

2020 Pierce County Democrats Endorsement Questionnaire  
-Judicial Election-

Candidate Name: **Judge Alicia Burton**

Position sought: **Pierce County Superior Court Judge, Dept. 22**

Date submitted: **April 13, 2020**

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

The Pierce County Democrats may withdraw endorsement of any judicial candidate it determines has acted in conflict with the answers provided during the screening process or it determines 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 particular position?

**In November of 2019, I was appointed by Governor Jay Inslee to fill the vacancy on the Pierce County Superior Court Bench created with the retirement of Judge John R. Hickman. I was sworn in as the Judge for Department 22 on January 2, 2020. I am running in 2020 for the four-year term.**

2. What are your qualifications for seeking this office, and what was the nature of your law practice?

**I am very proud to have spent my entire 20-year professional career in public service. I consider myself very fortunate to have held significant positions as a Pierce County deputy prosecutor in the Civil, Juvenile, Appellate, Misdemeanor and Felony Divisions. Each of these positions provided me with experiences that will help me immensely as a Superior Court Judge for Pierce County.**

3. If your past legal practice has emphasized one area of law, how will you prepare to decide other disputes and demonstrate to litigants that you can competently do so?

**My 20-year career as a deputy prosecutor afforded me the opportunity to work in both the criminal and civil divisions. From 1999 until 2004, I served in the Misdemeanor and Felony divisions of the**

**Prosecutor's office. In that capacity, I managed a large criminal caseload, including seven murder cases. In that five-year period, I conducted over 60 trials. Between 2004 and 2008, I practiced in the Appellate Division, arguing cases before the Court of Appeals, Washington State Supreme Court, and Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. In my career, I have handled 115 cases in the Court of Appeals, seven in the Supreme Court and five in the Ninth Circuit. From 2008 to 2014, I served as the Assistant Chief of the Juvenile Division, where I handled a full trial caseload, assisted the Division Chief on all issues related to the Division, and collaborated daily with Juvenile Court staff on issues of policy, juvenile law, and best course of action for juveniles within the legal system. And for the six-year period prior to joining the Bench, I defended the County in legal actions as a member of the Civil Division's complex litigation team. I was also the Legal Advisor to the Juvenile Court. These experiences have proven invaluable as I begin serving as a judge in the Superior Court. New judges often face a steep learning curve and I am certainly no exception!**

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

**I believe strongly that the most pressing issues are the delivery of justice with often times a lack of adequate resources to meet the legal needs of the men and women I see in court each day. Access to justice and the effective administration of justice are the goals I subscribe to most especially now as we collectively move through the public health crisis. These are difficult times, but I remain positive about our ability to meet these challenges.**

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

**I would respectfully ask that you make your decision based upon the body of my work as a Judge, former deputy prosecutor and my record of community service.**

6. If you hold any Democratic Party values, how have you demonstrated them?

**Judicial canons require judges to adhere to the concept of non-partisanship. I believe the best way to answer this question is to respectfully ask your organization to review my record of professional accomplishment. Throughout my career in public service, I have attempted to practice law in a respectful, comprehensive, and compassionate manner for the citizens of Pierce County. All of us are a product of our environment, and I will use these experiences to help me as I begin this next chapter of my professional career. As a judge I am committed to fairness, integrity, and discipline in my courtroom as those qualities are central to my professional career.**

7. Please list any key endorsements.

**We are early on in this endorsement process. To date, I have visited with Democratic legislative groups during their monthly meetings to introduce myself as the Governor's appointee to the Superior Court Bench. I have spoken to the Pierce County Democratic Legislative groups in the 27<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup>, and the 29<sup>th</sup>.**

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

**“Exceptionally Well Qualified”, Tacoma/Pierce County Bar Association**

**“Well Qualified”, LGBT Bar Association**

**“Exceptionally Well Qualified”, Joint Asian Judicial Evaluation Committee**

**“Well Qualified”, Latina/O Bar Association**

**“Qualified”, Washington Women Lawyers**

9. 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.**

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

**U.S. District Court Western District of Washington, 2013; U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, 2013; Washington State Bar Association, Member; Tacoma-Pierce County Bar Association, Member and former Judicial Qualifications Committee (2003-2004 and 2007-2008); Washington Association of Prosecuting Attorneys, Member; Washington Defense Trial Lawyers, Former Member.**

11. When in law school did you participate in a bar review publication? What was your final class rank?

**In law school, I was not on law review but I did participate in the Moot Court Honor Board where I won several competitions, including a regional competition. The University of Washington law school did not use standardized grading, therefore I do not have a class ranking.**

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

**As a judge, I work to ensure pro se litigants are fully aware of the various resources available to assist them with the preparation of their case. During my career as a deputy prosecutor, I served as a volunteer attorney for Tacoma Pro Bono legal services.**

