

STONEWALL DEMOCRATS OF DALLAS

2024 Endorsement Screening

Day 4 Questionnaires

HD 109

162nd Judicial District Judge

Court of Criminal Appeals-Presiding Judge

Texas Senate District 16

Court of Criminal Appeals-PI 7

5th Court of Appeals-Chief Justice

Note: The answers provided in this document are direct copies of the answers provided by the candidates. They have not been edited or changed in any way by Stonewall Democrats of Dallas.

STONEWALL DEMOCRATS OF DALLAS

2024 Endorsement Screening

HD 109 Questionnaires

Candidates:

Aicha Davis - AD

Victoria Walton - VW

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Question 3: Pronouns

AD - she/her

VW - As a team and clause subjective pronouns

Question 4: As an organization affiliated with the Texas Democratic Party, Stonewall Democrats of Dallas will only endorse candidates who affirm an affiliation with the platform and policies of the Texas Democratic Party. Do you make such an affirmation? What is your previous voting history?

AD - I have always proudly voted Democrat

VW- Yes

Question 5: Please list some of your qualifications and experiences pertinent to the office you are seeking

AD - I currently serve as a Member of the Texas State Board of Ed. In this capacity, I've worked directly with House Members on state legislation, writing bills, creating advocacy strategies, and building bipartisan coalitions. This includes The CROWN Act with Rep Bowers, which was recently passed into law after two sessions of advocacy. I've also worked with legislators to fight harmful bills, such as the current attempts to pass vouchers. I've partnered with the current HD 109 Rep, Representative Sherman, on rights for those facing incarceration and increasing educational opportunities to reduce to the school to prison pipeline. Even before being elected, I was active at the Capitol as a teacher fighting to improve outcomes for students across Texas.

VW- First, I am 15 years + advocate for DF-V recognized by 2-1-1, OAG, DHA, NDHL, TDHCA, and I hold an associate degree in Law studies as a Paralegal.

Question 6: How long have you been a current member of Stonewall Democrats of Dallas? If you are not a member, will you pledge to join before the endorsement screenings? If no, why not?

AD - I'm not a member but will gladly pledge to join!

VW- I am not a member of Stonewall Democrats. No!

Question 7: Please share any experience that illustrates your understanding of and interest in the needs of the LGBTQ+ community in your District/Role sought.

AD - In my current role on the SBOE, I had the opportunity to directly support LGBTQ+ students in public schools and their families. We had the responsibility of reviewing health standards, and my colleagues resisted any amendments to include information about comprehensive sex education or bullying specific to LGBTQ+ students. I reached out to organizations across Texas and The Freedom Network to get as many as young adults as possible to testify and share their stories. We had hundreds testify, forcing my colleagues to understand the impact of their decision. I also amended our science standards so students learn about LGBTQ+ scientists. Those experiences helped me build greater understandings on needs for healthcare, education, housing, and protections in the workplace that can be improved through legislative action.

VW- As a community advocate, I speak out on gender discrimination domestic violence against all genders. However, violence acts against the LGBTQ community should be treated the same.

Question 8: Once you are elected, what are some of your plans specific to your office's responsibilities?

AD - Education will continue to be a priority, as it's been one of the top issues with the majority of the constituents in HD 109. However, we are home to more union workers than any other district in Dallas, and I want to ensure our workforce continues to thrive. We also do not have any major hospitals and limited access to healthcare, and I plan to address that.

VW- There are many specific duties that need to be done.

Question 9: When elected:

A. how will you recruit, retain, and create a supportive environment for LGBTQ+ staff and affirming staff?

AD - I want an office that is open to all, and my staff must reflect that. My ideal staffers have diverse backgrounds, and I prefer a Legislative Director with civil rights experience. Although I'm limited in paid staff, I definitely would like to have interns for support. My recruitment efforts will be to ensure our office advances rights for all Texans, especially those historically targeted for inequities. I will likely work with The Freedom Network to develop a pipeline of interns, including LGBTQ+ college students and allies.

VW- When elected I will retain a speaker for and from the LGBTQ community.

B. Would you be willing to appoint a liaison to meet with the LGBTQ+ community on an ongoing basis? If not, why?

AD - Absolutely.

VW- Yes

C. What non-discrimination policies will you support for employment and protection of LGBTQ+ constituents based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression?

AD - As HD 109 employs more union workers than any other districts, I want us to continue building our workforce. This includes ensuring everyone has opportunities for employment and promotion. I will support policies that offer protections LGBTQ+ workers and fight attempts for hurdles to success.

