



FOX CHAPEL DEMOCRATIC COMMITTEE 2025 JUDICIAL CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

PART 1: INTRODUCTION

As you know, there are a large number of candidates for an unusually high number of judicial vacancies within the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas in 2025. The Fox Chapel Democratic Committee (FCDC) believes that citizens of Fox Chapel and those of surrounding communities as well voters within Allegheny County in general would benefit from learning more about the candidates, so that their choices in upcoming elections can be as informed as possible. Therefore, FCDC has developed a Judicial Candidate Questionnaire and is asking each judicial candidate to complete and return it, so that your responses can be distributed as widely as possible.

FCDC intends to:

- Share your responses with Democratic committees of other communities in our region;
- Share your responses with the citizens of Fox Chapel and to individuals within Fox Chapel School District, and encourage other area committees to do so;
- Publish your responses on FCDC’s website and seek to have them published on the Allegheny County Democratic Committee’s website as well;
- Publish them on FCDC’s social media pages.

PART 2: INSTRUCTIONS

Please respond to the questions on the following page and return your written responses to *foxchapedems@gmail.com* on or before **Friday, February 14, 2025**.

This form is in Word format, so responses may be typed directly under each question.

Please answer each question, including subparts, as completely as possible; however, please keep responses clear and reasonably concise so they are understandable and useful to individuals who may not have a background in law.

QUESTIONNAIRE

CANDIDATE NAME: Amanda Green-Hawkins

DATE: February 14, 2025

1. Judicial Philosophy and Temperament

Judges make decisions in high-stakes and emotional situations. How do you stay fair and calm under pressure? Share an example from your career.

My guiding principle is to first treat people with dignity and respect, which grounds me and my behavior. I then observe the behavior of others to gauge whether and how my behavior could deescalate the situation and I act accordingly.

Earlier in my career, I was in court where the opposing attorney kept interrupting me and talking over me every time I was presenting my case to the judge or answering the judge's questions. I remained calm but inside I was seething because the opposing attorney was being disrespectful and treating me like I was invisible. My anger was exacerbated by the fact that the judge was not doing anything to stop the opposing attorney's unprofessional behavior. I took it upon myself to end it. When the attorney interrupted me again, I looked directly at him and got his attention by firmly and authoritatively saying "Counsellor, I did not interrupt you." He looked at me as though he was seeing me for the first time. He did not interrupt me again.

2. Commitment to Judicial Ethics

Judges must avoid conflicts of interest and undue influence. How would you handle a situation where a friend or campaign donor asks for special treatment in your courtroom? I would simply and firmly let them know that I am unable to help them. I would also ask them if they would like a copy of the PA Code of Judicial Conduct.

a. Have you had this experience, and what was your response? I have experienced this and my response was simply and firmly "no".

b. Did you disclose it to an ethics body or to law enforcement? Why or why not? I did not disclose it to an ethics body because there was no ethics body that had jurisdiction or authority over the matter, but I did report it to the organization's general counsel.

3. Accessibility and Fairness

a. Judges must ensure everyone can participate in the legal process. How will you make your courtroom accessible to people without lawyers? When I served as a mediator, I was often working with people where one or neither side had a lawyer. Those experiences would guide me. First and foremost, I would treat people with dignity and respect, which is essential for people to be heard and for due process. People must be fully heard, otherwise, I would lack information that may be important for the decisions that must be made.

I would also want to know if they had an opportunity to consult with a lawyer. If not, I would ask if they contacted the bar association's lawyer referral service, or other legal aid or legal service provider in their community. I would also take the time to explain the legal process for their case and why the process was important, and the reasons for the decisions being made. Judges must also be teachers to help people understand what happens and to build trust in the system.

b. Every person has conscious and/or unconscious biases. How do you recognize and suppress those biases in yourself, so that you can deal with all parties fairly and dispassionately? Give examples of how you've dealt with this issue.

First and foremost, I recognize that I have biases and that they can affect my ability to fully listen to people, so that they are not heard. As a result, I could be making decisions without enough information or the right information. It is incumbent upon me to confront and address biases to improve my interactions with people in the courtroom, and to produce better outcomes for the people I serve.

