

2025 JUDICIAL CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is designed to provide insight about your candidacy and to aid the various committee members in making a more informed choice when casting their endorsement vote. This will be shared with the members of the committees participating in the 2025 Judicial Candidates Zoom Conference and any other Democratic Committee/Committee member that requests copies. Your response is requested no later than: January 20, 2025. Please email your .pdf responses to: committee@mccandlelessdemocrats.org

Name: Judge Matthew V. Rudzki

Campaign website:

www.judgerudzki.com/www.judgerudzki4orcommonpleas.com

1. Have you received a rating from the Allegheny County or Pennsylvania Bar Association?

If so, please state the rating and year received.

If not, are you applying for a rating? Please state when your interview is scheduled or why you are not applying for a rating.

Date of Rating: January 7, 2025

Rating: Recommended

2. What are your qualifications to run for a Judicial Seat? What specific accomplishments in your past have qualified you for this?

My time in public service extends back to 2011. I take great pride in having served my community as a member of Council, as mayor, and as a magisterial district judge. Having served in every branch of government, I know the process of drafting our laws, enforcing our laws, and applying our laws. I am likely uniquely qualified having served in all three branches and to bring this perspective to the role.

Further, as a district judge, we handle incredibly heavy dockets with matters requiring quick decisions. During my time on the bench, over 14,000 matters have been on my district court docket. Moreover, the matters before our courts align with three of the four divisions in the Court of Common Pleas: civil, criminal, and family (juvenile cases, emergency protection from abuse hearings). On a near-daily basis, we are holding dozens of summary trials and preliminary hearings, ruling on objections and making evidentiary decisions, crafting solutions to matters to the benefit of all parties involved, and issuing judgments or verdicts.

One of the most important, if not the most important qualities of a great jurist, is judicial temperament. I believe that my time as an elected official and especially on the bench has helped me to hone a presence that is assertive and firm yet compassionate and understanding. Judges are cloaked not only in a robe but with immense power, and in the words of the late Chief Justice Max Baer: "All you try to do is the right thing...and how can it be a bad job if all you try to do is the right thing all day every day?".

As a supplement to my invaluable experience on the bench, I was a general practitioner for the entirety of my legal career, practicing within every division of our Court of Common Pleas, albeit with the bulk of my work in the civil division. Prior to passing the bar, however, I interned for two summers with the Allegheny County Office of the District Attorney and gained vital insight into the criminal division.

I am proud to have introduced innovative initiatives such as night court for juvenile cases, making me one of only two judges in the County at the time to provide this option. Furthermore, I collaborate with Animal Friends to bring trained therapy dogs to court for every night court session and occasionally during criminal court sessions, making me the sole judge in the County with such a program. My court waiting room is adorned with abstract art featuring positive and reaffirming messages, aiming to reduce the stress of court appearances.

Further, to better serve the community, I regularly organize workshops on expungement, fine and fee management, harm reduction, landlord-tenant issues, and license plate replacement. Additionally, I provide opportunities for local youth groups to visit his court and hosts summer interns.

Finally, I adhere to the maxim and motto of Duquesne Kline Law "Salus Populi Suprema Lex" ("The Welfare of the People is the Highest Law") and have artwork hanging in my courtroom with a rendering of Lady Justice and the maxim on it.

3. Describe the nature of your legal practice since graduating from law school, including the percentage of your practice dedicated to litigation and whether you appeared in court frequently, occasionally, or not at all.

General practice with a focus on school and municipal law, estate planning and estate administration, and real estate. Researched, prepared, and drafted memoranda, pleadings, contracts, and estate planning & administration documents. Counseled government agencies regarding the Right-to-Know Law, the Sunshine Act, local agency law, employment law, delinquent tax collection, and real estate tax assessment appeals. Appeared at preliminary hearings, pretrial conferences, status conferences, arbitration hearings, administrative hearings, motions court, and Sheriff's Sales.

