



JUDICIAL COMMITTEE

2025 QUESTIONNAIRE FOR JUDICIAL CANDIDATES

Candidate's Name: **Jeremy Lightner**

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1. Why are you seeking the position of Judge of the Court of Common Pleas?

My entire legal career has been serving the community. Over the years, I've increasingly taken on a more significant role in the Erie County criminal justice system. I've played a meaningful role in reducing violent crime in Erie County and am proud of that work. However, crime is, of course, a symptom of larger problems in our community, and only a small piece of the puzzle. My skills, experience, and decision-making ability would better serve our community in a broader legal context that touches all aspects of society rather than just the criminal justice system.

2. Being careful to maintain client confidentiality as embodied in the Rule 1.6 of the Rules of Professional Conduct, describe the general character of your law practice, including areas of concentration and the most significant achievements of your legal career. Explain how your practice has prepared you for the position of Judge of the Court of Common Pleas.

Within the District Attorney's office, I'm the Chief Deputy District Attorney in charge of the Trial Division. My practice is courtroom and violent-crime-oriented. I've worn many different hats throughout my tenure at the D.A.'s office, including Juvenile prosecutor, Treatment Court prosecutor, Veterans Court prosecutor, representative on the Nuisance Bar Task Force, prison and crime prosecutor. Since 2021, I've also increased my responsibility to oversee all shooting, gun, and gang cases in Erie County. I've managed over 30 murder cases and over 400 shooting cases. I've handled over 10,000 cases in my career--this number is likely closer to 20,000, but I am listing 10,000 officially to be conservatively accurate.

My career has provided a variety and thorough level of preparedness for the role of judge in our community. First and foremost, I'm in the courtroom every day. I've handled thousands of contested hearings at all levels of court, and I've become adept at in-the-moment arguments and decision-making, which affords me the unique prerequisite to handle one of the hardest tasks a judge has: making serious decisions with limited time in the courtroom during a hearing. Second, possibly the most important skill for an assistant district attorney is long-term decision-making. Daily, ADAs are making incredibly important decisions that affect the well-being of our citizens. These decisions involve weighing the interests of the community, the interests of victims, and the interests of the accused in an intricate balancing act. Often, the information at hand is limited, tainted, or contradictory. As an ADA, you have to get those decisions right, and they bring with them long-term and real-life consequences. Although you never become fully comfortable with such decisions, I've developed a comfort level in determining how to make hard decisions. This is the most vital skill we require from judges- to get it right. I believe my record when deciding which gun cases we prosecute aggressively and which we show leniency toward supports this.

My most significant contributions to our community, in my opinion, have come through my work in the Nuisance Bar Task Force. Through that team, I've been the point person on numerous cases involving establishments in Erie that are disrupting basic peace and tranquility in their neighborhood. These cases involve little to no criminal law. They involve a deep understanding of municipal law, including zoning, code enforcement, and the liquor code, as well as an understanding of civil procedure. We've successfully closed multiple bars using civil filings as well as negotiations behind the scenes with bar owners to stop crime and violence stemming from neighborhood bars.

My practice is incredibly courtroom and litigation oriented. On the average day, I'm appearing in 3-4 courtroom (sometimes at the same time) and have become familiar with the different practices that different Judges bring to their courtrooms. I cannot prove this, but I believe you would be hard pressed to find a person in Pennsylvania who has done more trials than I have, or more hearings, over the last ten years. This has prepared me for presiding over a courtroom. I would bring a deep and nuanced familiarity to courtroom arguments and pre-hearing decision making. Often, in criminal law, case law can be like shifting sands where you are trying to get your footing. You constantly have to familiarize yourself with new rules, new concepts, and new regimes. I've been adept at adapting to those and understanding them quickly so that I can apply them well. This has obviously prepared me for the new fields I will be wading into if I'm elected.

Also, I've been the attorney who has a late filing or is late to court for reasons out of their control, and I've dealt with the grace of our bench in figuring those situations out. I appreciate how hard our jobs can be and that it is impossible to be perfect, and that the system works better when Judges bring grace and sensitivity to what they expect from the attorneys and members of the community, while also taking seriously the responsibilities of the bench.

3. With respect to the last ten years:

- a) Did you appear in court regularly, occasionally, or not at all? If the frequency of your appearances in court has varied during this period, describe each such variance, giving the dates thereof:

I'm in court multiple times a day. One day a week, I have 30-40 hearings scheduled. I also am in a Judge's chambers for Search warrants 3-4 times a week.

b) What percentage of these appearances was in:

1. Federal courts: **0%**
2. State courts of record: **100%**
3. Other courts:

c) What percentage of your litigation was:

1. Civil: **1%**
2. Criminal: **99%**

d) State the number of cases in courts of record you tried to verdict or judgment (rather than settled), indicating whether you were sole counsel, chief counsel or associate counsel:

150+

e) What percentage of these trials were:

1. Jury: **70% (Approximately 110 jury trials)**
2. Non-jury: **30% (Approximately 40 bench trials)**

f) Describe other areas of practice:

4. If a good amount of your practice has been before administrative boards, commissions or agencies during the past five years, identify the boards, commissions or agencies before which you have practiced and estimate percentages of practice time devoted thereto.

