Completed forms are not confidential and will be published on-line

**2024 Pierce County Democrats Endorsement Questionnaire**

**-Judicial Races-**

Candidate Name: \_Ingrid McLeod\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Position sought: \_\_Judge in Pierce County Superior Court, Department 15\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date submitted: \_\_April 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?

I am running for Judge in Pierce County Superior Court because I care deeply about our judicial system, our court, and our community. I want to bring my experience as a Pierce County Superior Court Commissioner to start addressing case backlogs on my first day in office. I have been rated “***Exceptionally Well Qualified***” for this position by every bar association that issues ratings in Pierce County and I have earned the support of a vast number of Judges and Justices, key community leaders, and the legal community. If elected, I will serve with integrity, fairness, and treat every person who enters my courtroom with respect. I ask for your endorsement and support.

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

Since April 2021, I have served as a Commissioner in Pierce County Superior Court. As a Commissioner, I understand the commitment necessary to serve as an effective Judge and have firsthand experience presiding over every type of case that our Judges handle, except jury trials and adult criminal cases. I also have a record of serving on many of our court’s committees, which service is essential to ensuring our court is administering justice effectively, fairly, and openly. This record of service has helped me understand and support court administration, which is a necessary component of a Judge’s role.

Before joining the bench, I had a broad civil practice and worked my way from legal intern to shareholder with Davies Pearson, P.C., a longstanding local firm. Through this work, I had the opportunity to represent clients in all manner of civil litigation, including business and contract disputes, employment law cases, estate and trust disputes, consumer protection cases, personal injury cases, securities cases, family law cases, and appeals. This breadth of civil experience is rare on the Pierce County Superior Court. Early in my legal career, as a judicial law clerk, I worked on dozens of felony criminal cases and civil cases. My judicial law clerk experience and broad civil litigation background, coupled with my experience presiding over cases as a Court Commissioner, make me uniquely suited to start resolving cases in any area from my first day in office.

I am honored to have the endorsement of retiring incumbent Judge Gretchen Leanderson; a large majority of our current and retired colleagues on the Pierce County Superior Court bench; and a majority of the Justices on the Washington Supreme Court and Judges on the Court of Appeals, Division II. Because of my experience and track record as a judicial officer, the Tacoma-Pierce County Bar Association, Pierce County Minority Bar Association, Washington Women Layers, and QLAW all deemed me ***Exceptionally Well Qualified*** for the position of Superior Court Judge.

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

While I do have breadth of experience, being a Superior Court Judge requires constant learning. As the trial court of general jurisdiction in Pierce County, our Judges are called to address family law, guardianship and probate, real estate, contract, business, civil commitment, and criminal matters, often with scarce preparation time. My practice and current work as a Commissioner have equipped me with broad civil law experience and I can hit the ground running in all civil cases. I commit to supplementing my extensive background in civil law by studying criminal law and procedure in depth before being sworn in as a Judge. I will do this by continuing to review appellate opinions in criminal law as they are issued, studying Washington Practice’s criminal law and criminal procedure treatises, reviewing criminal law and procedure judicial training materials to which I already have access on Washington’s Inside Courts system, viewing the recorded criminal law sessions from the 2024 Judicial College (and participating in the 2025 Judicial College), and observing as many criminal law proceedings as possible during throughout the year.

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

The Pierce County Superior Court is unique, and we need experienced judicial officers to resolve cases. Unfortunately, we lead the state in filings for civil protection order and minor guardianship cases, which require significant investment of time at both the Commissioner and Judge levels. We also have a high volume of Involuntary Treatment Act cases and a backlog of criminal cases since the pandemic. At the same time that we are navigating these challenges, four of our most experienced judges are retiring at the end of 2024. This means that we will need Judges who are prepared to dive in and serve in any judicial rotation needed and work on court committees to maintain and improve our court’s service to the community. As an experienced judicial officer who will have been with the court and actively participating in court administration for nearly four years when the term starts, I am well-situated to help the court navigate this transition.

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

I ask for your organization’s endorsement because I am uniquely qualified to serve as Judge in Pierce County Superior Court, Department 15. I have both the legal acumen, record of service, community support, and campaign plan to warrant your endorsement. Throughout my career, I have endeavored to both improve access to justice and eliminate bias in the justice system and legal profession. For example, as an attorney in private practice, I volunteered with other members of the Tacoma-Pierce County Bar Association’s Guardianship Committee to develop plain language instructions and informational guides for unrepresented persons attempting to navigate the complicated process of petitioning for adult guardianship. This work was in connection with both the Pierce County Law Library and Tacoma Pro Bono. I also gladly accepted appointments by the court in guardianship matters to gather information and report back to the court on the expressed desires and best interests of some of the most vulnerable persons in our community, including supporting access to justice for persons facing financial exploitation from neighbors and family members, languishing in hospitals or rehabilitation centers without access to anyone to assist with surrogate decision-making or provide the informed consent needed for them to leave that restrictive treatment setting, or discharging from Western State Hospital.

