

AFSCME DISTRICT COUNCIL 47
2019 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

Barbara Thomson

CANDIDATE INFORMATION

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

Name: Barbara S. Thomson, Esq.

Registration Address:

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Campaign Contact Information

Full Name of Campaign Committee: Barbara Thomson for Judge

HQ Address: 8002 Winston Road, Ste 300 Philadelphia, PA 19118

Campaign Manager Name: Robert W. Previdi

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Candidacy Information

What office are you seeking? Municipal Court Judge - Philadelphia

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

With which party are you registered? Democrat

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

I seek input from union leaders because they advocate for working families. Specifically, I would seek input from the AFSCME and all the other labor unions that have been supporting me, such as Laborers, Teamsters, TWU, and Plumbers. The Teamsters and Plumbers have already endorsed me and the TWU has supported me over the years along with the Laborers. I grew up in a union family and was a member of the Laborer's Local 1000 in New York as I worked my way through college and graduate school. The unions supported me as I received my education and I believe it is my role to support every working man and woman. I understand that every union member who comes into court is supported by his or her union family who provides a foundation for people who work for a living. While attending Brooklyn Law School, and thereafter, I worked with the MTA New York City Transit negotiating fair labor deals for all their unions, including TWU 100, ATU, SSSA and others. I am most proud of negotiating a

Memorandum of Understanding that provided bonus pay for maintenance workers for all of the unions mentioned. My husband and I proudly raised our children in Philadelphia, who graduated from J.R. Masterman. And we proudly brag that our children received a world-class education from unionized teachers.

Who are your opponents?

I will not officially know who the Municipal Court opponents are until May 15th. I know that there are currently 2 vacancies for Municipal Court and that Cortez Patton and I have been endorsed by Philadelphia City Committee. There are other people seeking ballot positions; however, the deadline for petitions is on March 7th. I understand that a number of candidates (about 5) are circulating petitions at this time for both Common Pleas and Municipal Court, and they will decide which office suits them based on their ballot numbers. I am committed to Municipal Court as I believe it is the most important court for the people of Philadelphia.

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 Municipal Court? What would you like to achieve as a judge?

Public service has always been my passion. I have been a public servant for over 35 years. During my college years, I worked as a Laborer for the Local 1000 in New York State and as a trash remover to help support my college education. I earned a BA and an MS in Public Policy at Stony Brook University; and attended Brooklyn Law School while working full-time at MTA New York City Transit. One of my proudest accomplishments was negotiating a bonus for maintainers in 1999 and 2000. The program exists today. After attending law school, I focused on labor relations and compliance issues with local, state, and federal regulations instituting large public projects. As my career progressed and my family and I moved to Philadelphia in 2001, I continued focusing on these issues as I broadened my experience to emerging issues facing Philadelphia and other large cities. is included more interaction with the most vulnerable people in our communities; and a devotion to those who are struggling. For example, I supported the opening of the Hub of Hope – a homeless day shelter in Philadelphia; the PHL City ID Card, and now I am supporting the Welcome Center in North Philly where asylum seekers are coming from El Paso, TX on buses. We welcome them with dignity, respect, and compassion – the same way, I believe, everybody should be treated in Municipal Court.

I am grateful for all the opportunities and relationships in my life. While I have achieved professional success as an attorney, I have the heart and temperament to manage a courtroom and understand how people are affected by judicial decisions. My professional, community, and family relationships are long-standing and strong because people can trust me; and, I know who I can trust. When I receive a court-appointed defendant, the person often looks guilty on paper. When I get to know the person, I learn the circumstances. I also interview them inside and out to see if they are telling me the truth so I can defend them properly. There is always another story behind the police report.

Municipal Court can determine whether or not someone gets into the criminal justice system for life. It's a tough road once someone is there. It limits them from finding jobs and contributing to their family and community. Landlord-Tenant matters can determine whether someone is homeless. As a judge, I would be able to improve our system of justice by applying my legal and public policy background to assess policies that lead to support and more equitable results. I have the values and experience inherently needed to hear people and treat them fairly in the court room. In our city, we are adapting to radical changes; and we must never lose sight of the individual. I have been working toward this professionally since I started college at Stony Brook University; and it is something I'd like to share with the people of Philadelphia as a Municipal Court Judge.