13. Do you have a judicial philosophy? If so, what is it?

**Yes. I will work tirelessly to earn a strong reputation as a judge whose philosophy embraces the very essence of fairness, integrity, and accessibility. I want every litigant who appears before me to feel as if they have been heard, regardless of the outcome of their proceeding. I believe we are all a product of our collective experiences and I feel strongly that my 20-year career as a deputy prosecutor, community involvement and personal experiences have prepared me well for the challenges and the opportunities now before me as a Superior Court Judge.**

14. How is being a judge different than being a lawyer, if it is?

**The role of a judge is very different than that of an attorney. As a prosecutor, I served as an advocate as did the attorneys opposing me in the Courtroom. Judges, on the other hand, are called upon to render verdicts as a neutral decision maker. The adversarial process works best when all parties – the judge, the plaintiff and the defense are all extensively prepared for Court. Throughout my career, I have worked with many excellent men and women in the law who have helped me garner the experience that I have today as a judicial officer. I am ever mindful of my responsibility now as a judge to use my experience to benefit the citizens of Pierce County.**

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

**One of the best ways for judges to provide these services to the public is through the “Judges in the Classroom” program. As a deputy prosecutor, I regularly spoke to students in their classrooms and at Career Day, as well as to the princesses on the Daffodil Court, about my experiences as a deputy prosecutor and how to maintain a balanced professional and personal life. I’ve always enjoyed educating others about my job and the justice system. I am looking forward to speaking to students about our Court and the justice system once we move through the current corona virus situation. I think it imperative that the members of the judiciary participate in educational and community projects throughout Pierce County.**

16. What would you do to provide greater access to the civil judicial system for non-wealthy people?

**Judges have a unique ability to enhance equal access to justice. By virtue of their position, judges are able to ascertain the needs of pro-se litigants and take the necessary actions to ensure access to justice becomes a reality. Because many parties appear in Superior Court without an attorney, I believe it imperative that a judge ensures the litigant is fully aware of the resources available free of charge. These resources include interpreter services, online assistance with forms, court records, and pro bono legal services. In just the short time I have been on the Bench, I have been very impressed with the structure currently in place in the administrative portion of the Superior Court. The staff is extremely knowledgeable and available to assist pro-se litigants. Collectively, the legal community, as a whole, must do more to educate the public on the availability of these resources.**

17. If you think that the judicial system improperly produces different results for certain groups or classifications, what would you do to remedy that problem?

**As a deputy prosecutor for 20 years, every day in court seemed to present an opportunity to eliminate bias and /or improve access to the judicial system for those who needed it the most – the indigent, the accused, and ethnic, racial and sexual minorities. Whether that meant obtaining an interpreter, referring a victim to a victim advocate, selecting a diverse jury, or helping a pro se defendant understand the nature and consequences of what was happening in court, I was always sensitive to the needs of others and felt it was my duty as a prosecutor to protect those rights. Now, as a judge, I have a different role, but the same duty, and I am ever mindful of the need to apply the principle of fairness in my courtroom each and every day.**

18. Do you think there is a problem with the way in which legal financial obligations or other costs and fines are currently imposed on criminal defendants? If so, what would you do to remedy that problem?

**Under the current legal structure, the Court determines certain legal financial obligations based on an offender’s ability to pay. There are very few fines — crime victim penalty assessments and restitution — that must be imposed by the court. When these fines are imposed, the Clerk’s Office works with the individual to come up with a feasible payment plan considering the circumstances of the individual. I**

**believe this is a fair and equitable process because it takes into account an offender's individual circumstances, but still provides very important financial support and compensation for victims of crime.**

19. 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?

**Many offenders have underlying drug addiction and/or serious mental health diagnoses that contribute to their criminal behavior. I support alternative court programs because I believe in addressing the problem that led to the criminal behavior, if it can be done in a way that protects the community and holds the offender accountable. Pierce County Superior Court recognizes that certain offenders can benefit from treatment intervention, which can be accomplished through one of our innovative programs, including Felony Drug Court, Family Recovery Court, Felony Mental Health Court, and Assisted Outpatient Treatment. I serve on the committees for both Felony Drug Court and Felony Mental Health Court. By statute, we also have sentencing alternatives (drug offender sentencing alternative, sex offender sentencing alternative, parenting/family sentencing alternative) available if the case and offender meet certain eligibility requirements.**

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

**Congestion and caseload issues must be addressed on two fronts. First, individual judges can do a great deal to avoid delays in the legal process by being prepared and by ensuring the respective attorneys are well prepared as well. In my short time on the Bench, I've also observed the need for the judicial body itself to collectively address these issues. I have been quite impressed with the administrators of the Court that work diligently to keep the business of the Court moving forward most especially in these extraordinary times. The issue of court congestion will undoubtedly be one of the biggest issues our Court faces at the conclusion of this health crisis, but I'm confident our Court will create a plan to move cases forward effectively and efficiently.**

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

**I am deeply honored to have been selected by Governor Inslee for this judicial appointment to the Pierce County Superior Court. The Pierce County Democrats have a proud tradition of using their endorsement to help inform voters about judicial candidates. Your endorsement would be very important as we approach this year's elections. I very much appreciate your consideration. Thank you.**