VW-

Question 10: If applicable to your office, how would you lead or support legislation and/or constitutional amendments pertaining to: A. LGBTQ+ Couples adopting and providing foster care to children?

AD - Texas is in desperate need for loving families for children in our foster care system. LGBTQ+ couples should not be restricted. By focusing on the dire need, I would lead legislation by arguing these couples have the resources to improve outcomes and provide emotional support needed for children. I would also love to bring LGBTQ+ families that have adopted to Austin to share their stories and testify in support.

VW- Open for suggestions

B. Supporting the repeal of the sodomy law that was ruled unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court?

AD - I am very proud of the work done by Rep Venton Jones in the last legislative session to address Texas' defunct ban and would proudly stand with him as he continues to lead the fight.

VW- More information is needed.

C. Supporting the repeal of the Texas Marriage/Civil Union Amendment?

AD - LGBTQ+ couples have the right to marry, and the Texas law cannot block that. I would proudly stand with legislators for its removal.

VW- I am open to revision.

D. Supporting safe schools for LGBTQ+ students, staff, and families?

AD - I would be honored to lead this legislation, as there are several opportunities to address this in public schools. First, I would fight against vouchers because private schools can discriminate against LGBTQ+ students, so public dollars should not be funneled to schools that aren't inclusive. I would also address LGBTQ+ students and bullying in health standards by amending the education code. There should also be resources for families to ensure they have supportive tools for their child's success.

VW- Yes

E. If applicable to your office, how would you address recent laws enacted such as laws requiring transgender Student Athletes to participate in sports based on their gender assigned at birth?

AD - I believe all students should have opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities. This includes sports and clubs. I've met families of transgender students that feel their child can no longer participate because they're forced to now identify with the gender assigned at birth. I would proudly lead or stand with attempts to ensure all students can participate as they are.

VW- **no answer provided**

F. How would you address Texas Abortion bans that interfere between a private individual's right to all healthcare options as medically determined between the pregnant person and their healthcare provider?

AD - I believe a woman has the right to choose what happens with her body without restrictions. I also fully believe abortion is healthcare. I would proudly stand and fight hard to reinstate this healthcare in Texas.

VW- **no answer provided**

G. What specific ideas do you have and/or what current legislation would you support to improve our state economy and address the income inequality and growing poverty rate in Texas?

AD - Improving education will directly impact poverty and the economy. Ensuring students are well prepared for the workforce and have access to college or career training is key. This includes increasing funding for career and technical courses and partnerships with community colleges. Additionally, more incentives for job training and businesses in impoverished areas will improve the economy in concentrated areas.

VW- **no answer provided**

Question 11: If applicable to your office, how would you lead or support efforts to provide better funding for health care and better health care options for all Texas residents?

AD - HD 109 does not have any major healthcare systems to serve our constituents, and we are not unique to this problem. I would love to thoughtfully craft legislation to provide incentives for healthcare across Texas, focusing on access in smaller communities and health deserts.

VW- Yes!

Question 12: What are your ideas to respond to evidence of climate change?

AD - I believe resources should be allocated to grow clean energy innovation. Additionally, students currently learn very little about climate change and textbooks with comprehensive climate change information were recently denied by the SBOE. I would prioritize amending the education code to include language about climate change and mitigation in science standards.

VW- Unknow at this time.

Question 13: If applicable to your office, what specific ideas do you have to strengthen the reliability of electric power supply to all Texans?

AD - I would monitor the effects of the recent budget increase to ERCOT to develop long term strategies for responsible energy practices.

VW- **no answer provided**

Question 14: If applicable to your office, how would you lead or support legislation restoring previous funding for HIV prevention in Texas including access to PrEP?

AD - As this is a healthcare issue, I want to ensure all Texans have access to information and resources to be healthy and safe.

VW- **no answer provided**

Question 15: In light of the Supreme Court decision in December 2023 against reparative/conversion therapy, how would you lead the fight against reparative/conversion therapy in Texas?

AD - Conversion therapy is dangerous and discredited by nearly all mainstream medical and mental health organizations. As LGBTQ+ youth have been the primary target, I will strongly fight against these harmful practices and any attempts at legalizing similar practices.

VW- TBD

Question 16: What are your ideas for immigration reform at the state level? How would you support the right of immigrants to seek asylum, hold employment, and have a clear path to citizenship?

AD - I believe immigrants should have the right to safely seek asylum, and I would fight obstacles against it. I would also support legislation for more support for Dreamers to obtain citizenship and resources for post-secondary education.

VW- No sure at this point.

Question 17: Would you lead or support legislation to require mandatory sexual harassment and Equal Employment Opportunity training similar to the resolution passed in the U.S. Senate that requires Senators, staff, and interns to complete training each session and submit certification to be published online that their office staff fulfilled the requirements?