Bias must be interrupted and disrupted whenever it rears its head by first, honestly assessing my own biases and determining whether I would treat someone differently if they were different than they appeared. Any biases would need to be addressed by refuting stereotypes, changing perspectives to gain another point of view, and being intentionally thoughtful in my interactions with people. This has become my habit to keep bias out of my decision-making as much as possible.

I've interrupted and disrupted bias when considering applicants for employment which revealed hidden gems and changed my belief about a desired skillset. I interrupt and disrupt bias when interacting with children. I find that they sometimes know more than I expect, and that I can trust their statements which must be viewed from their perspective. And finally, I have interrupted and disrupted bias when I have seen others applying their biases when discussing solutions for our community's homeless/unhoused people. Homeless/unhoused people come from all walks of life and include many people who are underemployed and unable to afford housing, and includes many women with children.

4. Describe the types of cases you've tried/presided over

List 3-5 examples of cases (anonymously) in which you've been involved as counsel or judge, and that you believe inform or enhance your ability to serve as a judge. Include why/how these experiences influenced you.

The case I discussed in answer #1 has remained with me because it was an example of a judge not controlling his courtroom, or worse, not requiring that I be treated with dignity and respect and heard. A judge has a responsibility to control what happens in their courtroom so that due process and the administration of justice are not hindered. I was invisible in that courtroom, and I cannot allow what happened to me to happen in my courtroom. Attorneys will be acknowledged by name, and firmly reminded to be professional and to speak when it is their turn, if necessary.

I worked on another case that involved sexual harassment and the person was hesitant about continuing with the matter because they did not want to relive the details of their experiences. They felt shame about what happened to them. It is not uncommon for judges to have people in their courtroom facing these same circumstances. People need to be able to trust the judge and know that the judge is in control of the courtroom, so that they can feel comfortable enough to tell their stories. This experience influences me to think about ways to earn the trust of people who need to tell their story. That may be achieved by explaining the process, having only the necessary parties in the courtroom, taking multiple breaks, and by just asking the person how they can be accommodated if possible.

I also worked on a case where someone's license was revoked, without due process, and it directly impacted their ability to earn an income. Their family suffered. The case clearly fit into exceptions to the law so that this person should have had their license restored, but the judge did not even acknowledge the argument. We had to appeal for the court to consider the exceptions. It seemed that the judge may have just made the easy decision to dismiss the case just to get rid of it when this person really did have a right to have the license restored. For this person, justice was delayed but for many, it would have been justice denied because most cases are not appealed. This influences me to afford people and the cases before me the time and attention they deserve, which is simply treatment with dignity and respect. The decisions I make can affect people for the rest of their lives and it could have tragic consequences for the people involved in the case and for their families. Dockets will always be overflowing with cases. As a judge, I cannot use that as an excuse to ignore arguments and deprive people of due process.

5. Improvements to the courts

Courts are in the business of serving the public by providing the fair, efficient and prompt administration of justice.

- a. Do you perceive shortcomings in our current court system? Please provide examples.

Yes. Our Interbranch Commission has informed us that people report bias from some judges and attorneys. There are racial disparities in awards for damages in civil matters where people of color tend to receive lower damages awards, and there are racial disparities in sentencing in criminal matters where people of color tend to receive longer sentences.

- b. If elected, how would you go about correcting these problems? What specific steps would you take to improve the quality and delivery of results to litigants and the public?

Each of these problems would require me to check my own biases and change behaviors as discussed in my answer to question 4.

In addition, the practice of using statistics based on race and gender to calculate damages must cease, and as a judge, I would be obligated to interrupt and disrupt the use of race and gender in discussing a plaintiff's likelihood of career, future earnings and other matters for calculating damages. The use of the statistics legitimizes and perpetuates inequality, thereby leading to lower damages awards for people (generally, women and people of color) based on the likelihood of certain events or achievements in their lives.

Finally, there are sentencing guidelines that can be used to try to decrease racial disparities in sentencing, and mitigating factors can be used to decrease sentences; however, I recognize that the disparities may continue based on district attorneys' decisions regarding charges and on a person's decision to enter into a plea agreement.

6. Judicial selection process

- a. Do you believe state judges should be elected? Why/why not?

Yes. The eligibility requirements are known and available, and anyone who meets the requirements can get on the ballot and let the people decide to elect or not to elect them.

- b. If not, what system do you believe should be used instead, and why?