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**2024 Pierce County Democrats Endorsement Questionnaire**

**-Judicial Races-**

Candidate Name: Diana Kiesel

Position sought: Pierce County Superior Court Department 7

Date submitted: April 7, 2024

For judicial endorsements, the Pierce County Democratic Central Committee (PCDCC) seeks to endorse well-qualified candidates with the education, experience, ability, and temperament to reach just decisions in the cases brought before them, who will also work to make the justice system more understandable, accessible, and equitable for all. The Endorsements Committee screens candidates and then makes endorsement recommendations to the PCDCC.

The PCDCC may withdraw endorsement of any judicial candidate if they determine the candidate has acted in conflict with the answers provided during the screening process or it determines the candidate has violated the letter or the spirit of the Code of Judicial Conduct or the Rules of Professional Conduct.

\*You may respond N/A (not applicable) if appropriate. Expand or decrease space as needed.

Questions

1. **Why are you running for this position?**

 I want to continue to have a voice to improve the legal system and access to justice. As a Judge, I am now able to

serve as chairperson on state and local committees. I am currently serving on the Supreme Court Disability Justice Task Force Steering Committee, serving as Chairperson of the Outreach Committee. This is a committee focusing on better access to the court system for persons with disabilities. If reelected, I will continue to work on this Committee. Additionally, I am Chairperson of the Superior Court Judges’ Probate Committee, as well as the Technology Committee. I serve on the Superior Court Judges’ Legislative Committee striving to improve the quality and fairness of new legislation. I rotated to a Juvenile Court assignment in February 2024 for an eighteen-month rotation. I am on a committee developing a Pierce County Indian Child Welfare Court. Unless I am reelected, I will not have the voice to effectuate change in the system. My experience at every level of the legal system gives me unique insight that can help improve the legal system.

1. **What are your qualifications for seeking this office, and what was the nature of your legal background and experience?**

I sat in every position in the legal profession from legal assistant, to paralegal, to attorney, Superior Court Commissioner and now an elected Judge. I was appointed to the Pierce County Superior Court as a Commissioner in 2009 by the Superior Court Judges. As a Commissioner, I presided over areas of law that impact many litigants and children. Those areas of law include Landlord Tenant litigation, Family Law divorce, custody, domestic violence/civil protection orders, child support issues, probate, guardianship, juvenile court dependency, truancy, at-risk-youth, and juvenile offender proceedings. I always strived to reduce barriers to justice, and fairly administer justice. While serving as a Superior Court Commissioner I received two “Jurist of the Year” awards from the Washington State Bar Association Family Law Section and also the Tacoma-Pierce County Bar Association. I received additionally community service awards from the Tacoma-Pierce County Bar Association.

I ran for Superior Court Judge in 2020 unopposed. Since that time, I presided over many civil and criminal trials. I am a member of the Superior Court Judges’ Association Legislative Committee reviewing and commenting on proposed legislation to improve the legal system and fair administration of justice. I serve as liaison to Joint Base Lew McChord legal offices facilitating training for new attorneys assigned to JBLM Legal Offices allowing them to better assist military families and veterans navigate Pierce County Superior Court proceedings. I taught Judicial College to new Judges and Commissioners for three years. I continue to present at legal seminars on a variety of legal topics.

1. If your past legal practice emphasized one area of law, how will you prepare to decide other disputes?

I practiced law for two decades with an emphasis on Family Law and Elder Law. In order to adequately represent parties in these two areas of law, an attorney must have a broad knowledge of many areas of law. In order to effectively practice Family Law and Elder law you must also have a working knowledge of tax law, business law, juvenile law, domestic violence, parentage law, child support laws, probate law, guardianship law, landlord tenant law, and criminal law.

As a Superior Court Commissioner for 11 years I presided over matters related to:

Criminal dockets including Juvenile Offender matters and felony arraignments.

Civil dockets including Civil Commitment hearings including RCW 10.77 hearings, felony and misdemeanor cases; Civil dockets include rotations in the following areas of law: Family Law, Domestic Violence Protection Order litigation, Guardianship Law, Landlord Tenant Law, Vulnerable Adult Protection Order litigation, Anti-harassment litigation, Probate litigation, Parentage/paternity litigation, Prosecutor Child Support dockets including civil contempt hearings, replevin hearings, Juvenile Dependency proceedings, Emancipations, and Juvenile Anti-harassment proceedings.