I frequently appeared in motions court, and before administrative bodies such as the Board of Property Assessment Appeals, the Board of Viewers, and Sheriff's Sales. Occasionally I made appearances at preliminary hearings, status conferences, and for pleas.

4. Why are you running for this office?

I am a public servant at heart and consistently trying to find better ways to effectively serve my neighbors, while also meaningfully growing the impact of such service. I did this for seven years on Sharpsburg Borough Council before being elected as mayor and serving for four years in that role. I have presently done it on the bench as a district judge for the last three years.

When I ran for district judge, my platform centered around delivering restorative, fair, and accessible justice for all.

Restorative justice requires taking a holistic approach to the matter at hand, whether it be making a plaintiff whole in a civil matter, delivering meaningful diversionary programs to a defendant in a criminal matter, utilizing fine and fee workshops, or crafting creative solutions for at-risk youth. Judges have many tools available to them to help resolve matters in their court, and in my time as a jurist, I have learned what those tools are and how to effectively use them.

Fairness requires a judge to deliver on many fronts: being dignified, equitable, impartial, and patient, among others. As a former teacher, mayor, councilman, and as a sitting judge, I have always been aware of the needs of the people I serve. We know that disparities exist in our justice system and we must be attuned to address those disparities by striving to deliver due process to all parties appearing before the courts and ensuring that they are also treated equitably.

Access to the courts is foundational to our justice system. I frequently remind parties appearing before me that justice delayed is justice denied. At the District Court and Common Pleas level, that means ensuring the indigent parties can be heard. As a district judge, I have increased accessibility to the courts by introducing a monthly night court session for juvenile cases to avoid pulling them out of school and for parties who cannot afford to take off a day of work. We also stagger cases by scheduling matters over a period of time all at once. Finally, we utilize remote technology when requested and when reasonable.

Now, I would like to take the progress I have made locally and apply it to a County-wide scale to deliver justice-oriented outcomes for all the residents of Allegheny County as a judge of the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas.

5. Have you ever run for or held office? If yes, what office? Why did you leave office?

- Borough of Sharpsburg, member of Council, appointed April 2011 to fill an unexpired term through December 2011;
- Borough of Sharpsburg, member of Council, elected November 2011 to a four-year term;
- Borough of Sharpsburg, member of Council, elected November 2015 to a four-year

term;

- Borough of Sharpsburg, mayor, elected November 2019 to a four-year term;
- Magisterial District Judge, Magisterial District 05-2-04 (Fox Chapel Area), elected November 2021 to a six-year term.

6. Have you ever been arrested? If yes, list the county and state of arrest, the charge, and the outcome of the case.

No.

7. Have you ever had a Domestic Violence Protection Order or Civil Stalking Protection Order taken out against you? If yes, list the county and state issuing the Order.

No.

8. Do you have any outstanding tax liabilities? Have you ever had any outstanding tax liabilities in the past? If yes, describe them and the outcomes(s).

No.

9. Have you ever had a malpractice claim filed against you? If yes, list the year and detail the complaint.

No.

10. Have you ever had a bar complaint and/or grievance filed against you? If yes, list the Bar Association which handled the matter and the outcome of the matter.

I have never been disciplined nor cited. One complaint was filed against me before the Disciplinary Board and dismissed, and one complaint was filed against me before the Judicial Conduct Board and dismissed.

11. Has your law license ever been inactive? If so, why?

No.

12. Has any professional license held by you other than your law license ever lapsed, been denied renewal, suspended, or revoked for any reason? If yes, describe the circumstances and outcome(s).

No.

13. Has your driver's license ever been denied renewal, been suspended, or been canceled because of unpaid tickets or for any other reason? If yes, describe the circumstances and outcome(s).

No.

14. Do you have or have you had any liens or judgments on any property you own? If yes, describe the circumstances and outcome(s).

No.