As a judicial officer, I am personally and professionally committed to increasing equity in the court system and legal profession. I consider doing so an ethical imperative. I further this work through my service on the Pierce County Superior Court’s DEI Committee and the Superior Court Judges’ Association’s Equity and Fairness Committee, through which we work to ensure court spaces in which all members of the community are welcome. For example, I helped draft and advocate for the inclusion statement that is now present on the homepage of the Pierce County Superior Court’s website, alongside a gender and pronoun inclusivity graphic, and a link to the Washington Supreme Court’s June 2020 Commitment to Diversity statement. *See* [www.piercecountywa.gov/122/Superior-Court](http://www.piercecountywa.gov/122/Superior-Court). In addition, before taking the bench, I served on the boards of both the YWCA Pierce County and the Pierce County Washington Women Lawyers, both organizations focused on empowering women. While judicial office is steadfastly non-partisan, my record of service demonstrates my values.

1. Please list your key endorsements:

To date, over 50 current and retired judicial officers have endorsed my campaign, including:

* The following six Washington Supreme Court Justices have endorsed my candidacy: Charles Johnson, Barbara Madsen, Raquel Montoya-Lewis, Debra Stephens, Mary Yu, and Helen Whitener.
* The following current and retired Washington State Court of Appeals, Division II Judges: Meng Li Che, Rebecca Glasgow, Linda Lee, and Lisa Worswick (Ret.).
* 28 current judicial officers with Pierce County Superior Court, including retiring incumbent Judge Gretchen Leanderson.

To date, the following elected officials have endorsed my campaign:

* Speaker of the House of Representatives, Laurie Jinkins
* Pierce County Council Chair, Ryan Mello
* Pierce County Council Member, Marty Campbell
* Pierce County Council Member, Jani Hitchen
* Pierce County Council Member, Robyn Denson

I am also honored to have endorsements from a broad range of attorneys from all practice areas and including my past law partners, opposing counsel from past cases, and many attorneys who have appeared in my courtroom during my tenure as a Commissioner.

For a full list of endorsements, please see: [www.ingridmcleodforjudge.com](http://www.ingridmcleodforjudge.com).

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

For my current campaign for Judge in Pierce County Superior Court, I have received the following ratings:

* Tacoma-Pierce County Bar Association: ***Exceptionally Well Qualified***
* Pierce County Minority Bar Association: ***Exceptionally Well Qualified***
* Washington Women Lawyers: ***Exceptionally Well Qualified***
* LGBTQ+ Bar Association of Washington (QLAW): ***Exceptionally Well Qualified***
* Joint Asian Judicial Evaluation Committee (JAJEC): Well Qualified
* Latina/o Bar Association (LBAW): Well Qualified

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 professional or disciplinary body has found me in violation of any rule or code of professional or judicial conduct.

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

I am currently the President of the Hon. Robert J. Bryan Chapter of the American Inns of Court, a national organization committed to furthering civility, excellence, and professionalism in the practice of law. Before taking the bench as a Commissioner, I served for six years on the board of Pierce County Washington Women Lawyers.

Since taking the bench as a Commissioner, I have continued to serve in court administration groups, including the Pierce County Superior Court’s Civil Protection Order Committee, DEI Committee, and Family Law Committee; and the Superior Court Judges’ Association’s Equality and Fairness Committee, Family and Juvenile Law Committee, and Guardianship Committee.

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

Before joining the court as a Commissioner, I volunteered at a civil legal aid clinic in partnership between my firm and Tacoma Pro Bono, regularly served as court-appointed counsel for indigent Respondents in guardianship cases at a significantly reduced rate, and served on a workgroup that developed plain-language instructions for unrepresented guardians navigating the court system. In recognition of our group’s work on the plain-language instructions for guardians, the Tacoma-Pierce County Bar Association bestowed the 2017 Service to the Legal Profession award to me and my fellow workgroup members.

Now that I am on the bench, I regularly partner with court stakeholders to develop our registry of court-appointed counsel in guardianship matters and to raise awareness of the need for robust volunteer legal services in our community.

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

To be a Judge is to serve. Judicial service is required in each and every case that comes into our court, as that case is the most important case in the world to the litigants. Each litigant is entitled to a Judge who has read and reflected on the court filings, listens attentively, and is prepared to respectfully decide the issue. The court system as a whole also requires steadfast service from every judge, through serving on local and statewide committees, liaising with the legislative and executive branches of government in support of the court’s goals, and researching and analyzing how to most effectively administer justice in the county. Judges must also serve the community through volunteer work, speaking with community and civic organizations to increase understanding of and confidence in the judicial branch, and helping educate the community about the court system and judiciary.

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

Being a judge is markedly different from being an attorney. Attorneys are advocates for a client’s position and interests. Attorneys remain private citizens, accountable to their client and without limitation on their participation in political activities. Judges are advocates for justice and a fair process, with the resolution controlled by applying the applicable law to the facts introduced. Judges are public officials representing an independent and co-equal branch of government. Judges are accountable to the parties and counsel in each case, appellate courts, and the public. Because of the profound importance of an impartial judiciary – and the appearance of impartiality – a judge’s ability to participate in political activities is necessarily limited. I recognize the privilege that I have already in serving as a judicial officer and aspire to serve more deeply as an elected judge.