2. How would you describe your judicial philosophy as a judge in Municipal Court?

My philosophy is to treat everyone who comes into Municipal Court with dignity, respect, and compassion. People must be heard and understand the consequences of any agreements they make. I also believe that when people come to court with family members – including their union family members, it demonstrates their commitment to living within the law. They have a community who will help and guide them if need be.

The Philadelphia Municipal Court is the first contact most people with make with the Justice System. In addition to treating people with fairness and respect, I will explain to people what is happening. In Criminal Court, my goal is to connect each offend with the necessary treatment, skills, and information to improve their life and options after their sentence is served. Diversion and Treatment Programs are an essential tool to reduce recidivism and improve the quality of life in the city and reduce overall crime.

My background as a public servant demonstrates that I understand equity, which, in short, ensures that everyone has what is needed to seek opportunity and security. We all have the right to be heard, respected, and understood regardless of who we are and why we are in court.

The Philadelphia Municipal Court Civil Division does not require legal representation for Small Claims, Code Enforcement and Landlord-Tenant matters. As such, I will pay close attention to what people have to say, apply the law fairly, and take the time to explain both the ruling and reasons behind it.

My philosophy as to how I manage myself in Municipal Court is consistent with my role as the Rector's Warden at St. Martin-in-the-Fields Episcopal Church. I treat people with kindness and dignity with an expectation that we are a family and we treat each with respect and compassion. The Rector's Warden is similar to the Chairman of the Board for the church. In this role, I manage all the business and partner engagements for church, as well as act as the primary lay representative for setting an example of behavior and values.

3.. What is your perspective on mandatory sentencing?

Mandatory Sentencing is the act of imposing harsh mandatory minimum sentences and locking people of color in jail to protect white people, which disproportionately affects poor people of color. Unfortunately, "... Prosecutor's use of mandatory minimums in over half of all federal cases disproportionately impacts poor people of color and has driven the exponential growth in the local prison population in recent decades." (Alison Siegel, Brennan Center for Justice Oct. 18 2021). Prosecutors also bring mandatory sentences against black and latino individuals more often than white individuals with possession or sale of a quantity of drugs just sufficient to trigger a mandatory minimum. (Alison Siegel, Brennan Center for Justice Oct. 18 2021).

In my opinion, this treats people unfairly and inhumanely. It also restricts judges from considering extenuating circumstances and the context in which the crime was committed. I believe it's overly harsh, reallocates the power from judges to the prosecutors, extends racism and classism, and fails to advance community safety. Thus, I denounce them.

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

Yes, I have been performing pro bono work in the last 2 years for the Charles Bernard Pro Bono Initiative and as a Law Clerk for Municipal Court Judge Thomas Gehret as a volunteer. I represented people at criminal preliminary hearings, criminal trials, and landlord-tenant court. I also represented the Philadelphia's Democratic Committee for Election Law Challenges for Nomination Petition Reviews (about 40 cases). As a Law Clerk, I performed legal research, assisted in managing the demands of a very busy docket, and advised on final opinions.

In addition to courtroom pro bono work, I have been the Secretary for Self Help Movement, a drug and alcohol residential treatment facility located in Philadelphia. I reviewed annual and semi-annual reports and budgets and supported their annual fund-raising events. I am also the Rector's Warden at St. Martin-in-the-Fields (similar to the Board Chair. We are going through a Rector Transition where I'm acting as the CEO the church managing all affairs including compliance with city, state, federal, and Canon Law and Regulations. This includes:

- Executing the vision and mission of St. Martin-in-the-Fields with \$1.1 million budget
- Overseeing community partnerships, such as the St. James School, Jubilee School, and Guatemala Episcopal partner churches totaling \$100,000 to ensure transparency and compliance with agreements
- Overseeing clergy and drafting and negotiating letters of agreement for service
- Identifying pastoral needs
- Providing liturgical support
- Managing personnel actions within the law and in compliance with the Employee Handbook

- Interacting with Episcopal Diocese on policy matters
- Communicating with vestry and congregation
- Primary representative for setting an example of behavior and values
- Ministry Programs such as Refugee Resettlement, Children and Youth, Bible Studies, Choir, Choristers, Vacation Bible School, Choir Camp, Youth Pilgrimages, Adult Formation, etc.