 As a Superior court Judge I serve as a general jurisdiction judicial officer presiding over civil

 and criminal matters. I presided over felony jury trials and non-jury trials as a Judge.

1. What are the most important issues for the jurisdiction you would serve or for the court you seek to join?

Keeping families together is a priority in my current Juvenile Court rotation, I just started an eighteen-month rotation at Juvenile Court as the Dependency Judge. I will be presiding over the Early Childhood Court (also known as Zero to Three Court) focusing on support for parents so that infants and toddlers can safely remain in home during this critical developmental stage of a child’s life why the parents receive necessary services to overcome issues with mental health, drug addiction, and homelessness. In all dependency cases, I will address barriers to success for parents such as housing, substance abuse treatment, and mental health treatment. It is a Dependency Court Judge’s duty to make sure the Department of Children Youth and Families (DCYF) offers and pays for services allowing parents to remedy parental deficiencies. I will enforce the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) requiring DCYF to identify children with possible Indian ancestry, and engage in active efforts to keep Indian children at home with parents, or if there is an imminent safety threat that services cannot address safety risks, to make sure DCYF locates a culturally appropriate placement.

1. Why should the Pierce County Democratic Party support you for this position?

 I am a first-generation college graduate. My core values include equal opportunity for all persons. As a lawyer, Superior Court Commissioner and Judge I work with groups to improve access to justice. I have been recognized by my peers for my work improving the legal community. I was recognized twice by Joint-Base Lewis McChord for my work as liaison between Superior Court and the JBLM Legal Offices allowing military members and Veterans easier access to justice in Pierce County Superior Court. I have been acknowledged by bar associations and the Washington Supreme Court for my dedication to improving the legal profession. A summary of the acknowledgements are:

2023 Certified Professional Guardianship and Conservatorship (CPGC) Board, 2014 to 2023.

Supreme Court appointment. Chairperson of the CPGC Board October 2022 to

September 2023.

 Recognized by Chief Justice González for nine years of service in October 2023.

2017 Service to the Legal Profession Community Service Award from the Tacoma-Pierce County Bar Association;

2016 Jurist of the Year Award, Washington State Bar Association, Family Law

 Section;

2015 Award for improving the collaboration between JBLM and the Pierce County Courts from the Office of the Staff Judge Advocate, I CORPS;

2015 Jurist of the Year Award, Tacoma Pierce County Bar Association;

2015 Award for improving the collaboration between JBLM and the Pierce County

2013 Humanitarian Award, Tacoma Pierce County Bar Association

1. Please list your key endorsements:
* **Executive Director, Center for Dialog & Resolution Maralise Hood Quan**
* **Director of Advocacy for Initiative for Black Justice Carol C. Mitchell**
* **Speaker of the Washington state House of Representatives, Laurie Jinkins**
* **Numerous endorsements from Washington Supreme Court, Division II Court of Appeals and Pierce County Superior Court Judicial Officers**
1. Provide ratings from any Bar Associations, either in this election or a prior one.

2024:

I am in the process of being evaluated by other bar associations. This election cycle I have bar association ratings, with exceptionally well qualified ratings, from the following: **Ratings by minority bar associations as exceptionally well qualified: Asian Bar Association, Latino/Latina Bar Association, QLaw Bar Association, and Pierce County Minority Bar Association.**

**2019:**

**The following bar associations and groups rated me exceptionally well qualified:**

**Asian Bar Association, Latino/Latina Bar Association, QLaw Bar Association, Pierce County Minority Bar Association, Tacoma Pierce County Bar Association, Veterans Bar Association.**

1. Has any professional or disciplinary body made a finding that you violated any rule or code of judicial or professional conduct? If so, please provide a full explanation.

No.

1. To what Bar groups or sections do you belong now or have belonged to in the past?

Current member of the following Bar groups/sections:

American Bar Association and the following sections: Family Law, Juvenile Law, Technology, and Probate/Guardianship.

Washington State Bar Association, and Family Law Section, Animal Law Section, and Probate Section.

Tacoma-Pierce County Bar Association.

1. How have you supported pro bono or low-cost legal services?

As a lawyer, agreed to represent litigants through Tacoma-Pierce County Tacoma Pro Bono services. Once appointed to the position of Superior Court Commissioner I joined and continue to attend the Coordinated Family Law Project group. This group meets monthly to share information how to best serve self-represented litigants. The members include groups from the YWCA, Family Justice Center, Tacoma Pro Bono, Northwest Justice Project, and Pierce County Center for Dispute and Dialog, I am on the Friends of the Law Library Board. The Law Library continues to look for way to serve self-represented litigants.