**IF ELECTED TO THIS POSITION…..**

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

If elected, I commit to continuing my work with the American Inns of Court and supporting its mission of fostering civility, excellence, and professionalism in the legal community. I would also continue to engage in the Pierce County Minority Bar Association’s annual Youth & Law Forum and the YMCA Youth and Government Mock Trial program. I would support Pierce County hosting another Color of Law forum in partnership with the Administrative Office of the Courts and the Superior Court Judges’ Association. I also intend to participate in Judges in the Classroom, host courthouse tours, and engage in other public forums for discussion on our judicial system overall and Pierce County Superior Court.

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

Increasing access to justice for all requires deliberate work by all stakeholders in the judicial system. In most civil cases, court appointed counsel is not an option – even when significant rights are at issue, like in civil protection order cases and parenting plan matters – and cost of hiring a lawyer is cost prohibitive for many people. This often leads people to attempt to navigate the court system on their own, which is a barrier to their ability to access justice and a challenge (and an opportunity) for the court. Separate from the cost of counsel, other court costs like court filing fees, service of process fees, service by publication costs, or obtaining court transcripts for further judicial review are often barriers to justice. I support addressing these issues in a multifaceted way, including by streamlining my own courtroom processes where possible under applicable authority (like informal family law trials under GR 40); mentoring law students and young lawyers who may be interested in working as court-appointed counsel (for example, in landlord-tenant or minor guardianship cases), pro bono counsel, or low-bono counsel; partnering with community legal service providers when appropriate; providing clear and accessible information to self-represented litigants; assisting the court with developing a resource list for self-represented litigants and referring to the Pierce County District Court Resource Center and other community supports; and pursuing grants and other funding sources to mitigate these barriers to justice. I would also analyze court data to constantly inform access-to-justice efforts to support the court’s advocacy for additional access-to-justice resources.

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

Yes, I believe the judicial system still produces different results for different demographic groups but there is cause for hope. Over the past decade, Washington courts and related organizations have focused on training regarding systemic bias and implicit bias and recognizing implicit bias as it arises. Washington now has the most diverse Supreme Court in history and, putting those diverse judicial experiences to use, it is taking action. For example, the Washington Supreme Court led the charge to revise GR 37 to direct trial court judges to deny a preemptory challenge to a potential juror if an objective observer could view race as a factor in the challenge; is issuing cases confronting disparities head on, including in the context of Native American children in the dependency court system and juvenile law; and, in June 2020, it issued an open letter to the legal community regarding systemic racism, the court’s historic role in prolonging that system, and the court’s essential role in identifying and dismantling biases in the court system. Our trial courts must follow these new authorities and can cite our Supreme Court’s open letter in asking questions or requesting supplemental briefing about the impact of demographics on a particular case or litigant. I am committed to adhering to the law as articulated by our State’s highest Court, supporting efforts to quantify court outcomes across populations for a data-driven approach to identifying and remedying disparate outcomes, continuing to serve on court committees working towards more equitable courts, and continuing to study this issue.

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?

Yes, I believe that LFOs have created barriers to justice, but recent changes are starting to address this. Recognizing that Superior Court Judges do not make public policy, I support prioritizing payment of restitution to victims of crime. While Washington law also prioritizes payment of restitution over other LFOs, recent legislation has changed the LFO landscape. Under current law, the court cannot impose court costs as LFOs on an offender who is indigent at the time of sentencing, interest is no longer imposed on non-restitution LFOs, non-payment of LFOs is sanctionable by the court only if the non-payment was willful, the court can convert monetary LFOs to community restitution hours under certain circumstances, and the court can no longer impose non-restitution LFOs on juvenile offenders. With most of these new LFO provisions taking effect less than one-year ago, I believe that our courts have an opportunity to compile LFO data, assess payment/non-payment outcomes under the new law, analyze that information across our state courts, and meaningfully liaise with policymakers about any legislative adjustments to increase the community impact.

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?

Yes, I am a strong supporter of therapeutic courts to support both community safety and the root causes of court involvement in cases prompted by behavioral health or substance use disorders. In such cases, punishment alone is not an effective means of resolving the underlying issues that led to the charge in the first place and, thus, not always the most effective means of promoting community safety. In appropriate instances, a structured and supportive court program focused on both treatment and accountability can lead to sustainable change and a safer community.

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

Court congestion and judicial caseload are big issues. My ability to help address court congestion and caseload issues is a significant part of why I am running for Judge. Our court is comprised of 33 individual judicial officers (23 Judges and 10 Commissioners), all of whom must be working on concert and efficiently deployed for the court to successfully deliver justice services to the community. In doing so, I favor a data-informed approach that balances case volume, case age, case management best practices, input from stakeholders, and expedited resolution for those cases that legally require expedition (i.e., criminal trials, civil commitment trials, and protection order matters).

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

Beyond my legal experience, I would like to share that I am a first generation American and have worked since I was 15 years old. My upbringing and my diverse work experience outside of the legal profession, from elementary education to retail management, bring a valuable perspective to my judicial work. Thank you for your time in reviewing my endorsement request. I look forward to meeting with your organization on April 15, 2024.