

**2024 Pierce County Democrats Endorsement Questionnaire
-Judicial Races-**

Candidate Name: Camille J. Schaefer (she/her)

Position sought: Pierce County Superior Court Judge, Position 10

Date submitted: May 5, 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?

Service to others has been a core value throughout my life. I am a proud resident of Pierce County, and I want to serve my community by making Pierce County Superior Court more accessible and ensuring each person's voice is heard.

The first time I was in court was when I was in high school after being assaulted by my youth pastor. I had the opportunity to provide a victim impact statement and speak to the judge at the sentencing. Through that experience, I came to understand the power of courts to give a voice to someone who had been powerless.

I became a lawyer to use this power to help others. I dedicated my career as an attorney to giving people a voice in court. I have volunteered hundreds of hours at free legal clinics for low-income people and survivors of domestic violence.

Now, as a full-time judicial officer for over eight years, I ensure that my courtroom is a place where every person's voice is heard. Not everyone gets the outcome they want when they go to court, but in my courtroom, everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

I am running for judge to serve my community by bringing my values, experience, and track record of making well-reasoned and responsible decisions to Pierce County Superior Court. I have the most full-time judicial experience of any candidate, and I will "hit the ground running" on my first day in office. Further, as a gay woman, being a judge on this bench will add important diversity to the court where there are

currently no openly LGBTQ+ judges. I will make an immediate and positive contribution to the Pierce County Superior Court.

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

I have over eight years' experience as a full-time judicial officer, including as a trial judge. I have been a full-time Court Commissioner in King County Superior Court since 2018. I also served as a full-time pro tem Trial Judge in Superior Court for almost two-and-a-half years, as a full-time Administrative Law Judge for the State of Washington, and as a pro tem Magistrate in Municipal Court.

I have presided over thousands of cases involving families, juveniles, people's property, finances, and children. Daily, I handle cases involving issues such as violence, substance abuse, and mental illness. Many parties in my courtroom represent themselves, and many rely on an interpreter to participate in their court proceeding. In each case, I am committed to being impartial, fair, and making sure my courtroom is a place where every voice is heard.

I bring substantial experience as an attorney working with families, persons in crisis, and marginalized communities. I focused on complex family law litigation in private practice and worked as an attorney for Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) in both family law and dependency cases. I also served as a mediator in family law cases.

In addition, I have experience in business and teaching. My undergraduate degree is in organizational management and I have worked for a non-profit organization and as a marketing manager of a publicly traded company. I have been a small business owner and an adjunct professor.

And finally, I serve on local and state-wide committees that support the administration of our court system. I will be a strong contributor to the administrative work of the Pierce County Superior Court, which is another part of the work of a judge in addition to work in the courtroom. Supporting the administrative work of the court is an important component to improving access to justice for all persons who engage with our court system.

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

No new judge joins the bench with experience in every area of the law or with every type of case. This is particularly true in Superior Court, where each jurist is a general jurisdiction judge and will be called upon to hear every type of case and controversy over which Superior Court exercises jurisdiction. What is important is an individual's willingness and ability to apply existing skills while learning new areas of the law. I have demonstrated this willingness and ability on multiple occasions.

My work as an attorney emphasized family law and domestic violence cases, which are the majority of cases I hear now as a Court Commissioner. However, as a pro tem Magistrate, I presided over different areas of law including infractions and ordinance violations. As an Administrative Law Judge, I presided over additional new areas of law including public assistance benefits, contested founded determinations by Child Protective Services, juvenile rehabilitation reimbursement, and special education due process hearings with the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. As a pro tem Trial Judge, I successfully applied my substantive knowledge of intimate partner violence and family law, the rules of evidence, and trial procedure in the role of a pro tem Trial Judge.

In each of these transitions to new types of cases in increasingly responsible and challenging roles, I engaged in rigorous independent study, consulted available resources including judicial bench guides and mentors, and observed experienced judicial officers in the types of cases I was learning to preside over. I will apply these same strategies as I prepare to make decisions in new types of cases as an elected judge.

In addition, I plan to attend the General Jurisdiction course through The National Judicial College at my own expense, which will supplement the state-sponsored Judicial College with education on core competencies for a state court judge.

