

Georgia Judicial Qualifications Commission

Dos and Don'ts for Judicial Campaigns*

The campaign conduct for those seeking election to judicial positions or judges seeking re-election (collectively “judicial candidates”) is governed by the Georgia Code of Judicial Conduct, specifically Canon 4. Observing the following Dos and Don’ts will help judicial candidates stay within the bounds of the Code during their campaigns.

Dos:

1. Judicial candidates may personally solicit funds, endorsements, and votes. Candidates should establish a campaign committee to receive funds and conduct campaign activities but are not required to do so.
2. Judicial candidates may use the term “judge” and may wear a robe in campaign materials *only if* the candidate currently sits as a judge and the materials clearly identify the position the judge currently holds. Candidates for judge who do not currently hold judicial office, or who are not incumbents but hold another judicial office other than the one they are seeking, must clearly state that they are seeking election for a judicial position but are not currently an incumbent. For example,

“Elect John Smith for _____ Court Judge.”

The omission of terms denoting that the candidate is running for the seat but is not an incumbent misrepresents the current status of the candidate. Judicial incumbents seeking re-election may state their current office. For example,

“Re-Elect Judge John Smith, _____ Court Judge.”

3. Judicial candidates may use general political terms such as: conservative, progressive or liberal. In partisan races, the candidate is permitted to identify themselves as Republican or Democrat in advertisements when required by law to run as a partisan official.
4. Judicial candidates should review the content of any statement published or communicated by themselves or their campaign committee to ensure truthfulness and accuracy.
5. Judicial candidates may attend a meeting of a political party, even as a non-partisan judicial candidate, to seek support for their candidacy.
6. Judicial candidates may attend a fundraising or campaign event for another candidate, including a non-judicial candidate affiliated with a political party, to seek support for their candidacy.

* The Commission utilized former Director Jeff Davis’s Article “The Ten Commandments for Judicial Elections,” initially published in the June 2012 issue of the *Georgia Courts Journal*, in creating these dos and don’ts for judicial campaigns.

7. Judicial candidates should exercise caution that they and their supporters do not violate any laws or ordinances regarding the placement of campaign signs or other promotional materials, including placement on public rights-of-way or other public property.

Don'ts:

1. Judicial candidates may not make contributions to political parties or endorse a political party platform.
2. Judicial candidates may not endorse other candidates for political office. However, candidates may make private campaign contributions to other political candidates. Such contributions do not constitute a public endorsement.
3. Judicial candidates may not display political support buttons or political signage (on property they own or on personal vehicles) in support of another political or judicial candidate.
4. Judicial candidates may not place campaign materials in a judicial office or use state/county resources, including employees, during normal business hours in furtherance of their campaign.
5. Judicial candidates may not comment or make statements with respect to substantive issues of law likely to come before the court in a manner which reflects a promise, pledge, or commitment to rule in a particular way, apart from general statements to uphold the law.
6. Judicial candidates may not use or participate in the publication of a false statement or make misleading statements about their own candidacies or their opponents.

More resources about judicial campaigns are available on the Commission's website, www.gajqc.com. Additionally, Commission staff members are available to answer more specific questions regarding permissible campaign conduct.