15. Have you ever sued or been sued in your personal capacity? If yes, describe the circumstances and outcome(s).

Yes. As a minor, I was the plaintiff in a personal injury matter before the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas at Docket No. GD-96-018229. The case settled before trial.

16. Have any sexual harassment allegations and/or complaints been levied against you? If so please detail.

No.

17. Please provide your screen/username for all social media accounts, including but not limited to LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, etc.

a. Facebook: Matthew Rudzki (personal); Judge Matt Rudzki for Common Pleas; District Judge Matt Rudzki

b. Instagram: matthewrudzki; judgerudzki

c. LinkedIn: Matthew V. Rudzki

d. X: N/A

e. TikTok: N/A

f. Other:

BlueSky: @matthewrudzki.bsky.social; judgerudzki.bsky.social

YouTube: @friendsofmatthewv.rudzki7221

https://scjap.org/find_a_judge/matthew-rudzki/

18. Please disclose any other matter that may be of significance in your judicial race. Include in your disclosure any information about you that could be used negatively against you or the Democratic Party.

A simple Google search of my name will reveal in January/February 2022, I was the subject of a multi-week news story in which I used non-monetary conditions on a Defendant. The Defendant subsequently re-offended the following day, was arrested, and had his bond denied by another district judge. During the course of the original media story, a police officer doxxed (i.e. revealed the street name where my family and I reside) me on Facebook with suggestive language

regarding the public protecting themselves by acquiring guns and visiting my home.

In light of this incident and the general nature of criminal justice reform, my use of monetary bond is both championed and questioned. While I am not wholly opposed to monetary bond—and use it in limited circumstances (detainers or other holds)—it must be used according to the Constitutions of the United States and our Commonwealth, as well as the Pennsylvania Rules of Criminal Procedure. Specifically, the Rules of Criminal Procedure require the bail authority to consider the financial ability of the defendant and that the monetary condition be reasonable. Thus, if a defendant has no income, is unhoused, or otherwise indigent, the use of monetary bond may not be appropriate.

Since taking the bench and pursuant to records compiled and published by the Abolitionist Law Center, between June 2022 and June 2023, I used \$1,320 over 104 arraignments at Pittsburgh Municipal Court. This is the least amount of monetary bond—by factors of ten—used by any district judge over that time frame.

Conversely, although I do not use monetary bond to detain defendants pre-trial, I recognize that there are situations requiring a defendant to be detained pre-trial. As a result, after determining that no condition or combination of conditions can guarantee the safety of the public when the proof is evident or presumption great, I hold defendants without bond in approximately 7% of cases, one of the highest rates amongst my colleagues.

19. Please explain your thoughts on cashless bail? i.e. when is it appropriate and when is it not appropriate?

See response to Question 18.

20. Are you familiar with Senate Bill (“SB”) 752 (Expanding Diversion; Focusing Detention and Out-of-Home Placements; Related Juvenile Justice Reforms)? Please explain whether you support the bill and explain your reasoning.

The Conduct Rules for Magisterial District Judges (*see* Rule 2.10), the Canons of Judicial Conduct (as applied to candidates), and the O’Brien Memo all prohibit judges and judicial candidates from making statements regarding pending or impending matters and/or regarding proposed bills, unless via a judicial lobbying group (O’Brien Memo). The Special Court Judges Association of Pennsylvania (the “SCJAP”) represents district judges for such purposes, and it appears as though the SCJAP has taken no stance on the proposed legislation.

21. Is a hot dog a sandwich? Please explain your reasoning.

A hot dog is not a sandwich, but belongs to a category of its own, similar to a hamburger or wrap. Sandwiches require two slices of bread with contents between them, or open-faced.

Democratic Values

22. Why are you a Democrat? What makes you a Democrat?

Because my core values align with Democratic values and policies.