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

Access to affordable civil legal services is an important issue in Pierce County Superior Court (and across the state) because of its impact on access to justice. As a current judicial officer, I see this play out in court every day. I see hardworking people with good jobs who still cannot afford an attorney. I see people who qualify for legal aid services but a system that must prioritize others who have even fewer resources. And I see self-represented litigants doing the best they can to navigate a system that was not designed to be particularly accessible to them. The lack of access I am describing touches every part of the legal process. I see it in court filings that lack crucial facts and details, I see missed opportunities to raise issues, and I see it in the faces of people who are overwhelmed when they come into court. Access to civil legal services is critical to ensuring access to justice because it supports people who must engage with the civil legal system and increases consistently fair and just results. Pierce County Superior Court provides a variety of helpful services to support litigants who do not have an attorney. As a judge, I can use my experiences with these situations and types of resources to increase awareness of and access to these services in our court.

One positive outcome from the way courts were forced to pivot during the pandemic was the implementation of options for remote court appearance. Remote appearance options significantly improved accessibility by low-income parties who need access the most, and other parties as well as attorneys benefited from remote appearance options as well. One of my favorite examples of the benefit of remote court appearance is from my time as a pro tem judge in 2022. I presided over a dissolution trial with self-represented parties who struggled to present evidence, although one party was able to have a witness testify via Zoom. I observed that the witness, holding a cell phone to be seen on video, was wearing a hard hat and reflective vest, and from the faint sounds in the background, I realized he was at a construction site. I then recognized the grey molded plastic room where he was standing as the inside of an outhouse. While this is one of the more unorthodox locations from which a witness might testify, I understood that this was likely the only place he could do so privately, and that appearing remotely by Zoom meant the party could have the benefit of this witness' testimony and the witness did not have to miss a day of work. This case illustrated that sometimes access to justice means putting function over form so that parties and witnesses can participate in a meaningful way. I was an outspoken leader in my court for implementing virtual court appearance options during the pandemic, and I support maintaining these options where appropriate as one way to increase access to justice.

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

Judicial service represents the highest and best use of my skills and experience. I have demonstrated an exceptional work ethic and embraced the challenge of making well-reasoned decisions on complex legal matters including for almost two and a half years as a pro tem Trial Judge. I have the experience to make an immediate and positive contribution as a Judge in Pierce County Superior Court, and I share the values of

making the justice system more understandable, accessible, and equitable for all. I would be honored to have the support and endorsement of the Pierce County Democratic Party.

6. Please list your key endorsements:

To date, I am endorsed by over 70 judicial officers including Washington Supreme Court Justices, Judges, and Court Commissioners as well as many community leaders, including the following:

Senator Yasmin Trudeau, Washington State Senate, 27th Legislative District
Speaker Laurie Jenkins, Washington State House of Representatives, 27th Legislative District
Ryan Mello, Pierce County Council Chair, District 4
Kristin Ang, Port of Tacoma Commissioner President and Co-Chair of the Northwest Seaport Alliance
Justice Mary Yu, Washington Supreme Court
Justice Helen Whitener, Washington Supreme Court
Justice Raquel Montoya-Lewis, Washington Supreme Court
Justice Susan Owens, Washington Supreme Court
Justice Charles Johnson, Washington Supreme Court

Additional endorsements from community leaders, legislative districts, and labor unions are in process.

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

I have been rated **Exceptionally Well Qualified** by the Tacoma-Pierce County Bar Association and the Pierce County Minority Bar Association in this election. Ratings from other bar associations are in process.

8. Has any professional or disciplinary body made a finding that you violated any rule or code of judicial or professional conduct? No. If so, please provide a full explanation. N/A

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

I am a member of the following bar associations and sections:

Washington State Bar Association
Tacoma-Pierce County Bar Association
King County Bar Association
Washington Women Lawyers, King County Chapter and Pierce County Chapter
QLaw, the LGBTQ+ Bar Association of Washington
International Association of LGBTQ+ Judges
Association of Family and Conciliation Courts

In the past, I belonged to the following bar associations and sections:

American Judges Association
International Association of Collaborative Professionals
Collaborative Professionals of Washington
King County Bar Association Solo and Small Firm Section and Family Law Section
American Bar Association
Phi Delta Phi

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

As an attorney, I regularly accepted cases on a pro bono and reduced-fee basis; my goal was to always have at least one such case at a time. I have volunteered hundreds of hours at free legal clinics for low-income people and survivors of domestic violence. These legal clinics included the King County Bar Association's family law helpline and neighborhood legal clinics, as well as legal clinics sponsored by El Centro de la Raza. These programs assist people who lack resources or familiarity with the court system in getting the help they need. Helping people navigate an overwhelming court process with interpreters was a rewarding and eye-opening experience early in my career that continues today as I work with parties with limited English proficiency and interpreters almost daily in my courtroom.

