

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: *Alyssa Burrell Cowan*

Campaign website: *votecowan.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.

Yes, I have been rated Highly Recommended.

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

In addition to the qualifications discussed throughout this questionnaire, I would also like to provide the following:

As a Legal Services Training Specialist with the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network, I provided the following trainings to an audience of paralegals, caseworkers, attorneys, hearing officers, and judges:

- *Beyond the Bond: The Needs & Welfare Analysis in a TPR*
- *Choosing the Permanency Goal(s)*
- *Conquering the Courtroom*
- *CPSL Amendments: Old Values, New Protections*
- *Crossing Borders: Immigration Issues in the Child Welfare System*
- *Fostering Connections Revisited*
- *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008*
- *ICWA Then and Now: Complying with the New Regulations*
- *Meeting the Educational Needs of Children in Foster Care*
- *Opening Doors: Children of Incarcerated Parents*

- *Overview of the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening*
- *Pathways to Permanency—Legal Mandates of Act 55 and Fostering Connections*
- *The Road to Success: Legal Issues for Transitioning Older Youth*
- *Terminations [of Parental Rights] Demystified*

At the University of Pennsylvania, I co-taught a graduate student course for law, medical, and social work students entitled “Education for the Professions: The Intersection of Law, Social Work, and Medicine,” that examined the professional education and work relationships among these disciplines.

I am currently Adjunct Faculty at the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work and teach “Children and Families at Risk,” “Advocacy for Children and Families,” and “Advocacy and Lobbying for Non-Profit Organizations” to graduate students.

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.

Throughout my career, I have focused on pursuing opportunities in child welfare law. Before entering law school, I earned a Master’s in Social Work and gained valuable experience as a child advocate in my role as a social worker. With a strong passion for child advocacy, I entered law school with a clear focus on child welfare law, intending to obtain a law degree to further my commitment to this field. I was fortunate to receive a scholarship at Temple Law through the Rubin-Presser Social Justice Fellows program that allowed me to graduate with minimal debt and pursue a career in public interest law. This has allowed me to remain committed to and develop an expertise in child welfare law over the course of my legal career.

In my roles as Assistant Attorney General in the Child Protection Section of D.C.’s Office of the Attorney General; Staff Attorney at KidsVoice; and Supervisory Assistant County Solicitor for Allegheny County’s Children, Youth, and Families, I have appeared regularly in Court. I have been sole counsel and tried to verdict hundreds of cases over the course of my nearly 25-year career.

4. Why are you running for this office?

I am running for Judge of the Court of Common Pleas in order to ensure that every family and child interacting with the court system in Allegheny County has access to fair, equitable, effective, and timely justice. Children deserve timely and appropriate interventions focused on ensuring their safety and maintaining their well-being. Over the course of my career, I have developed the skill set needed to make a valuable contribution and be effective in the role of Judge in the Family Division of the Fifth Judicial District.

My career has been focused on child welfare law. I have local, state, national, and international experience in this field. I have worked as both Guardian ad Litem and

Assistant County Solicitor in child welfare cases on the local level. I have provided trainings on a variety of child welfare laws across the state of Pennsylvania as a legal trainer for the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network and have also participated in statewide workgroups dedicated to improving outcomes for court-involved youth. In my work at both the ABA Center on Children and the Law and the Field Center for Children's Policy, Practice, and Research at Penn, I have participated in child welfare research projects at the national level. Internationally, I have presented twice at the International Society of Family Law World Conferences; 2000 in Brisbane Australia and 2017 in Amsterdam, Netherlands.

As a professional with both a law degree and a master's degree in social work, I am able to navigate the complex legal and emotional aspects of working in the Family Division. Families and children appear in the courtroom in crisis often having experienced significant trauma in their lives. My professional experiences have allowed me to develop skills in active listening and empathy. This gives me the ability to de-escalate high stress situations in order to resolve conflict rather than exacerbate it. My goals as a Judge would be for families to have the opportunity to be heard on a level-playing field in the courtroom, to leave their hearings with confidence in the system, and to have peace with the result whether it is their preferred outcome or not.

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

Yes, I ran for Judge of the Court of Common Pleas in 2021.

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

No, I have not.

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, I have not.

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, I do not.

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

No, I have not.

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.

No, I have not.

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

My Pennsylvania law license is active and has always been active. My District of Columbia law license and Maryland law license are currently inactive as I am not actively practicing in those jurisdictions at this current time so I pay a reduced rate. I can convert those law licenses to active status at any time and pay the full rate.

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, they have not.

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, it has not.

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, I do not.

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

No, I have not.

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

No, I have not.

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

a. Facebook: *https:// www.facebook.com/alyssa.b.cowan*

b. Instagram:

c. LinkedIn:

d. X:

e. TikTok

f. Other:

<https://votecowan.com>

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.

No additional details or negative information to disclose.