My record as an elected official while a Councilman and mayor should speak for itself: I had a vision for what Sharpsburg could become and in 2011 started that journey. Initially the steps were small, but gradually our momentum began to build. For the first time in 50 years, Sharpsburg passed a comprehensive plan that would steer our progress. We codified our ordinances and modernized our zoning and planning. We expanded and renovated a library that won architectural awards.

After completing the tasks to make sure our foundation was strong, I began drafting legislation to make Sharpsburg more inclusive and sustainable while honoring our heritage. I introduced and Council unanimously passed legislation to recognize Indigenous Peoples' Day, to create the Sharpsburg Environmental Advisory Council and Sharpsburg Historical Commission, to extend animal protection laws, and to prevent bullying in our community.

During my time as mayor, I supported and signed into law a Human Rights Ordinance which extended protections to our LGBTQIA+ community. After the murder of George Floyd, I worked with our police to completely overhaul our policies, increase our training, outfit each officer with a body camera, and became the only mayor in Allegheny County to express interest to opt into the County's proposed Police Review Board parameters. I issued proclamations recognizing: the life and legacy of Martin Luther King Jr. and promoting service, equality, diversity, and inclusivity; Black History Month; Juneteenth; Arbor Day; Earth Day; Pride Month; Native American Heritage Month; Women's History Month; Urging the PA General Assembly, the Governor, Congress, and President to Pass Common-Sense and Responsible Gun Legislation; among additional proclamations. Working with others, I helped spearhead the first Etna-Sharpsburg Earth Day Challenge and Etna-Sharpsburg National Night Out, lead Sharpsburg through a series of floods and the pandemic, organize harm-reduction events, and collaborated with other millennial mayors to advocate for social justice reform.

23. If you do not receive the Democratic Party Endorsement for this position, will you run against the endorsed candidates?

Yes.

24. Have you ever run for political office where you ran against an endorsed Democratic candidate? If so, why?

No.

25. Have you ever changed your party affiliation or voted in a primary other than the Democratic Primary? If so, when and why?

No.

26. Have you ever volunteered for a Democratic campaign? If yes, what candidate and what year?

Yes. As a former elected committeeman, Sharpsburg Democratic Chair, and The Valley Dems Chair, I have volunteered for countless campaigns in many capacities since 2011.

27. What personal experiences have you had that you believe will shape your judicial temperament?

Foremost, my experience of being on the bench as a district judge for the last three years have had an immense impact on shaping my judicial temperament. The on-the-job training is the best way to hone judicial temperament. Lawyers, by their very training, are zealous advocates in an adversarial system—the exact opposite of what we expect from our judges as neutral arbiters. My collective experiences over thousands of cases in my court, sitting in for colleagues in their courts, and presiding over matters of Pittsburgh Municipal Court have helped me develop a proven temperament that is calm, patient, respectful, courteous, and dignified.

Beyond my time as a judge, my experiences as a lawyer appearing before numerous judges led me to pick and choose traits that I saw as most effective in a jurist. Further, being a husband and father of three has been vital to shaping how I interact and react from the bench. Between my undergraduate studies and law school, I taught English at two high schools in Austria. Being a teacher and most importantly the patience and communication skills it taught me have been vital to my time on the bench and judicial temperament. Lastly, serving as a mayor for four years is akin to being a social worker and referee who must be transparent, able to clearly convey thoughts, and a manager of personalities.

All of the above, taken together, have shaped and will continue to impact my judicial temperament.

28. What does it mean to have a commitment to diversity and inclusion? In your personal, professional, or civic life have you demonstrated that commitment? If so, how?

A commitment to diversity and inclusion means that all parties are afforded to and have access to the same rights and privileges, regardless of their social status.

As mentioned above, during my time as mayor, I supported and signed into law a Human Rights Ordinance which extended protections to our LGBTQIA+ community, became the only mayor in Allegheny County to express interest to opt into the County's proposed Police Review Board parameters, and collaborated with other millennial mayors to advocate for social justice reform.

