

AFSCME DISTRICT COUNCIL 47

2019 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

(Common Pleas Court Judges)

CANDIDATE INFORMATION

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

Name: Samantha J. Williams

Registration Address: PO Box 42672, Philadelphia, PA 19104

E-Mail: samantha@williamsforphillyjudge.com

Home Phone: 267-912-1420

Work Phone: 267-912-1420

Cell Phone: 267-912-1420

HQ Phone: 267-912-1420

Fax: I do not have a fax number.

Work Address: I resigned my position within city government to run for office. As such, I do not have a work address.

Campaign Contact Information

Full Name of Campaign Committee: Williams for Philly Judge

HQ Address: I do not have a headquarters. The mailing address for my campaign is PO Box 42672, Philadelphia, PA 19104.

Campaign Manager Name: Jeff Serra

Campaign Manager Phone: 570-401-3424

Campaign Manager E-Mail: jeff@williamsforphillyjudge.com

Candidacy Information

What office are you seeking? Judge of Municipal Court; Judge of Court of Common Pleas.

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

With which party are you registered? Democratic Party

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

Chris Woods, formerly of 1199C.

Who are your opponents? There are at least two seats open in Municipal Court and at least ten seats open in the Court of Common Pleas. Therefore, I do not have direct opponents.

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'm running for judge because I am wholly invested in the future of this city and I know that it is critical that our local judiciary reflect those most likely to face obstacles and challenges within our system. When I speak of the reflection of our local judiciary, I am not just speaking in terms of gender diversity or racial diversity. I see the need for diversity in age, practical experience and life experience as well. I firmly believe that the uniqueness of my legal experience, combined with my proven dedication to understanding and addressing the issues facing those working and residing in our city provide me with the ability to bring a wholistic approach to the bench.

In terms of my practical experience, I have a deep familiarity with the law—I've practiced it and I've written it. From November 2014 to May 2016, I served as an Assistant District Attorney in the Trial Division of the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office. In this role, I represented the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in hundreds of cases, from their inception to their completion, including handling misdemeanor bench trials in Municipal Court and felony waiver trials in the Court of Common Pleas. My responsibilities included conducting all facets of cases, including, preliminary hearings, drafting of pretrial motions, conducting motions to suppress and motions in limine, post-trial motions and appeals, and sentencing. I specialized in cases involving high-risk DUI offenders with expert witness examination from toxicologists. Additionally, I was tasked with teaching trainings to new Assistant District Attorneys on how to conduct motions to suppress. My experience at the DA's Office not only provided me with a wealth of trial experience, but also insight on courtroom operations, judicial protocols and the effective management of caseloads.

From May 2016 until January 2023, I served as the Director of Legislation and Policy to Councilmember Curtis Jones, Jr. In that role, I oversaw the legislative body's committees on Public Safety, Criminal Justice Reform, and Legislative Oversight, all of which involve the relevant functions of our City's courts. I also had the opportunity to write laws that were aimed at ensuring our systems were fairer, more efficient and produced better results for city residents.

My legislative accomplishments include:

- o Philadelphia's "Good Cause Eviction" law (drafted September 2017; signed into law January 2019)
- o Updates to Philadelphia's "Fair Criminal Records Screening" ordinance (drafted August 2020; signed into law January 2021)
- o Creation of Philadelphia's Citizens Police Oversight Commission (drafted January 2021; signed into law June 2021)

In this role, I also had the opportunity to collaborate with the leaders of our criminal justice agencies through my work on the Criminal Justice Advisory Board – including leadership of the First Judicial District, Philadelphia Police Department, District Attorney's Office and the Defender Association of Philadelphia. I have also issued reports involving issues impacting these agencies, including a report from Philadelphia City Council's Criminal Justice Committee detailing measures aimed at reducing the City's prison population and reducing reliance on cash

bail, and a report from Philadelphia City Council's Shooting Review Committee analyzing solutions to combat rising gun violence in Philadelphia.

In terms of my life experience, I am a product of this city in every sense of the word. I was born, raised and still live in West Philly. I'm Philadelphia educated: through our City's public school system and Temple University. I've dedicated my entire legal career to public service to the City that I will call home for the rest of my life.

