

Democratic Club of Boca Raton and Delray Beach- candidate Questionnaire
Questions for Judicial Candidates August, 2020

1. Please provide a short biography.

I was born in Queens, New York on August 19, 1957 and I am the product of a public-school education. My parents were hardworking and a guiding light in my educational and career pursuits. I attended college in upstate New York at Cornell University graduating with honors with a Bachelor of Science degree in Industrial and Labor Relations. I then attended Cornell Law School and graduated with a law degree in 1982. In college, I served on the Academic Integrity Committee and University Review Board. During law school, I served as a Moot Court Judge.

After law school, I moved to Michigan to gain courtroom experience, spending the first 10 years working as in-house counsel and as a partner at a law firm handling complex civil litigation. With an eye toward my future, I took and passed the Florida Bar Exam and became a member of the Florida Bar in 1992. In 1993, I opened my own law practice in Detroit Michigan representing civil rights victims in complex employment litigation. In late 1999, I opened my law office in Palm Beach County, Florida and moved to Palm Beach County in December 1999. In summary, prior to my public service as your Circuit Court Judge, I was a veteran employment discrimination lawyer with over 30 years of courtroom experience and significant jury trial experience.

I was elected by the people of Palm Beach County to serve as your Circuit Court Judge in August 2014. I began my service as a Circuit Court Judge in January 2015. I presently serve in the Circuit Civil Division and served in that division for about three and a half years. I also served for close to two years in the Family Division and the Probate and Guardianship Division in the South County Courthouse. I have also been honored to serve as a faculty member at Florida Judicial College in 2019 and 2020 teaching circuit civil fundamentals and civil trial procedure to new circuit court judges. I have been a member of the United States Supreme Court Bar for over 28 years and a member of the American Bar Association for over 35 years. I am also a member of the Palm Beach County Bar Association and the F. Malcolm Cunningham, Sr. Bar Association. I have held and continue to maintain for the last 20 years an AV rating by Martindale Hubbell, the highest ranking for professional excellence, legal ability, and ethical standards.

2. What experience do you bring to this position?

I have presided over numerous jury trials and thousands of hearings as a Circuit Court Judge during my five and half years of service. I have presided over circuit civil cases, family cases, probate and guardianship cases, and domestic violence proceedings. I have also had the honor of presiding over adoption proceedings. And I have presided over first appearance hearings on the weekend. I also have excelled in case management and ensuring that our community is able to get their cases tried or resolved in a timely

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and fair manner. My preparation and hard work contributed to my teaching as a faculty member for the past two years at Florida Judicial College. There is no substitute for courtroom jury trial experience. Before my service as a judge, I have been an advocate for my clients for over 31 years. I have over 37 years of legal experience as well as a long history of community service. Before my election to the bench, I was an active member of the League of Women Voters of Palm Beach County, a Board Member of the Voters Coalition of Palm Beach County, a member of the Palm Beach County National Organization for Women, an Advisory Council Member for the Arthur Marshall Foundation for the Everglades and a Reading Ambassador for the Literacy Coalition of Palm Beach County.

3. Why are you running?

I am running because I have a passion for public service and a love of our legal system. I put my heart and soul into my service as Circuit Court Judge. I take pride in my preparation as a jurist for the thousands of cases that come before the court and ensure that the law is applied fairly with justice, integrity, and equality for all who enter the courtroom. Serving as a member of the judiciary is a privilege and a public service. I care about our community and believe that I have served with integrity, dedication, and a commitment to justice for all. Therefore, I have decided to run for re-election.

4. What are the major influences in your life?

My mother is the major influence in my life. My mom was incredible. She went to school at night and became a CPA in the late 1960s while raising three children. She became a partner at an accounting firm while always making time for the children. She guided my educational development and instilled in me a strong moral compass and work ethic. My mom made sure I had every educational opportunity available to a middle-class family. She taught me the value of perseverance, to pursue my dreams and most importantly to never give up. While my mom passed away in September 2015, her life lessons will always remain with me. I also have been fortunate to have strong friendships in the Palm Beach County community and in particular one important person in my life who provides me the same counsel and influence that my mom had provided.

5. What is your general judicial philosophy as it pertains to the court on which you will sit as a judge?

My judicial philosophy is simple. Be prepared, be fair, consider each case individually and carefully, remain independent and ensure equal justice for all who appear before the court. Each case must be treated as the most important case on the judge's docket, as the

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parties should expect nothing less. And to remember the importance of equal rights for all who appear before the court.

6. Would there be any specific types of cases in which you might find it necessary to disqualify yourself? Can you give us an example?

If a friend is a litigant in a case, it would be necessary to disqualify myself. There were certain initiatives I was active with during my membership with the League of Women Voters of Palm Beach County. I would first disclose that involvement and at the request of any of the parties, I would consider disqualification. The same would apply to certain election law cases involving community leaders and elected officials that I have positively interacted with over the years. I would disclose the relationship and then consider disqualification. While I can and would maintain objectivity and impartiality, it is the appearance and perception that must be considered.

7. Why should voters support you rather than your opponent?

My experience as a Circuit Court Judge as reflected in my earlier answers. My 31 years of courtroom experience in both state and federal court. My jury trial experience. My legal ability, integrity, and preparation. I have also maintained an AV rating by Martindale-Hubbell, the highest rating for professional excellence, legal ability, and ethical standards. My expertise in circuit civil trial procedure as evidenced by serving as a faculty member at Florida Judicial College for the past two years. And my passion for community service as reflected in the following organizations prior to my service on the bench - League of Women Voters of Palm Beach County, Advisory Council Member for the Arthur Marshall Foundation for the Everglades, Board Member of the Voters Coalition of Palm Beach County and the Palm Beach County National Organization for Women and as a Reading Ambassador for the Literacy Coalition of Palm Beach County. My depth of experience and passion for service are the reasons the voters of Palm Beach County should choose to vote for my re-election as Circuit Court Judge. I love serving the people of Palm Beach County as a Circuit Court Judge. Serving as a Judge is an honor and privilege, but it is not an entitlement. I have put my heart and soul into ensuring that I performed my judicial responsibilities with dedication, extensive preparation, integrity, and fairness.

8. Which justice of the Supreme Court, either alive or dead, would you like to meet and why?

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Justice John Paul Stevens. He served as a Justice for close to 35 years from 1975 until 2010. I would like to meet him to discuss his judicial philosophy during his years on the bench and during changing times in our society. I have read each of the books that he has written and was drawn by his love of the law and the history of our justice system.

9. What do you perceive as the greatest obstacles to justice, if any?

I do not view the following as obstacles but prefer to look upon the following as challenges facing our judicial system. We must continue to enhance our efforts to educate our prospective jurors on the importance of jury service. This is especially critical given the challenging times that we face. We need to ensure that we have effective procedures in place to ensure the health and safety of our jurors when they appear in the courthouse for jury service. We must also remain vigilant in ensuring that all people are treated fairly and on an equal basis, regardless of their gender, race, or sexual orientation. Another challenge is funding for domestic violence intervention programs.

10. What is your vision for the future of our judicial system? What changes would you advocate and why?

The increased use of technology so that hearings can be held by zoom video. Restructuring our courtrooms to ensure the health and safety of our jurors so that social distancing protocols can be adhered to. The use of on-line alternative dispute resolution and a streamlined discovery process so that dispute resolution can be utilized early on in the case before attorney fees and costs escalate to the point where settlement becomes impractical. An enhanced on-line self-service center and a free online law library to assist individuals who cannot afford to hire counsel.

Please return completed form to Kevin McGrath at: **akm_fl@yahoo.com**