Now that I am a judicial officer, I am not permitted to give legal advice, so I am unable to volunteer at legal clinics like I used to. However, I am still very involved as a volunteer in my community. I volunteer with the Tacoma Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) and with the Washington State Animal Response Team (WASART). These organizations help people and animals find safety during crisis situations. I also serve as a volunteer judge for YMCA High School Mock Trial competitions and volunteer with Raising Girls, an organization that works to end period poverty and hygiene insecurity for South Sound youth.

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

Access to justice means courts must be open, transparent, and responsive. They must also ensure public safety while upholding legal and constitutional principles. My judicial philosophy is closely aligned with these values.

I am committed to promoting access to justice by making courts more accessible and ensuring each person's voice is heard. By the time parties reach the courtroom, prior efforts to resolve their disputes have failed and the judge and judicial process is their last hope for justice. Parties are often nervous, anxious, and scared, and judges must create a welcoming and safe environment where everyone has the opportunity to be heard. I focus every day on building trust in my courtroom by being respectful, welcoming, and by enforcing court rules in a fair and predictable manner.

As a judicial officer, I am mindful of the significance and potential long-term impact of my decisions. I am entrusted with some of the most precious and valuable parts of people's lives, including their children, homes, and finances. In all decisions, from pretrial release or temporary orders through sentencing or final orders, judges must ensure community safety and the well-being of the most vulnerable while upholding legal and constitutional principles. I have a proven track record of making well-reasoned and responsible decisions. I am known for being prepared and for rulings that are thoughtful and carefully considered after each party is given a fair opportunity to be heard.

I understand my role as a steward of the public's trust with a responsibility to recognize my own implicit biases, and I work toward eliminating bias and systemic racism in the court system. In every decision I make, I carefully consider the law and evidence and do everything I can to make sure personal biases are not clouding my neutral decision-making responsibilities. Increasing public trust and confidence in the justice system has never been more important.

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

A judge must be fair and impartial while making good decisions, which is different from being an advocate for a particular party or position. A judge must also be mindful of enforcing court rules and procedures in a way that ensures a level playing field for all parties, in contrast to an attorney whose role is to emphasize the strengths and advantages of one party's position.

IF ELECTED TO THIS POSITION.....

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

Programs such as Judges in the Classroom, high school mock trials, community outreach, and speaking to young people are all ways that judges can inform and educate the public. This is important because it makes our judicial system more open and transparent, which builds trust in the courts and the rule of law.

I love serving as a volunteer judge for the YMCA Youth and Government Mock Trial program, which I have done for years. I was honored to do this most recently at the State Championship held at the Pierce County courthouse (the County-City Building) in March of 2024.

In addition, on May 4, 2024, I volunteered at the Youth and Law Forum sponsored by the Pierce County Minority Bar Association where I participated in a judicial candidate panel. My favorite question from one of the kids was, "Why do judges wear robes?" The Youth and Law Forum was a wonderful way to meet and talk with young people and parents in our community.

As a judge on the Pierce County Superior Court bench, I will continue to participate in these types of programs and community outreach opportunities to educate and connect with the public about the court and justice system.

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

All judicial officers have both an important role and a responsibility to enhance equal access to justice. We can, in part, help to meet this responsibility by ensuring parties know about the programs and resources that exist to help people have their day in court, ensuring people can be heard, and by correcting the wrongs and historical challenges that interfere with equal access. We have a front-row seat to the challenges parties face in accessing the judicial system. We see how poverty, institutional racism, and longstanding efforts to limit access permeate the system to this day.

As a judge, I would continue to use my voice and leadership position in our community to share these stories and this reality with the public. I would support efforts to improve legal aid services and make sure the appropriate policy and decision makers – whether state elected officials, county commissioners, or city leaders – know what equal access to justice looks like and what it takes to make it a reality in our courts.

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

Unfortunately, yes; too often, the judicial system produces different results for different demographics. Examples of two areas where this occurs are when social inequities result in disparate impacts in family law and child custody cases, and in criminal law cases where jury composition does not always provide a truly representative jury of one's peers.

In family law, I saw this firsthand in my work as an attorney for CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) and today as a Court Commissioner. I see how lack of adequate healthcare and mental health care, lack of stable housing, and lack of reliable income affect the ability of people in some demographics to raise healthy and well-adjusted children. Unlike dependency cases, where the State is obligated to provide services to parents, the cost is born solely by the parents in family law cases. Parents from affluent households are often more able to pay for treatment and supportive services, while parents from lower-income households are often not able to access these resources at all. This can result in a parent who needs but is unable to afford rehabilitative services being unable to enjoy the same time and relationship with their children as a parent who can afford to address their parenting deficiencies. A similar inequity exists in terms of parents who can afford legal representation compared to those who cannot.