Philadelphia's court system is the driving force when it comes to public safety, justice and fairness in this city. Fairness can only be "fair" based on the lived experiences of the person who is administering it. In order to have a system that truly works, judges have to be able to connect with those most likely to come before them. Our city desperately needs judges that understand what it's like to grow up in this city; judges that have spent time advocating for the needs of the most vulnerable residents of this city; judges who have already proven their commitment to change in our system. I embody all of these qualifications which solidifies my ability to understand the challenges that those who interact with our systems face and will enable me to create a culture within our courts of dignity and respect for all.

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

My judicial philosophy as a sitting Common Pleas Judge would be one of thoughtfulness, respect, compassion, and most of all, fairness, with a focus on taking an individualized, fact-specific, wholistic approach to every case that comes before me.

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?

Unions rely on collective bargaining agreements to ensure appropriate benefits and quality working conditions for their members. Arbitration is usually a last line of defense for unions to ensure the employer is upholding the contract that they fought and negotiated for. As such, setting aside or modifying an arbitration award, particularly one that was in favor of the union, could be extremely harmful to the men and women of the labor organization, and that's something that shouldn't be taken lightly. Any reconsideration of an arbitration award would require due diligence in evaluating the collective bargaining agreement to have a better understanding of the intent of the language of the contract as it relates to the issue in front of the court. While judicial rules prohibit candidates from making promises concerning their conduct on the bench, the setting aside of an arbitration award should be reserved for clear and direct violations of the collective bargaining agreement.

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?

As I expressed in my answer above, unions must be allowed to exercise the power to fight for the rights of their membership. That is something that courts should respect and it should not be a goal of the courts to take that power away from the union. In determining whether to issue an injunction in a labor dispute, I would consider whether a work stoppage of the unions involved would lead to a serious public crisis. To provide an example, if the union membership involved

in the labor dispute included hospital workers, a public crisis would be imminent, as a work stoppage could mean that city residents could not get adequate medical attention in our hospitals. Those types of scenarios should be the focus in making determinations related to injunctions.

5. What considerations would compel you in deciding to limit picketing in a labor dispute?

It should not be the goal of the courts to limit picketing that results as a part of a labor dispute. As long as the union has followed the collective bargaining process and has provided notice, in circumstances where notice is required, then the men and women who are a part of the union should be able to exercise their right to strike and engage in strike-related activities. The real consideration should be, whether work stoppage and/or picketing of the unions involved would lead to a serious public crisis.

6. What alternatives to incarceration do you feel are most appropriate?

There are many alternatives to incarceration that may be appropriate after taking into consideration measures that would be necessary for the rehabilitation of the individual involved in the specific case. Those alternatives could be probation, community service or other community based interventions, mental health or addiction treatment programs or rehabilitative services, home detention or electronic monitoring, work release and where appropriate, restitution.

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

While serving as an Assistant District Attorney for the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office, I tried, at the very least, over 600 criminal cases in the Trial Divisions of Municipal Court and the Court of Common Pleas, as well as the Family Division of the Court of Common Pleas.

8. With an Adult Probation/Parole Department so severely understaffed and underfunded, 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?

Through my work on the Criminal Justice Reform Committee and the Criminal Justice Advisory Board on behalf of Philadelphia City Council, I have first-hand knowledge of the need for reform of the First Judicial District's policies regarding probation, due to many of the issues facing the Adult Probation/Parole Department, including the staffing levels in comparison to the amount of individuals who are sentenced to probation each year. While judicial rules prohibit candidates from making promises concerning their conduct on the bench, I do believe that any judge should consider the issues facing the Adult Probation/Parole Department when considering a sentence of probation, including the appropriateness of the length of probationary sentence, whether the probationary sentence will be reporting or non-reporting, and whether probation is the best alternative for rehabilitation.

9. What is your position on mandatory sentences?

Each case before a judge will have a different set of parties, a different set of facts, and a different set of circumstances, which should all be considered for a judge when determining an appropriate sentence. My position is that mandatory sentences don't allow for the type of individualized, case-by-case assessment that true justice and fairness would require.

10. Would you be in favor of a liaison person from the probation department to discuss court problems with court administrative Judges and if so, what role would you like to see that person play?

The justice system is meant to function as a whole-- not with its individual departments and agencies operating in silos. As such, I would be in favor of a liaison to monitor and discuss issues relevant to the Adult Probation/Parole Department and the leadership of the First Judicial District and think that such liaison would be useful in increasing efficiency, transparency and better outcomes for those who interact with our systems, which is always a goal that the courts should strive for.

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