



# Philadelphia Judicial Elections

Everything you need to know to make an informed decision when **voting for judges.**



## Philadelphia Municipal Court

### Responsibilities

- Determining whether serious criminal cases go to the Court of Common Pleas
- Preliminary arraignments and hearings
- Setting and accepting bail, except in murder or voluntary manslaughter cases



## Commonwealth Court

### Responsibilities

- Hears civil cases involving state or local government
- Hears appeals and sometimes sits as a trial court in certain cases brought by or against the Commonwealth, such as a constitutional challenge to a state law or a tax dispute
- The only court like it in the country



## Supreme Court

### Responsibilities

- The highest court in the Commonwealth and the oldest appellate court in the nation
- Known as the "court of last resort" and can assume jurisdiction over any case in the PA court system
- Seven justices serve on the Court and their job is to make the final judgment in interpreting PA's laws and Constitution



## Court of Common Pleas

### Responsibilities

- Hearing criminal and civil cases, including those involving families and children
- Hearing appeals from the minor courts and appeals not exclusively assigned to another court
- Holding civil, criminal and jury trials



## Superior Court

### Responsibilities

- The appeals court for most citizens and businesses
- One of the busiest intermediate appellate courts in the country, receiving hundreds of thousands of filings per year and deciding more than 8,000 individual cases



# When we vote, we're hiring someone to do a job.

Judicial Salaries range between

**\$182,346 - \$221,295**

This makes the case for a voter to be well informed on the selection process, since voters pay judges salaries through taxes.

## Qualifications to Look for:

- Legal experience
- Educational and professional background
- Endorsements by organizations you trust
- Community involvement and public service
- Commitment to equal justice
- Compassion, reputation for integrity and fairness
- Prior case decisions



## Questions to ask Judicial Candidates

### Commitment to Justice:

What are the biggest changes you think we need to make to our justice system?

### Qualifications:

What qualifies you to be a judge beyond a law degree?

How long have you practiced law?

### Identity:

How will you balance being an independent judge and an elected official?

How will you handle conflicts of interest on the bench?

What pro-bono and community services are you a part of and what is your role?

What clubs and associations do you belong to?

### Equality:

What changes would you make to ensure equal justice for all?

In your opinion, does the court, as a whole, deal effectively with racial and gender bias? Why or why not?

What will you do to ensure equality for people of all backgrounds in your courtroom?

## How Endorsements Work

### TYPES OF ENDORSEMENTS

- **NEWSPAPER:** Usually decided by the publication's editorial board, based on a questionnaire and/or interview process.
- **POLITICAL:** Democratic, Green, and Republican Parties (etc.); Labor Groups (such as 32BJ, 1199C, SEIU, IBEW), and elected officials
- **ADVOCACY GROUPS:** Examples include National Organizations for Women, Philly for Progress, Fraternal Order of Police, can be partisan or nonpartisan, nonprofits or clubs.

### For Newspaper Endorsements:

*Who is on the editorial board, and how have they covered the election and related issues on the past?*

### For Political Endorsements:

*What are the issues that are important to these groups and individuals that reflect their endorsements?*

### For Advocacy Group Endorsements:

*What are the main policy agendas of the endorsing group and how would each office being endorsed support their efforts?*

*Check campaign finance records to see if there is a financial commitment from candidates before or after the endorsement.*