Serving on the Duquesne Kline Law Alumni Association Board of Governors, the Alumni Association President's focus for the academic year is to focus on and promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. While I do not serve on the subcommittee, I am fully supportive of the initiative, committed to the process, and recognize the inherent value that in embracing diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging, we can realize our full potential.

Since taking the bench in 2022, as referenced above, I also have hosted summer interns every summer. Four of five of my interns have been women, one of which is a woman of color, and my intern slated for the summer of 2025 is also a woman of color.

As a member of the judiciary and the ACBA Criminal Litigation Section, I took a particular interest in the near 250-page document issued by the Rand Corporation for the University of Pittsburgh Institute for Politics entitled "Creating a Path Forward to Reduce Racial Disparities in the Criminal Justice System in Allegheny County". The study highlighted what many of us already knew: in Allegheny County, the criminal justice system disproportionately impacts the Black community.

Adjacent to equality and inclusion within the legal profession, we must also address how our profession impacts the lives of the residents of our County and beyond in order to adequately address the needs of the many. In that vein, as mentioned above, I was honored to serve and address the vital issue at the 2024 ACBA Bench-Bar Conference as a panelist on the Criminal Litigation Section CLE entitled "Confronting Racial Inequities in the Criminal Legal System and Practice Reforms".

29. Have you previously represented any clients where you had to take a position adverse to any Democratic values or core constituencies (ex. representing an employer during a union busting campaign, representing a white supremacist)? If so, please explain.

No.

30. Have you ever taken a public stance for or against the following? If so, please detail your position at the time of the public statement and where the statement can be found (if published or recorded):

The bulk of my public stances can be found on my former Mayor Matthew Rudzki Facebook page, now the Judge Matt Rudzki for Common Pleas Facebook page, including all referenced below:

a. Women's Reproductive Rights

b. LGBTQ Rights: multiple Mayoral Proclamations celebrating and recognizing Pride Month; advocating for and signing into law a Human Rights Ordinance extending LGBTQ+ protections in

Sharpsburg

c. Marriage Equality: see above; officiating LGBTQ+ weddings as a judge

d. Right to Work Legislation: multiple posts supporting organized labor

e. Collective Bargaining: multiple posts supporting organized labor

f. Second Amendment: Being a Member of Everytown for Gun Safety and Mayor's Against Illegal Guns; signatory of Congresswoman Gabby Gifford's Pledge; Mayor's Proclamation 18-04 Urging the PA General Assembly, the Governor, Congress, and President to Pass Common-Sense and Responsible Gun Legislation

g. Vaccinations or other public health measures: multiple Facebook posts promoting vaccinations

h. The validity of any election or election process

31. If you believe that gender, racial, ethnic, class or other forms of bias can infect the justice system, how will you work to keep your courtroom as bias-free as possible?

Because of the aforementioned Rand Report, we know that racial disparities exist in the Allegheny County Criminal Justice System. How we address the issue is vital. First, we always need to acknowledge our own implicit biases and continually self-reflect and self-improve to address them and apply it in practice. Keeping our courts as accessible as possible and promoting due process requires that all parties are on a level playing field whether, for example, they are wealthy or indigent, or white or Black.

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Since taking the bench on 2022, I also have hosted summer interns every summer. Four of five of my interns have been women, one of which is a woman of color, and my intern slated for the summer of 2025 is also a woman of color.

As a member of the judiciary and the ACBA Criminal Litigation Section, I took a particular interest in the above-referenced Rand Report entitled "Creating a Path Forward to Reduce Racial Disparities in the Criminal Justice System in Allegheny County". Because of the report and my role with the ACBA Criminal Litigation Section, I was honored to serve and address the vital issue at the 2024 ACBA Bench-Bar Conference as a panelist on the Criminal Litigation Section CLE entitled "Confronting Racial Inequities in the Criminal Legal System and Practice Reforms".