

2024 Pierce County Democrats Endorsement Questionnaire -Judicial Races-

Candidate Name: Rebecca K. Reeder

Position sought: Pierce County Superior Court, Dept. 4

Date submitted: March 13, 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?

After nearly 30 years as an attorney, I'm prepared to pursue my service to the community in a different capacity as a Superior Court Judge. I want to take all my passion and experience to the bench and help even more people than I did over the years as a private attorney. Giving back and community service are important values to me, and serving as a judge is the best way I can think of for me to do that.

I want to be the kind of judge people respect, trust, and feel good about, even if I do not rule in their favor. People should leave court feeling like they had a fair chance to present their case and to be heard. We need more people on the bench with those skills – skills that I have honed over decades of practice in our community.

Judges are not advocates but that does not mean they cannot be transformative figures in people's lives. Judges can help give people a roadmap to recovery, housing stability, financial stability, conflict resolution, peace and family reunification, personal safety, and most of all – justice. It is the right time in my life to do this important work and "give it everything I got" to get elected to the bench.

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

There is no replacement for experience, and I have it. I've worked in private practice for decades while serving as a Pierce County Superior Pro Tem Court Commissioner and Arbitrator.

For better or for worse, courts operate in their own world with their own set of procedures that can confuse even the most experienced attorney. There is no better preparation for a Superior Court Judge than to sit on the bench as a Pro Tem Commissioner, look parties directly in the eye, and make rulings that impact their lives. I have over 20 years of judicial experience in this capacity, which has set me up to hit the ground running and hear cases right out of the gate when I am elected to the bench.

I am proud of my reputation as a private attorney in our community. But I am even more proud of my reputation as a thoughtful, fair, and impartial part-time judicial officer. Attorneys know when they appear in front of me that I am prepared and have the right mix of experience to give them a fair shot for their client.

There are so many nuances to running an effective and efficient courtroom. Time management is crucial as more than a dozen cases often show up on a morning docket, all of which deserve an equitable amount of time. I have worked hard to keep caseloads on track and moving along.

Judges are also tasked with managing people in tough, emotionally charged situations. I have had my fair share of tough situations as a pro tem and I have learned over the years how crucial it is to maintain decorum and help people stay calm in a very stressful situation. These “soft skills” are often overlooked when considering who to select for judge, but I can tell you they are exceedingly important.

Judges are consistently asked to hear cases in new areas of the law. I have received extensive training from the court to serve as a pro tem commissioner in a wide array of legal areas, including updates in the law year after year. The following are the types of cases I have direct experience presiding over as a court commissioner:

- Family law dealing with any number of topics to include spousal support, restraining orders, child custody, ordering evaluations and reviewing the same (such as mental health, drug/alcohol, and anger management), appointment of guardian ad litem, enforcement of prenuptial and post nuptial agreements, appointment of special masters, third party custody cases (nka minor guardianship), de facto parentage, insurance issues, occupation of homes, etc.
- Paternity cases (child support, residential schedules, genetic testing, motions for summary judgment, name change requests, back child support, etc.)
- Child Support to include post-secondary or college support
- Contempt cases which can involve jail sentences
- Guardianship hearings
- Probate cases with and without wills
- TEDRA actions
- Minor Settlements
- Approving structured settlements and early withdrawals from the same
- Collection actions to include supplemental proceedings
- Unlawful Detainer actions (evictions)
- Ex Parte docket
- Specific types of real estate cases
- Civil Protection Orders to include domestic violence orders of protection, sexual assault orders of protection, anti-harassment orders, vulnerable adult orders
- Becca Bill / truancy docket (ReMann Hall)

Superior Court is a “general jurisdiction” court, so it hears anything and everything. Through my time as an attorney and pro tem, there’s a good chance when an issue comes before me as judge, I will have the knowledge to take on the case and make high quality decisions.

With all this discussion of my time as a pro tem commissioner, which I am exceedingly proud of, I would be remiss if I did not discuss my substantive work as a practicing attorney heading into my 29TH year of practice. I have appeared before countless judges and commissioners over the years, and I have a great sense of what it takes to be a great judge through that experience alone.

