE DIFFERENT

Candidates for public office generally campaign by advocating for their views and promising to implement those views if they are elected.

If judicial candidates advocated for partisan views or pledged to decide cases in certain ways, judicial impartiality would be undermined. So judicial candidates are different from candidates for other public offices:

- Judges are not elected to represent partisan views. They are elected to make important and complicated decisions fairly, impartially, and independently.
- Judicial candidates may not make promises about how they plan to decide certain types of cases or rule on controversial issues. They must pledge to consider each case carefully and objectively on its own merits.

- Even though for judges, the general election is non-partisan, judicial candidates may use party nominations and endorsements in campaign communications throughout a campaign.

JUDICIAL CAMPAIGNS

Judicial campaigns are more carefully regulated than other campaigns for public office.

QUALIFICATIONS

Judicial candidates must...

- have a law degree, have passed the Ohio bar examination and satisfied bar admission character and fitness requirements, and be admitted to practice law in Ohio.
- have practiced law for at least six years, as a working trial attorney or in another capacity that employs legal expertise.

CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS

- Generally, judicial candidates may not personally solicit or accept contributions-this must be done by a campaign committee. However, judicial candidates may make general requests for contributions when speaking to an audience of 20 or more.
- Judicial candidates may sign letters requesting contributions if the letters are distributed by the candidate's campaign committee, and if the letters direct contributions to be sent to the committee, not the candidate.
- Judicial campaigns may solicit or accept contributions only within 180 days before and after the election.
- Employees of a judge's court may not contribute.
- Campaign contribution amounts are limited.
 - Limits are adjusted in the Code of Conduct- Rule 4.4
 - Limits vary whether it's a Primary or a General Election
 - Limits vary depending on whether the race is for the Supreme Court, the Court of Appeals, a Trial Court in a county with more than 750,000 inhabitants, or a Trial Court in a county with fewer than 750,000 inhabitants
 - Specifics can be found in the Supreme Court's "Ohio Code of Judicial Conduct"

PRESERVING JUDICIAL IMPARTIALITY

Judges and judicial candidates may not....

- Comment on any substantive matter relating to a specific case pending on the docket of any judge;
- Make any statement that would reasonably be expected to affect the outcome or impair the fairness of a matter pending or impending in any court;
- In connection with cases, controversies, or issues that are likely to come before the court, make pledges, promises, or commitments that are inconsistent with the **impartial** performance of the adjudicative duties of judicial office.

(Code of Judicial Conduct, Rule 4.1)

QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT ASK

Ask about legal experience:

What kind of law have you practiced? Have you practiced in the court you wish to serve on? Talk about the hardest case you were involved in.

Ask about the administration of justice:

What is your view about Internet access to court records? What can a court or judge do to promote public understanding of the law?

Ask about experience:

What positions of public service have you served in? How have you been involved in community affairs? What do you consider your greatest accomplishments?

Ask about judicial philosophy:

What should be the role of mediation in the judicial system? What is the greatest obstacle to justice in our court system?

Ask about character:

As a judge, what would be your greatest strength? Your greatest weakness? How do you handle difficult decisions?

Ask yourself:

If this candidate were to judge a case concerning yourself or someone close to you, do you think the judge would be fair?