

AFSCME DISTRICT COUNCIL 47
2019 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE
(Common Pleas Court Judges)

CANDIDATE INFORMATION

Candidate Personal Contact Information (Fields marked with asterisks are required)

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Campaign Contact Information

Full Name of Campaign Committee: Friends of Natasha Taylor-Smith
HQ Address: P.O. Box 5179
Campaign Manager Name: Pete Lyde
Campaign Manager Phone: 267-701-4503
Campaign Manager E-Mail: Petesoreal@aol.com

Candidacy Information

What office are you seeking? Court of Common

Are you the incumbent? * Yes ___ No X If yes, year first elected:

With which party are you registered? Democratic

Please list union leaders you seek input from when developing your legislative agenda:

N/A

Who are your opponents?

TBD

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If there is not sufficient space to respond to the following questions, please attach additional sheets to the questionnaire.

1. What in your background qualifies you to be a judge of the Court of Common Pleas? Why do you want to be a judge?

I believe that I am qualified to be a judge because I have had varied experiences, both personal and professional, with people from diverse backgrounds and communities. These experiences have allowed me to have an understanding of the human condition when faced with what can be a daunting experience, being a defendant, complainant, or litigant in the courtroom. My experiences have allowed me to feel the connection that bonds all of these groups, and that is to have justice served.

I have tried almost 100 jury trials, and hundreds of non-jury trials. Further, I have assisted and trained many others in the practice of law. This abundance of courtroom experience has honed my ability to discern facts very quickly, and to intelligently apply the law to facts. This experience is crucial in presiding over and making judgments about the merits of a civil, family, or criminal case. Finally, my calm, thoughtful, and levelheaded demeanor, intelligence, personal experiences, and good judgment are all assets that would serve me well as a judge.

2. How would you describe your judicial philosophy if you are a sitting Common Pleas judge?

I wouldn't say that I have a particular "judicial philosophy." I hope to improve our system of justice by making sure that each litigant, defendant, or witness that appears before me feels that they have been fully heard, that their testimony or circumstance has been fully considered, and that they feel that no matter the result, they were treated with fairness and dignity. If everyone who appears before me feels this way, I believe that it could create a domino effect in reducing what some perceive to be an unjust, unfair, and unsympathetic judicial system.

3. Common Pleas Judges are sometimes asked by employers to set aside or vacate arbitration awards. What considerations, if any, would compel you to set aside or modify an arbitration award pursuant to a collective bargaining agreement? Are there any circumstances under which you believe you would set aside an arbitration award?

As a judicial candidate, 207 Pa. Code 33 Canon 2.10 requires that..." A judge shall not make any public statement that might reasonably be expected to affect the outcome or impair the fairness of a matter pending or impending in any court, or make any nonpublic statement that might substantially interfere with a fair trial or hearing." However, if elected, equality and fairness will be the bedrock of any decision I make, and absent clear proof of fraud I cannot opine as to any circumstances that would cause me to consider setting aside an arbitration award.

4. Common Pleas Judges are often asked to issue injunctions in connection with labor disputes. What considerations would compel you in judging whether it is appropriate to issue an injunction in a labor dispute?

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5. Have you performed any pro bono work in your career within the last 2 years and if so, what was it?

In the past 2 years, I have handled several pro bono matters. I have handled issues involving tax liens, passport restrictions, landlord/tenant matters, spousal support and divorce filings, and assisting with civil litigation matters.

6. What would you consider in deciding to limit picketing in a labor dispute?

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7. Under what circumstances do you believe alternatives to incarceration are appropriate? What do you believe are the most effective programs for preventing recidivism?

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8. How many and what types of cases have you handled in the last several years?

I have handled approximately 300 criminal cases over the past 5 years. Prior to that I practice municipal law which included land development, real estate acquisitions, drafting of ordinances and resolutions, contract negotiation and review, zoning matters, education law and general litigation. I also have experience with family law.

9. With an Adult Probation/Parole Department and a Prison Department so severely understaffed and underfunded, including the Options program and psychological services, what will you do to make sure that your judicial orders don't turn into a series of "unfunded mandates," without any real force of law?

In the Relapse Prevention Court, we have been able to partner with social service agencies outside of the criminal justice system in order to provide resources for our participants. Many of these programs have unfilled slots to provide services. I would work with Court Administration and other stakeholders to make some of these agencies available to arrested persons. Additionally, I would work with the Supervising Judge and the Administrative Judge to seek out new providers with independent funding sources to alleviate some of the burden from Probation and the Philadelphia Prison System.

10. What is your position on mandatory sentences?

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11. Would you be in favor of a liaison from the probation department to discuss court problems with court administrative judges? Why or why not??

Absolutely, the Criminal Justice system only works when the stakeholders have an opportunity to provide input on the fair administration of justice. Probation receives training and information that the Court should have available to it in order to insure that cases are being adjudicated in a timely manner without sacrificing or impacting the rights of defendants, witnesses or victims. A liaison could assist with this function including providing opportunities for judges to participate in their on continuing judicial education programming.

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