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

As a judge, I would look at the specific circumstances of each case to determine whether cash bail would be necessary and fair to ensure that defendants attend their future court proceedings. Cash bail should be utilized in cases involving serious offenses. Judges have a great deal of discretion in deciding cash bail and can consider a number of factors in granting/setting bail amounts including the nature and circumstances of the offense, prior criminal record, community ties such as employment and family, previous failure to appear for court, drug and alcohol history, and potential danger to the public. Cash bail should remain as a tool in a judge's toolbox and applied in consideration of these factors.

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.

Yes, I am familiar with Senate Bill 752. In general, Pennsylvania's juvenile delinquency system as developed through the Juvenile Act is focused on rehabilitation, accountability, and community protection with an emphasis on equipping youth with the tools and support they need to become productive members of society. Efforts to support the overall statutory goals of the Juvenile Act would fit well into Pennsylvania's current legal framework and provide Judges with a wide variety of options to address issues of juvenile delinquency in their courtrooms on a case by case basis.

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

Yes. It is a food item being held together and placed in-between two pieces of baked bread dough eaten by hand.

Democratic Values

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

I am a registered Democrat because of my belief in and commitment to Democratic values including a commitment to social justice, equality, protecting democracy and the rule of law, and respect for diversity and inclusion.

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?

I ran for Judge of the Court of Common Pleas in 2021 and ran against endorsed candidates. I entered the race after the endorsement process was underway.

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

No, I have not.

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

I have volunteered with John Kerry's Presidential campaign, Hillary Rodham Clinton's Presidential campaign, Judge Eleanor Bush's judicial campaign, Judge Jennifer McCrady's judicial campaign, Kamala Harris' Presidential campaign, Rep. Lamb's campaign, Rep. Benham's campaign, Rep. Venkat's campaign, and Rep. Deluzio's campaign.

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

Starting at a young age, my experiences as a volunteer in different capacities have shaped me, my current career, and will undoubtedly shape my judicial temperament. At age 14, I started volunteering with Habitat for Humanity in Braddock and at age 15, I started participating in an after-school tutoring program with East Liberty Presbyterian Church. It was through my experiences with the tutoring program and with Habitat for Humanity in high school that inspired me to continue with similar volunteer work in college at American University in Washington, D.C. In college, I was the President of our campus chapter of Habitat for Humanity and organized weekend building trips in D.C., Baltimore, Harrisburg, Philadelphia, and Wilmington as well as spring break building trips in Georgia. In college, I was also selected as one of eight students to

partner with Lincoln Multicultural Middle School on a tutoring and mentoring program. Lincoln Middle had the highest number of English as a Second Language (ESL) students among all D.C. public schools. My volunteer experiences ultimately inspired me to pursue a Master's Degree in Social Work, followed by a Juris Doctorate.

I've continued my volunteer service as an adult. My husband, children, and I serve newly arrived refugees as a mentor family with Hello Neighbor. We have been serving as a mentor family for a family from Afghanistan. We have been enjoying introducing our family to both traditional American holidays as well as Pittsburgh traditions such as Thanksgiving at our house, holiday zoo lights, and Steelers' and Penguins' games.

Given my wide range of professional and personal experiences, I will bring compassion, fairness, and the upmost integrity to the bench.

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?

In my career, I have had the opportunity to demonstrate a commitment to diversity and inclusion in the legal training setting. When I worked with the Pennsylvania Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network as a Legal Services Training Specialist, we worked to ensure that issues of race, diversity, gender equality, and inclusion were integrated into all of our trainings. Our trainings were offered to caseworkers, paralegals, attorneys, hearing officers and judges. All of the trainings were approved for continuing legal education (CLE) credits and were offered across the state so they reached a wide audience of legal practitioners.

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, I have not.

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):

- a. Women's Reproductive Rights**
- b. LGBTQ Rights**
- c. Marriage Equality**
- d. Right to Work Legislation**
- e. Collective Bargaining**
- f. Second Amendment**
- g. Vaccinations or other public health measures**
- h. The validity of any election or election process**

No, I have not.

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?

It is crucial to acknowledge that implicit bias exists in all settings, including the judicial system. Implicit bias stems from the messages, attitudes, and stereotypes we absorb from the world around us. While these messages may be unavoidable, we all have a responsibility to actively educate ourselves about their inaccuracies and work to combat implicit bias.

For judges, this responsibility is even more critical. Judges are tasked with assessing the credibility of witnesses and rendering decisions—two circumstances where implicit bias can have profoundly adverse effects on those appearing in court.

Judges must take the lead in addressing implicit bias within the judicial system. This leadership can include organizing trainings to foster an appreciation of diversity and multicultural perspectives, convening roundtable discussions, and establishing protocols for courtroom participants to provide feedback on their experiences.

Throughout my career, I have made it a priority not only to confront and mitigate implicit bias within myself but also to promote education and awareness of these issues within the legal community. As a judge, I remain deeply committed to continuing this critical work and fostering an equitable court system.