While in private practice I have handled cases almost exclusively in Superior Court involving the following:

- All areas of family law (involving dissolution, spousal support, child support (back & current support), post-secondary or college support, child custody, guardian ad litem, numerous types of restraining orders, mental health issues, drug/alcohol issues, anger issues, psychological evaluations, calculation of income requiring a strong working knowledge of paystubs & tax returns, payment of expenses, insurance issues, ordering special masters, paternity cases, genetic testing, motions for summary judgments, orders of default, vacating orders of default, writs of habeas corpus, post-nuptial and prenuptial agreements, third party custody (nka minor guardianship), etc.
- All types of Civil Protection Orders (most notably domestic violence restraining orders) – to include petitioning for orders and defending requests for the same.
- All aspects of Probate cases – both with and without a will.
- Estate planning
- Collection matters to include civil lawsuits through collection of judgments.
- Unlawful detainer actions (evictions)
- Personal Injury cases
- Guardianship / vulnerable adult cases
- General civil litigation
- Real estate / foreclosures / conveyance of title / construction cases
- Misdemeanor criminal
- Bankruptcy

I also work as a private mediator, which means other attorneys and parties come to me to help resolve their disputes before going to court/trial. I have also performed this work with my own clients and as a volunteer mediator on a regular basis.

I have had cases in Superior Courts all over Washington, including Pierce County, King County, Snohomish County, Thurston County, Lewis County, Kitsap County, Mason County, Grays Harbor County, Clark County, Skamania County, Skagit County, Whatcom County, Island County, Clallam County, Kittitas County, Chelan County, Yakima County, Walla Walla County, Spokane County and Lincoln County. This is another interesting part of our non-unified court system in Washington. I will use my experience from around the state to bring ideas back to Pierce County.

I know what it takes to be a great judge and I have the right mix of experience to hit the ground running.

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

While my private practice has emphasized family law and probate law the most, I have substantial experience in many other areas. Just as I been exposed to many other areas of law during my 20 plus years of pro tem commissioner service and through my volunteer work. This blend of experience is very unusual among attorneys currently. I have outlined much of that throughout this questionnaire.

Judges at the Superior Court level are assigned all types of cases regardless of their professional experience. I will prepare to decide these disputes by being a quick study and using the tools and resources available to me to gain understanding. With the sound legal research skills that I have honed over my years as an

attorney, I am confident I can quickly develop an understanding of new areas of law. I also know Pierce County Superior Court has a great number of judges who have varied and different experience. I will continue to build collegial relationships with as many of my colleagues as possible so that I can reach out to them if I need assistance on an issue. I also look forward to attending Judicial College after I am elected, which is a comprehensive program, a “crash course” if you will, in all areas of the law.

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

Every jurisdiction has areas where they can improve upon to include even the best run judicial system. Based on my experience and observations, here are three issues I would like to work on as a judge once I am elected. All these issues support my overarching priority and goal of achieving improved access to justice and justice for all.

A. I have been handling cases at ReMann Hall (juvenile court) since before the pandemic. I have primarily worked in dependency (when a child is removed from their home and placed in another suitable living environment) or termination cases (parents are losing their parental rights). There are several hearings on every case throughout the year. Many parents are losing their children on a temporary basis because they do not have suitable housing, often they are unemployed with limited financial resources, some are incarcerated and not available to care for their children, many parents have substance abuse issues, the list as to what contributed to their children being removed from their care is long. Before the pandemic, many parents were not making it to their court hearings or meetings with their social workers and attorneys such as permanency placement meetings. They were not making it to hearings because they did not have reliable transportation. Many did not have enough money for bus fare or they live too far away to depend on public transportation. Many do not have housing, so obtaining transportation is not a priority. Many are in new jobs and do not have the time off to attend a hearing or simply cannot afford to take the time off for said hearing. There are those that do not attend because they have substance abuse issues. Even though they may lose their children for their non-participation, they are not attending the hearing for one reason or another.

When the pandemic started, the court hearings started to occur via Zoom. The court found the participation level of the parents skyrocketed. If parties did not have reliable transportation, most had Wi-Fi or access to Wi-Fi to attend the hearing. If they had a new job, they could usually take a 5-10 minute break to participate in the hearing. In the recent past, ReMann Hall has returned to in person hearings. I understand why all-day trials should occur in person. But I do wonder why 5-10 minute hearings that occur as frequently as monthly are mandated to be in person given the reduction in participation that occurred almost immediately. Other Superior Court departments have remained open with appearances via Zoom. Given the population that is served at ReMann Hall, I would like to see more Zoom hearings. If “return to home” is clearly the goal in each case, Zoom appearances would be permissible whenever possible.

B. Most everyone I know has reliable transportation. However, the more I work with the general population, the more I have come to realize that this is a luxury that not everyone shares. That affects their ability to hold a job, care for their children, and attend court for their hearings. This became so evident to me while working at ReMann Hall. I would like to work with Pierce Transit, possibly with a grant, to secure reduced cost bus fare for any party traveling to court. This would include anyone facing criminal charges, eviction hearings, anyone with a court hearing. I believe this would be a win-win. The court would have more parties attending their necessary hearings. Pierce Transit would gain additional riders that would not otherwise be on the bus, which in turn increases their revenue.