These inequities can be addressed through increased funding for programs that support families involved in the justice system, increased accessible civil legal aid, and pro bono service by lawyers. In criminal cases, this can be addressed in part by removing barriers to jury service to increase participation by BIPOC community members.

For example, as an attorney, I served on the Washington State Bar Association's Limited License Legal Technician (LLLT) Board's Examination Subcommittee. The purpose of the LLLT program was to increase access to our court system by allowing non-attorneys to provide limited legal services in family law cases. In the program's infancy, I drafted exam questions, developed model answers, and graded applicants' exams. I know views differ on whether the LLLT program is the right way to improve access to justice, and my involvement reflects my commitment to innovative ideas and programs to address access needs.

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?

Legal financial obligations (LFOs) are imposed on criminal defendants under state law as restitution for court costs and victim compensation. On the surface, the intent of LFOs makes sense as a means of allocating the financial burden of prosecuting crimes and providing financial justice to victims. However, the practical effect of LFOs can result in a disparate impact on those who are convicted, who are often unable to pay amounts owed while incarcerated and face mounting debt that adversely impacts their successful re-entry to society upon release.

Continuing to scrutinize what LFOs are assessed and the impact on those who are required to pay is a critical component of ensuring justice for all. I support current efforts to review and reform how LFOs are assessed to ensure they are equitable and take into consideration a person's ability to pay. LFOs should not result in destabilizing debt that adversely impacts a person's ability to successfully re-enter society after incarceration. I support identifying other funding sources and means of appropriate restitution.

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 alternatives to criminal prosecution in appropriate cases. These can include therapeutic courts, such as drug courts and mental health courts, as well as other diversion programs and forms of restorative justice.

I saw firsthand how therapeutic courts can successfully serve and support families when I was legal counsel for Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteers in Family Treatment Court (FTC). FTC is a therapeutic drug court that provides parents in the juvenile dependency system with access to drug and alcohol treatment, individualized and comprehensive family support services, and increased judicial monitoring. Parents who were willing to engage in this therapeutic court model often had their children returned home sooner and experienced greater long-term success than parents who went through the traditional dependency court system because they received targeted support and services that addressed the underlying reason for their involvement in the system to begin with. Significant data supports similar results in criminal cases, where therapeutic alternatives to prosecution can support better long-term outcomes for defendants by addressing the underlying causes of criminal behavior.

I support restorative justice that incorporates accountability for an offender's actions, provides reparation to the victim, and supports rehabilitation of the offender and safe reintegration into the community. One of the benefits of restorative justice is that it is a flexible tool that can be adjusted to fit the specifics of each situation. In some cases, it may include mediation or other conflict resolution programs. It may also utilize victim impact panels, family conferences, and/or community reparation boards. In appropriate cases, it can include communication between victims and offenders. I am open to utilizing this in my courtroom in a way that honors all parties' needs and experiences.

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

I am a hard worker, and my approach to most workload challenges is to work harder. Realistically, though, there's a limit to how much one person – and an entire court full of people – can do, and so it is imperative to find more efficient and innovative ways to address caseload and court congestion issues.

One place that has received a lot of attention in this regard is the backlog of criminal jury trials during and following the COVID-19 pandemic. This, like all court congestion, has consequences throughout the system by straining our jails and mental health system, impacting the families of defendants, disrupting victims' lives, delaying civil matters, and adding a layer of distress when people already have enough to manage. While Pierce County Superior Court has made significant progress in reducing the backlog of cases following the pandemic, we must continue to prioritize this work.

Caseload challenges and court congestion issues impact everyone. Victims, families, and the accused all need a system that resolves criminal matters in a timely way. Attorneys who prosecute and defend the accused often struggle with insufficient resources and overwhelming caseloads, which impacts the ability to achieve speedy resolution. Attorneys and litigants in civil cases also need adequate support and timely resolutions. In many instances, this is impacted by funding – or the lack thereof. Many backlog and congestion issues can be most effectively addressed through increased funding, but without it, must be addressed through creative approaches and utilizing existing resources in prudent and responsible ways.

As a new judge on the Pierce County Superior Court bench, I would do a lot of listening to gather information about systems that are working well and places where different resources or increased efficiency could make a positive difference. I would then partner with key stakeholders to support the

implementation of initiatives to utilize new ideas and existing resources in the most beneficial ways to address backlog and congestion challenges.

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

I am grateful for the opportunity to be considered for an endorsement. I am happy to provide any additional information that would be helpful in this process.

I would be honored to be endorsed by the Pierce County Democrats as I seek election to Pierce County Superior Court, Position 10.