No

5. Do you have experience with ADR? If so, give details. **No**

6. Which judges or justices do you most admire and why?

A trait that I've noticed and admired about Judge Mead is predictability and reliability. I've handled hundreds of shooting cases in front of him. His decisions have been consistent and predictable based on certain factors in the cases at hand. This has allowed me to handle my practice effectively and efficiently. I believe this has had the same effect on opposing counsel. When I meet with a homicide victim's family regarding complicated pretrial matters, I can inform them fully and confidently on the likely outcome of the various motions before the court. Something along the lines of, "We're not going to win this motion, but we will win these motions, and these motions are in the gray area where either side could win." I have found this reliability helps all parties target their time and energy to the specific issues that matter and elevates the criminal practice in Judge Mead's courtroom. Additionally, the "clients" on both sides of the case walk out of his courtroom with an understanding of what occurred, realistic expectations of the next step, and an appreciation that the system is working logically.

7. Have you ever been engaged in any occupation, business or profession other than the practice of law or the holding of judicial or other public office? If so, give details, including dates:

I have been a sports coach at Fairview High School, both paid and unpaid, throughout my time as an attorney. I spent much of my time before becoming a lawyer working labor and construction jobs.

8. Describe your involvement in community activities.

As noted, I've been involved in Fairview High School athletics for most of my adult life. As my professional responsibilities have increased, I've moved to volunteering and announcing sporting events for the High School via podcasts or the radio.

I'm on two boards. I've served on the Multicultural Community Resource Center (MCRC) Board for three years and am immensely proud of the work we do there. More recently, I have additionally served on the Board of the Upper Room for less than a year.

Since the birth of our son and complications that stemmed from it, my wife and I have been active in supporting Grady's Decision and the Children's Miracle Network.

I also live in the West Bayfront area and attend events involving (and volunteer with) the Our West Bayfront neighborhood organization.

9. What do you consider a significant achievement in your life outside your profession? Describe it.

In my personal life, I've been a person of many hats. I'm proud of my athletic achievements as a youngster, and I've played football on national television in college. I've published a number of short stories. I like to travel, and have been to over 35 countries. I recently built a black walnut table with my father--we took it from log to finished product. The most important achievement in my life, of course, is being a good father to my son, Asher, and a good husband to my wife, Sarah. I generally weigh whether I'm achieving in life by whether I'm fully loving my family and friends.

10. Do any circumstances exist that would adversely affect your ability to perform the function of a Judge of the Court of Common Pleas or be able to fulfill your term of office? If so, please explain:

I do not believe there are any.

11. Describe your involvement in Erie County Bar Association activities.

I have generally been an attendee of Bar Association events. When my career began, I was somewhat active at the Young Lawyers events. I have never been in a leadership position at the Bar.

12. How do you view the current relationship between the Bench and the Bar of Erie County? Do you think it can be improved? What would you do to maintain or improve relations between the Bench and the Bar if elected to the position of Judge of the Court of Common Pleas?

To me, the relationship between the bench and bar is very healthy. My point of view, however, is influenced by my office in the courthouse and my interaction with the judges on a daily basis, so I find that I have a professional and courteous relationship with them stemming from that. I realize that others do not have that experience, and in my conversations with other attorneys, they do not know the Bench as well as those in the courthouse every day. I believe that it is important for the Bench to be a visible part of Bar events, as it allows the entire Bar to become more comfortable with the Bench and allows everyone to do a better job in their practice. As mentioned above, familiarity breeds a better functioning legal system, and I would make sure that members of the Bar are familiar enough with me to be able to have a comfort level that allows them to put the best forward--both for them and their clients-- when they have cases in front of me.

13. Do you believe it is important for a Judge to remain involved in Erie County Bar Association activities? Please explain:

As noted previously, I believe it is important. Familiarity between the bar and the bench allows the legal system to work for the better.

14. What do you envision to be your continuing role with the Erie County Bar Association should you be elected? Would you attend substantive and social gatherings of that Bar Association?

I would attend. Those who know me understand I'm a very social person who likes to interact with both friends and strangers. I currently have an incredible amount of social interaction through my professional life with colleagues, officers, victims, and others. I'm aware this would drastically change if elected. I look forward to the Bar Association and its events filling some of that void.

15. Have you ever been convicted of any misdemeanor or felony, court-martialed, been granted immunity from prosecution, or been the subject of a protection from abuse final order? If so, give details. **No.**

16. Have you ever been the subject of formal discipline for a breach of professional ethics or unprofessional conduct? **No.**

17. Have you ever been found liable for legal malpractice? **No.**

18. In the last 10 years:

a) has a tax lien or other collection proceeding ever been instituted against you by federal, state, or local authorities? **No.**

b) has a judgment been entered against you? **No.**

c) have you filed personal bankruptcy? **No.**

If you answer yes to any of these questions, give details.

19. Are there any other matters, not covered in these questions, that you consider relevant to members of the Erie County Bar Association and to voters evaluating your fitness for the judiciary? If so, describe.

I was born and raised in Erie, and serving our community has always been a high-value priority in my life. For the last 11 years, I have focused on this daily. Even when things don't work out as I hoped in a case, I've taken an immense amount of pride in the victims walking away knowing they had a fair shake and that their advocate worked hard for the best result. When people enter my courtroom, whether

clients or attorneys, it is important to me that they feel heard and that the system, flawed though it may be, has done its best to work correctly. I wholeheartedly believe this will lead to those involved walking away with slightly more faith in society, and that is almost as important as making good decisions on the cases in front of you.

Jeremy Lightner
Printed Name

/s/ Jeremy Lightner
Candidate's signature

03/11/2025
Date