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A look at who is running for judge in March 2024.

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Inland Empire voters will decide the next judge in Riverside and San Bernardino counties.

Riverside County has a three-way race for one open seat among two prosecutors and one court commissioner, while San Bernardino has a prosecutor and an administrative law judge running for an open seat.

Riverside

Elizabeth Tucker



Elizabeth Tucker was appointed court commissioner for Riverside Superior Court in 2018. Commissioners are judicial officers that handle many of the same cases as judges. They are appointed at the discretion of the existing judges.

In that role, she presided over criminal, civil, juvenile justice, juvenile dependency, traffic and probate cases, and worked on the county's Youth Court, an intervention process for first-time youthful offenders of non-violent misdemeanors.

Before she was appointed to the commissionership, she worked as a Riverside prosecutor for 23 years, and joined the State Bar in 1995.

She prosecuted serious and violent felonies, child abuse, domestic violence, prison and property crimes.

She also participated in collaborative courts.

She volunteers in Rotary International, the National Charity League and Girl Scouts, and coaches the Palm Desert High School mock trial team.

As commissioner, Tucker handled a case regarding a mother's fentanyl and heroin abuse. Tucker removed the woman's children from her care. The woman appealed Tucker's decision, but the appeal was denied by the Court of Appeal Jan. 29. The Court of Appeal, in the unpublished ruling, found that substantial evidence supported Tucker's finding that the mother was a danger to her children.

An Oct. 26, 2022, unpublished appellate ruling affirmed another of Tucker's rulings, involving an attempted robbery that ended in a homicide. Tucker had found that the defendant, based on being 21 years old, was now unable to be treated in the juvenile system, and should be tried in criminal court.

The Court of Appeal affirmed another of Tucker's rulings, in which she found Riverside County had investigated a child's ancestry up to federal standards for foster care cases, Feb. 7.

She is endorsed by Riverside Presiding Judge Judith Clark, 41 other judges, nine commissioners, the mayor of Palm Desert, four city councilmembers from across the desert, and Riverside's superintendent of schools, according to her campaign website.

Tucker has agreed to participate in the upcoming Follow Our Courts recorded candidate forum.

Gerald Pfohl



Riverside Deputy District Attorney Gerald Pfohl joined the bar, and the prosecutor's office, in 2007. He secured California's first jury verdict for murder for a fentanyl overdose in November.

He has prosecuted child molestation and murder cases. He is currently prosecuting two cases against Richard Hampton, who was accused of arson in 2019, and stands accused of the murder of Rosendo Echevarria, an inmate at the Larry D. Smith Correctional Facility, in 2020.

Pfohl volunteered with the Temecula Valley High School mock trial team, according to his campaign website.

Pfohl has agreed to participate in the upcoming Follow Our Courts recorded candidate forum.

Jeffrey Kirk



Orange County Deputy District Attorney Jeffrey Kirk joined the bar in 2008. He lives in Riverside County.

In 2013 and 2014 he received the Diligent Prosecutor Award from Mothers Against Drunk Driving. In 2018 he was commended by the Federal Bureau of Investigations for work on a joint task-force investigation.

Kirk declined to participate in the upcoming Follow Our Courts recorded candidate forum.

San Bernardino

Michelle Lauron



San Bernardino Supervising Deputy District Attorney Michelle Lauron joined the State Bar in 1994. She has prosecuted murders, rapes, child sexual assaults, domestic violence, drug trafficking, violent crimes and welfare fraud.

She is endorsed by District Attorney Jason Anderson, Sheriff Shannon Dicus, Assemblymember James Ramos, all five of San Bernardino County's supervisors, the Apple Valley and Victorville mayors, the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Employee's Benefit Association, the San Bernardino Police Chief, 24 current judges, two commissioners and 10 other members of the District Attorney's Office, according to her campaign website.

Lauron has agreed to participate in the upcoming Follow Our Courts recorded candidate forum.

Dieter Dammeier



Dieter Dammeier is a police attorney-turned state administrative law judge. Administrative law judges are executive judges for administrative disputes in the state government.

He was admitted to the State Bar in 2008.

He has volunteered as a board member for the American Cancer Society and coaching youth sports, according to his campaign website. He joined the police union firm Lackie, Dammeier, McGill & Ethir. The law firm was accused of impropriety, and disbanded in 2013.

He is not currently practicing law.

“I have been listed in malpractice cases with other attorneys over the decades of practicing but at the end of the day, I was always dismissed from the cases, never paying anything out of pocket and never receiving any discipline from the State Bar,” he said by email Feb. 23.

On April 5, 2014, Dammeier and his law firm were sued by the Board of Trustees of the welfare benefit plan Legal Defense Fund of the Peace Officers Research Association of California. The complaint accused the firm of violating the Racketeering Influenced and Corruption Organization (RICO) Act, legal malpractice, fraud, breach of fiduciary duty, unjust enrichment and negligent supervision. The complaint says that Dammeier’s firm was one of many to whom the Legal Defense Fund’s participants could be assigned. It claimed that the firm filed duplicate or excessive billable hours.

The Legal Defense Fund voluntarily dismissed the case Sept. 9, 2014. The firm had also published a playbook for police unions. The playbook encourages unions to claim that pay raise increases are about public safety, and that the union can exert pressure on their city by taking out a billboard that reads that crime is up. It also says that police officers can perform a work slowdown, and not make as many arrests. A third option for police officers, it says, is to threaten the city manager's job by pushing for a referendum that would eliminate the city manager's position.

The firm was raided by the Orange County District Attorney in 2013, the Los Angeles Times reported. The Times report also repeated claims that the law office hired a private investigator to follow a Costa Mesa councilmember home from a bar. The investigator called the police and made a report that the councilmember was driving drunk. The councilmember passed a sobriety test, and had a receipt for two sodas, the Times reported.

No charges were ever brought against the law firm associated with these allegations.

Dammeier declined to participate in the upcoming Follow Our Courts recorded candidate forum.