We need litigants to attend their hearings. If not, the costs of the justice system increase. By way of an example, if a litigant misses a particular criminal hearing, a bench warrant is often issued for their failure to appear. This in turn increases the workload of law enforcement when these individuals are pulled over or

apprehended on their outstanding warrant. This in turn increases the workload of everyone in the local jail to process them, feed them, get them to their court hearing escorted by more law enforcement officers, only for the court to process them and quash the warrant. All a complete and utter waste of resources better spent elsewhere. All because they missed their hearing because they did not have reliable transportation.

C. Another issue that affects the courts are cases with pro bono attorneys. There are a number of absolutely amazing attorneys working for non-profit organizations and the Department of Assigned Counsel who provide free legal services to parties that financially qualify. Just as there are a number of amazing attorneys that are volunteering their time to assist with these cases. But they are often overworked, underpaid and their programs are often underfunded. Quite frankly, we need more pro bono attorneys. Many of these organizations employ or utilize a wide range of attorneys from rather inexperienced to very experienced. I would like to see more free trainings offered to pro bono attorneys, particularly less experienced ones, to maximize the quality of their service. The court could definitely assist in this area.

There may also be grants available to assist with training. Just as I would approach “for profit” organizations that provide attorney trainings (called CLEs) and ask that they offer reduced or no cost attendance opportunities at training seminars for pro bono attorneys. Given that these trainings are often being conducted via Zoom post-COVID, there is limited cost to their attendance if a set number of scholarships are given. Each attorney in Washington State must complete 45 hours of training every 3 years, which can be expensive.

I would also like to see these pro bono attorneys get priority time settings when their cases are heard by the judge. The morning docket/calendar often starts at 9:00 am. But there may be 10-20 cases scheduled at 9:00 am. I would like to prioritize cases to be heard earlier on the docket when there is a volunteer attorney or pro bono attorney on a case. Otherwise, they may be sitting in the courtroom until noon waiting for their case to be called. Having their hearings heard earlier will give them more time in the office to serve the rest of their clients. Just as I would like to allow pro bono attorneys to appear via Zoom whenever possible. They can then handle other matters in the office while waiting for their case to be called if a priority time slot is not possible. This will encourage more attorneys to volunteer for cases if these cases take up less of their time. There is certainly the need for additional attorneys to accept more pro bono cases, so I would like to take better care of them.

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

The Pierce County Democratic Party has a well-known reputation for its thoughtful, deliberative judicial endorsement process. While we all know that judges are non-partisan, the fact that they must stand for election presents an interesting dynamic for candidates. The PC Democrats should support me for this position because I am the most qualified, most experienced person for the job. Most of what a judge does is motion and trial practice, involving analyzing discrete legal issues that are brought to a judge for a decision. I have a wide range of experience as a pro tem commissioner hearing all sorts of matters before the court. And I have nearly 30 years of experience as a practicing attorney in numerous areas.

6. Please list your key endorsements:

Judge Timothy Ashcraft – the Presiding Judge of the Pierce County Superior Court.

Judge Grant Blinn – the Criminal Presiding Judge of the Pierce County Superior Court.

Judge Bryan Chushcoff – the judicial officer that has held the position I am seeking for the past 28 years.

7. Provide ratings from any Bar Associations, either in this election or a prior one.

Tacoma Pierce County Bar Association: Well Qualified

TPCBA Minority Bar Association: Well Qualified

8. 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.

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

Washington State Bar Association, 1995-Present

Tacoma Pierce County Bar Association (TPCBA), 1995-Present

TPCBA Family Law Section, 1995-present

TPCBA Young Lawyer's Section, 1995-2006

Washington Women's Lawyers, 2023-present

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

I have primarily supported these services over the years as a volunteer. These activities have included:

- Serving on a registry to voluntarily assist parties pursuing Sexual Assault Protection Orders against their abusers who have private attorneys to level the playing field.
- Working with the Department of Assigned Counsel (DAC) on a volunteer basis to represent children placed in foster care. I typically represent girls and young women aged 11-18.
- Serving as a volunteer mediator at the Pierce County Center for Dispute Resolution nka Center for Dialog and Resolution to resolve cases without protracted litigation.
- Serving on the Volunteer Legal Services Theater Benefit Committee which raises money for their pro bono programs.
- Serving as an arbitrator for Pierce County Superior Court since 2008, with the authority to award up to \$100,000 in damages. Arbitration can save the parties significant sums in representation costs.
- Serving as a legal advisor to the YWCA to allow them to provide essential services to victims of domestic violence.
- Being appointed as a Special Master to ensure court orders are implemented in cases generally involving an intransigent party.
- Serving on a panel to provide mentorship and support to Guardians ad Litem (GAL), who provide crucial information to judicial officers when making custody decisions.
- Improving the administration of justice by serving on a select committee to address and implement litigation page limit/efficiency rules.

