



JUDICIAL COMMITTEE

2025 QUESTIONNAIRE FOR JUDICIAL CANDIDATES

Candidate's Name: Leigh Ann Orton
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1. Why are you seeking the position of Judge of the Court of Common Pleas?

I want to put my work and life experiences to use serving the citizens of Erie County. All individuals should have equal access to the legal system and should be treated with dignity and respect in the courtroom, regardless of economic, social or political status. I have the integrity, temperament, knowledge, experience and patience to perform the duties and handle the responsibilities required of the position. I am ready to hear the same type of cases heard by the Honorable Judge Elizabeth K. Kelly during her tenure on the bench.

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.

Over the past 30 years, my law practice has concentrated on family law, estate planning and administration, elder law and real estate. In the area of family law, my practice has focused on matters involving child custody, child support, spousal support, alimony, divorce, prenuptial agreements, marital settlement agreements, adoptions and Protection From Abuse Orders. I am also collaboratively trained in family law matters.

Since the beginning of 2024, I have served, and continue to serve, as First Assistant County Solicitor for Erie County. In this position, I have gained experience and knowledge in the area of prisoner litigation and various civil matters on behalf of the County.

I have made many significant achievements in my 30 years of practicing law. I have successfully litigated and received numerous favorable rulings in complex matters, including family law, estates and civil litigation. I have received favorable results from the Pennsylvania Department of Revenue regarding estates and inheritance tax. I have also conducted hundreds, if not thousands, of real estate transactions, both residential and commercial.

I am honored to have been selected as the People's Choice "Best Attorney" for the years 2012, 2013, 2017, 2018 and 2020 by the readers of the *North East News Journal*. My law firm was selected as the People's Choice "Best Law Firm" for 2019 by the readers of the *North East News Journal*.

I have authored numerous articles regarding long term care estate planning and I have presented continuing legal education to the Erie County Bar and others on a number of topics including divorce and estate planning, long term care planning, Medicaid planning and asset preservation.

I have the diverse experience and knowledge necessary to successfully step into the vacancy on the bench created last year by the resignation of Judge Kelly and I am ready to preside over the same types of matters as Judge Kelly did in her prestigious career on 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 have appeared in court on a regular basis over the last ten years.

b) What percentage of these appearances was in:

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

c) What percentage of your litigation was:

1. Civil: 100%
2. Criminal: 0%

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:

I have tried numerous cases in the Court of Common Pleas to judgment.

e) What percentage of these trials were:

1. Jury: 0%
2. Non-jury: 100%

f) Describe other areas of practice:

I have assisted numerous clients in simple and complex estate planning and elder law matters, including wills, trusts, long term care planning, Medicaid planning and asset preservation. I have also administered numerous estates in the Orphan's Court. I have conducted hundreds, if not thousands, of real estate transactions involving residential and commercial properties. I currently serve as First Assistant County Solicitor for Erie County and perform various duties associated with that position including litigation involving prisoners located in the Erie County prison.

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.

0%

5. Do you have experience with ADR? If so, give details.

I am trained in collaborative practice and have represented clients in collaborative divorces. I have also served as an arbitrator in various civil matters.

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

It would be inappropriate for me to comment on any sitting judges. I admire the Honorable Judge Elizabeth K. Kelly for the dignity and respect she showed those that appeared before her, attorneys and litigants alike.

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 obtained my real estate license as an Associate Broker and briefly worked as a licensed real estate agent. I have also taught a class on Wills and Estates as an Adjunct Professor at Gannon University.

8. Describe your involvement in community activities.

I am an active member of Park United Methodist Church. I am a former board member and past President of the board of Community Nursing Services of North East and a former board member of the Junior League of Erie. I am a former steering committee member of the North East Business Women's Roundtable and past Assistant Troop Leader of Girl Scout Troop #36009. I am a member of the Order of the Eastern Star, Shiloh Chapter No. 153, and former member of the National and Pennsylvania Association of Realtors and Greater Erie Board of Realtors. I have also participated in community activities to raise money for the treatment and cure of breast cancer, which is very important to me, being a breast cancer survivor.

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

I consider my marriage to my husband, Chris, and our three children, Madeline, Mallick and Max, to be my greatest achievements. I was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2016. Battling and conquering breast cancer was a significant achievement in my life which I would not have been able to accomplish without the support, love and encouragement of my family, friends and colleagues in the Bar.

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:

No.

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

I am actively involved in the Erie County Bar Association. I am a past chair of the Family Law and Estates and Trusts sections and actively participate in the family law Bar. I have served on the fee dispute resolution committee. I have attended Bench Bar Conferences and found them to be fun and entertaining as well as an excellent opportunity to get to know fellow members of the Bar in a casual setting. I have also participated and continue to participate in various other Bar sponsored events and continuing legal education seminars.

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?

I have attended the past few Bench Bar Conferences and believe them to be a great venue for judges and Bar association members to get to know one another outside of the formality of the courtroom. I view the current relationship between the Bench and the Bar to be good, but there is always room for improvement.

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

Judges should remain involved with the Bar to further the Bar Association's mission of supporting the public's understanding of and respect for the judicial system.

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 substantive and social gatherings of the Bar Association as much as possible. I believe it is important for judges and the Bar to communicate and work together to improve the judicial system.

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 past 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.

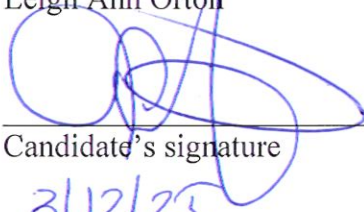
c) have you filed personal bankruptcy? No.

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.

My work and life experiences, along with practicing law for the past 30 years, have given me the experience and knowledge needed to preside over cases beginning on day one. I graduated 10th in my law school class and received the American Jurisprudence and Corpus Juris Secundum awards for excelling above the rest of my law school class in the area of criminal law. I am ready to put my knowledge and experience to work as a judge of the Erie County Court of Common Pleas. If elected, I will be fair and impartial and treat those who come before me with the utmost dignity and respect. It is important for a judge to be well rounded in the law, even tempered, and to display the highest ethical and moral standards. I am ready to bring those qualities to the bench.

Leigh Ann Orton



Candidate's signature

3/12/25

Date