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

The first 25 years of my legal career were devoted to providing services to large transit agencies and governments that were building new programs based on federally regulated grant programs, new policies, and emerging issues. My role combined my legal expertise and operations background instituting programs that were legally sound; met the needs of the public; complied with labor agreements and fair labor practices; and met local, state, and federal funding regulations. The programs include City of Philadelphia's Hub of Hope, PHL City ID Card, SEPTA's Key, Collective Bargaining Agreements for MTA New York City Transit, and researching and writing syntheses and reports for the National Academies of Science Transportation Research Board that shared best practices on new issues facing airports and transit agencies.

Philadelphia's Hub of Hope, the PHL City ID Card, and the case studies I performed for the Transportation Research Board exposed me to a more personal view of the people I have been supporting through my large projects. As I became more aware of the individual personal impact on people, I sought clients on a different level – the individuals who need help with the criminal justice system and people who are awaiting smaller civil trials. To this end, I became an Arbitrator for the First Judicial District of Philadelphia Arbitration Center and I have been seeking pro bono clients for criminal matters in Municipal Court. I also volunteered as a law clerk for Municipal Court Judge Thomas Gehret to better understand the administration and the thought process that goes into deciding criminal cases. I am also currently continuing my work with the City of Philadelphia leading the response for Federal Emergency Management Administration's Humanitarian Relief Grant. Philadelphia has become a border city and people are seeking asylum here as they are bused here from El Paso, Texas.

Examples of my work include:

City of Philadelphia: Federal Grant Program for City of Philadelphia Asylum Seekers from Texas (December 2022 – present) Program is coordinated by Office of Homeless Services, Office of Emergency Management, and Office of Immigrant Affairs

- Writing federal grant applications for Emergency Humanitarian Relief funding (HR 22); reviewing and documenting expenses for compliance with local, state, and federal requirements
- Developing application program for Emergency Food and Shelter Program for rent, mortgages, and utilities that complies with federal requirements for reimbursement and local privacy policies
- Ensuring compliance with state and federal rules and regulations related to funding the City's Office of Immigrant Affairs, the Office of Emergency Management, the Philadelphia

Department of Public Health, and an array of non-profit partners providing services for: emergency health screening, shelter space, food and water, legal services, and on-site language interpretation

- Researching and monitoring rapidly changing regulations pertaining to rights of asylum seekers and services provided

- **3 criminal trials – all resulting in dismissals**

- 1 trial for illegal sale of alcohol and conspiracy – won one count and lost one count in MC; appealed, and won at Common Pleas – avoiding criminal record for person accused of a crime for the first time

- 1 trial for aggravated assault and vandalism of police property

- 1 trial for threatening with a weapon:

- Oversaw implementation of City ID program for the City of Philadelphia ensuring compliance with legal documents required (such as state picture ID, mail establishing residency, foreign or US passport, lease, utility bills, school ID) to receive ID card; as well as the chain of custody for collection of revenue to ensure accountability.

- **Established City of Philadelphia Hub of Hope (Homeless Day Shelter)** run by Project HOME. Oversaw seamless transfer of property between SEPTA and the City of Philadelphia to build out the center. Identified and assigned responsibilities for ongoing operations and services, safety requirements, and compliance with ADA requirements. Advised City on workforce requirements to comply with collective bargaining agreements.

- **SEPTA** Hired by Law Department as legal and transit operations expert to re-energize professional relationship between SEPTA and contractor by establishing trust between the parties. Identified process for change orders initially totaling \$12 million that were reduced to \$4 million. Developed legal briefing books for settlement agreement. Advised SEPTA General Manager and Law Department on recommendations.