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

My judicial philosophy is one of fairness and common sense based on my nearly 30 years of experience as an attorney. I believe our judicial system should be a force for good, and a place where anyone can come to seek assistance. Our judicial system has not always been about justice and fairness for everyone, and we must take steps every day to make this right, while ensuring we uphold the rule of law.

The reality is, as a Superior Court judge, I will be making hundreds if not thousands of decisions a year on matters like child custody, whether to grant a request to suppress or exclude evidence, or whether a particular party has presented enough evidence to move their case forward, etc. These are extremely important decisions to the parties. These decisions will be made based on my ability to analyze the facts and the law and make a decision that makes sense.

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

This is a particular aspect that makes me uniquely qualified for this position. I have been a pro tem commissioner and an attorney in private practice for many years.

Attorneys of course represent and advocate for a particular party, with interests and a particular result in mind. In litigation, this translates to being a strong advocate both in and out of the courtroom for the client's needs and their position. On the other hand, a judge has to take a more even-keeled approach. They generally do not have the benefit of picking a side and running with it. They must consider all reasonable arguments with an open mind and rule based on the law and facts before them, even if they personally would prefer a different outcome. The one exception to this is the court's obligation to protect children and vulnerable adults.

Being a great judge requires a different temperament – a judicial temperament. You must be calm, thoughtful, and deliberate. This does not come easy in the heated courtroom environment. On the contrary, an attorney, especially at the trial court level, can engage in theatrics or a more boisterous style.

IF ELECTED TO THIS POSITION.....

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

The judiciary in our country is under attack. Support for the U.S. Supreme Court, for example, appears to be at an all-time low. The judiciary is a co-equal branch, but it's not a political one. People of all ages, but especially young people, need to learn this. Judges in the Classroom programs, Law Day appearances, Moot Court programs, Civic Education programs have never been more critical. I was involved in the Scholarship Mentorship program locally for years where high school students spent several days with various attorneys and received exposure to jobs in the legal community. I am volunteering for Law Day on May 1, 2024 (Voices in Democracy) in a local high school. All of these programs need to be supported. I will participate in these programs whenever possible. I also look forward to inviting young people from our community to my courtroom to see how things work firsthand. After spending years volunteering in the classroom educating our youth, I am especially excited at the prospect of joining a committee that stresses educating our youth about the judicial system. I understand the Public Engagement and Education Committee of the Board for Judicial Administration may be a good fit for me at some point given my interests.

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

My main focus is to provide access to justice. I will work within the legal community to improve access. Judges are leaders, not only in the legal community, but in the broader community. Within ethical bounds, I will utilize my leadership role in the community to advocate for civil legal aid funding and programming that improves these services.

The vast majority of all litigants in the Pierce County Superior Court do not have legal representation. Attorneys locally charge hundreds of dollars per hour with retainer fees owed up front that not everyone has the financial resources to secure. As a result, we need to maintain a robust legal aid system. I believe our

state has a strong legal aid system, both on the legal counsel side and on the advocacy side. But I would like to see more done to help parties that do not have the resources for private counsel.

There should be more attention to alternative dispute resolution efforts as well. Mediation is far less expensive and stressful for the parties. I would support each judge spending one day per month handling mediations during the day instead of trials, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. I believe this would enable the court to clear out more of their backlog of cases than actually trying cases that often take multiple days to try. We also need additional funding to pay attorney to conduct mediations arranged through the court. The time slots needs to be increased from 90 minutes to 3 hours each.

This is also where innovation can play a crucial role. Before COVID-19, the court system would have kicked and screamed before it moved to Zoom hearings. Now it has become the norm in certain areas. We need to be more willing to take a chance on change. The legal aid issue may not be a COVID-19-type public health pandemic, but it is still a crisis of its own.

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

Without question. This has long been a problem in our judicial system, and I am ecstatic that through the BLM movement, the #MeToo movement, and others, there has been so much more attention to it. I also know our state Supreme Court has issued a statement specifically encouraging the entire legal community, including the judicial system, to take steps to rectify historical wrongs in this area. I support these efforts wholeheartedly.

As a judicial candidate, I have been listening, learning, and developing a greater understanding of these issues and it will continue to be a priority for me. I know judicial officers receive some training at conferences about implicit bias and related issues, but that is not enough. I will personally take it upon myself to continue to be open-minded and educate myself on all facets of this problem.