1. Do you have a judicial philosophy? If so, please describe:

I am a public servant and I am committed to serving all litigants fairly, competently, and without bias.

1. How is being a judge different than being an attorney?

As a lawyer, I served the interests of one litigant at a time. As a judicial officer, I could resolve legal issues for many litigants, and in Family Law cases with children, I must focus on the best interest of children. I support access to justice for all persons. Many litigants cannot afford an attorney, and there are limited pro bono resources. I sought appointment as a Superior Court Commissioner to address the needs of many litigants navigating the legal system, often without any legal guidance. Many judicial officers do not like working with self-represented parties. It takes more time, skill, and patience when litigants are not represented by counsel. My years volunteering at the Pierce County Center for Dialog and Resolution, and representing domestic violence survivors through referrals from the YWCA and other organizations, gave me the skills to hear disputes efficiently and respectfully, within the parameters of the law.

**IF ELECTED TO THIS POSITION…..**

1. How would you educate and inform the public about your court and the justice system?

I will continue to work as the Superior Court Liaison with Joint Base Lewis McChord legal offices. I will also continue to work with the Coordinated Family Law Project. I have in the past, and will in the future, speak to youth in schools about our justice system.

1. What would you do to provide greater access to the civil judicial system, regardless of economic status?

I am honored to be a member of the Washington State Supreme Court Disability Justice Task Force Committee, and chair of the Outreach Committee. The goal is to make sure any person with a disability, regardless of financial resources, is accommodated in every Washington court. The DJTF Committee is working with many stakeholders to better understand the needs of persons with disabilities, and develop protocols for every Court in Washington.

Since 2009, I participate in the monthly Coordinated Family Law Project that is organized by Tacoma Pro Bono. Various stakeholders meet monthly to discuss access to justice and community resources.

1. Do you believe the judicial system produces different results for different demographics? If so, what would you do to remedy that problem?

I work through the Superior Court Legislative Committee to address systemic problems in the judicial system for marginalized persons in the legal system.

Also, I just finished an eighteen month rotation in Family Court. Many cases only one litigant could afford to hire private counsel. Rarely will any pro bono attorney participate at trial. I often appointed a guardian ad litem to investigate and provide information to the court at public expense, if necessary. If a child was over age twelve and the issues were complex, I appointed counsel for the youth. Also, I exercised my discretion to interview children over age twelve under RCW 26.09.210.

1. Do you believe there is a problem with the way legal financial obligations (LFOs) or other costs and fines are currently imposed upon criminal defendants? If so, what would you do to remedy that problem?

Current law allows litigants to reduce or eliminate many legal financial obligations. Pierce County Superior Court Judges are leaders addressing LFO issues. As a Judge, I review legal financial obligation motions and grant the motions as allowed under the law, routinely waiving LFO fees and interest. Even with the new process, legal financial obligations have a desperate impact on persons with low income. Pro bono organizations are working to assist litigants. Frequently Tacoma Pro Bono holds LFO clinics.

1. Do you support or oppose alternatives to criminal prosecution, such as drug courts, mental health courts, diversion programs, etc.? What changes would you make, if any?

I currently preside over Early Childhood Court Program/Baby Court (Best for Babies). This is an innovative, court-based program designed to ensure that infants and toddlers entering foster care receive services and support to keep families together. Issues of mental health and drug addiction are addressed in this court. Some of the parents are also participating in Pierce County Superior Court Felony Drug Court, a therapeutic Court. These programs lead often to better outcomes for children, parents, and the community.

Domestic violence therapeutic courts are successful in other jurisdiction. These courts entail complex processes that require careful consideration by the criminal justice system and civil family law courts. The cycle of violence will continue unless domestic violence survivors, abusers, and their children, receive intensive services. I would like to see funding for a Pierce County Domestic Violence therapeutic court.

1. How would you approach any caseload or court congestion issues?

I just finished an 18-month rotation in Family Court. Four trials are set per day. I rarely sent a case to another Department. I worked Friday afternoons to finish trials or give decisions. Children need the Court to make timely decisions. I believe as Presiding Family Court Judge I worked diligently to make sure the cases were addressed as quickly as possible.

1. Is there anything else you would like to share with the Committee?

I would be honored to serve another four-year term. I will continue to work hard to create better access to justice for all.