I also firmly believe as a judge, it is important to be out in the community through mentoring and civic education programs. Young people must have opportunities to interact with judges and attorneys to build trust and learn about the system. With my own family background, there were no expectations that I would ever become a lawyer. We should do more to expose people from all walks of life to work in the legal field and attract individuals into these fields. I look forward to participating in these efforts as a judge. I will do everything I can to encourage young people to explore careers in law so that the court truly reflects our community.

16. 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?

That issue is a double-edged sword. Often LFOs are assessed to repay innocent victims of crime to reimburse them for a portion of their losses. I completely understand the reason and necessity behind assessments for restitution. However, LFOs that are nothing more than a fine to be paid to the court to support their budget are more troubling. These have long been a problem and I am glad the Legislature has largely addressed the structural inequities associated with LFOs in our state laws. I am also glad that judges have received the education and resources they need to understand the consequences LFOs can have on someone's reintegration back into society after incarceration.

LFOs, court fines, and other costs are a symptom of a larger systemic problem. I understand that our courts receive a dismal amount of funding for its court system from the State. As a result, counties and local

governments have built up a reliance on these fees for operations. A judicial system that works well should not depend on user fees and fine revenue to function.

The Superior Court Judges and other advocacy groups have done a tremendous job over the years advocating for LFO reform. Pierce County has been particularly involved in this change. As a judicial officer, I look forward to joining these efforts to advocate for a justice system that is funded directly from the general fund and not from fees assessed on people with limited resources.

17. 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 support all these efforts to provide alternatives to the traditional criminal prosecution approach. Over the years, I have represented clients where I have seen firsthand how these specialty courts made a difference in their lives. Pierce County has been a leader in these courts. We currently have Felony Drug Court, Family Recovery Court (ReMann Hall), Felony Mental Health Court and Assisted Outpatient Court in Superior Court. In Pierce County District Court, they also support their own drug court, mental health court and Veterans Treatment Court. We are really seeing a shift locally to address these unique issues. I will do everything I can to support them, advocate for additional resources for them, and ensure judicial officers make them a priority. Participation in these courts dropped significantly during Covid and efforts are underway to increase their participation at present to pre-Covid levels.

The Administrative Office of the Courts has been able to allocate resources to provide some of this support at the statewide level. I want to make sure our specialty courts are at the forefront of innovation and research so that we can achieve the best results possible for participants.

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

I have seen first-hand over my over 20 years as a pro tem commissioner and as a practicing lawyer how crucial caseload management is for everyone involved. Courts must improve their customer service mindset and recognize how disruptive a congested and overwhelmed court can be for the parties. I will take a multipronged approach to this:

A. Proactively manage cases assigned to my department and encourage parties to find ways to efficiently use judicial time through their motion filings and arguments when in court. This may involve scheduling a “special set” hearing or evidentiary hearings that may help reduce extensive litigation later. This may also involve retaining jurisdiction over a case so that the matter is not bounced around among judicial officers which often results in disjointed justice or gamesmanship which increases litigation.

B. Make sure parties and attorneys know my expectations on different matters and know that I expect them to comply with court rules. This may be as simple as directing attorneys to confer on cases to see if they can reach an agreement on disputed matters without a knee jerk response of filing a motion. Or determining agreements on offered evidence in advance of trial to efficiently use courtroom time. Preparation is key and all parties, judges, and attorneys play a role in this.

C. Encourage my colleagues to support special dockets to address significant caseloads due to matters outside the court’s control. A good example of this is how we have established more efficient specialty dockets for evictions following COVID-19 as well as Civil Protection Hearing Orders. We have used trial blitzes in the past to control backlog. We need to continue to evaluate the needs of the parties and be willing to implement new procedures to address them.

D. Advocate for the efficient and effective administration of justice through funding requests and information sharing with our County Council, the Administrative Office of the Courts, other Superior Courts in Washington State and the Legislature.

E. Support technology improvement projects that allow parties to “self-serve” as much as possible, attend court remotely, and file documents electronically. Pierce County is fortunate to have a very robust court technology system (LINX), which is far superior to other counties in my opinion. We are also working on a system to more efficiently present evidence at trial, by uploading records in advance of trial. This will help streamline trials and reduce trial time. I look forward to supporting that program and expanding the functionality whenever possible.

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

Great judicial officers in my experience are hardworking, resilient, self-motivated, driven, dependable, stable, impartial, unbiased, neutral, smart, down to earth, calm/patient and an approachable team players. I believe I have what it takes to be a great judicial officer.