AD - Yes

VW- Yes,

Question 18: If applicable to your office, how would you address voter suppression in Texas and work to expand access to voting by all eligible voters?

AD - Texas is deeply affected by voter suppression, and I believe expanding access would ultimately turn Texas blue. I would address hurdles to voting and nonstop attempts to further suppress the right to vote, as well as expanding access to increase engagement with voters under the age of 25. While current law mandates voter registration at Texas high schools twice each school year, many schools do not.

VW- Yes

Question 19: How would you showcase your endorsement by Stonewall Democrats of Dallas if received? Would you include the endorsement in your campaign media?

AD - I would proudly share the endorsement on my social media platforms and website. Additionally, I am planning a series of mailers and would include this as well.

VW- Campaign mailout, platform, and commercials

Question 20: Is there anything in your past or background that has not been covered by the previous questions that might – without careful explanation - cause our organization to reconsider or withdraw our endorsement of you?

AD - No. I've always been a strong, active ally as a teacher and State Board Member. My vote history and advocacy reflects this. I've personally faced discrimination throughout my life as a Black woman, and I fought to ensure equality and equity so the next generations of Black women wouldn't have to. In this journey, I've created partnerships to fight all forms of discrimination.

VW- No

This completes the questions and answers for this race.

STONEWALL DEMOCRATS OF DALLAS

2024 Endorsement Screening

Judicial Questionnaires

162nd Judicial District Judge

Candidates:

Tracie Shelby - TS

Kim Bailey - KB

Note: The answers provided in this document are direct copies of the answers provided by the candidates. They have not been edited or changed in any way by Stonewall Democrats of Dallas.

Question 3: Pronouns

Tracie - She/Her/Hers

Kim - She/Her/Hers

Question 4: As an organization affiliated with the Texas Democratic Party, Stonewall Democrats of Dallas will only endorse candidates who affirm an affiliation with the platform and policies of the Texas Democratic Party. Do you make such an affirmation? What is your previous voting history?

Tracie - As an individual committed to the principles of the Democratic Party, I affirm my unwavering allegiance to the values and policies espoused by the Democratic Party. Throughout my voting history, I have consistently and wholeheartedly supported Democratic candidates, remaining a hard-core, lifelong, true-blue Democrat.

I am proud to declare that I have always registered and voted 100% Democrat, aligning my political choices with the progressive ideals championed by the Democratic Party. I am eager to continue supporting candidates who share this commitment and seek the endorsement of esteemed organizations such as the Stonewall Democrats of Dallas.

Kim - Yes. I am a lifelong Democrat.

Question 5: Please share any experience that illustrates your understanding of and interest in the needs of the LGBTQ+ community in your District/Role sought.

Tracie - In reflecting upon my childhood experiences, I have dedicated myself to becoming a steadfast advocate for the LGBTQ+ community. My journey has been profoundly influenced by the struggles faced by my father, a courageous member of the LGBTQ+ community. Growing up in a society that often harbored hatred and closed-mindedness towards individuals like my father, our relationship was marred by societal prejudices, denying us the simple joys of a father-daughter connection.

Witnessing my father's daily battle against shame and hatred left an indelible mark on my character, shaping me into the compassionate, understanding, and open-minded individual I am today. This transformative experience instilled in me a deep sense of concern, thoughtfulness, respect, and an unwavering love for all, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. It sparked within me a profound desire to champion the rights and well-being of the LGBTQ+ and underserved communities.

My advocacy for equality, inclusion, and justice is not a mere choice but a moral obligation. It emanates from the core of my being and stems from the responsibility I feel as the child of an LGBTQ+ parent. I am driven by an innate need to protect and serve the rights of all individuals, particularly those who face discrimination and marginalization.

As a staunch advocate, I am proud to align myself with organizations like Stonewall Democrats of Dallas, dedicated to fighting for the rights of the LGBTQ+ and underserved communities. The endorsement from Stonewall Democrats of Dallas holds immense significance for me, as it serves as a bridge to build trust within the LGBTQ+ community. It signifies my commitment to leveraging every resource at my disposal to safeguard the rights of everyone, fostering an environment of acceptance and equality.

This endorsement is not only a professional milestone but a personal affirmation of my dedication to the cause. As a member of Stonewall Dallas and as the child of an LGBTQ+ parent, this endorsement reinforces the importance of my mission. I am eager to continue the fight for a more inclusive and just society, and with this endorsement, I am confident in my ability to be an effective advocate and ally for the LGBTQ+ community in the role I seek.

Kim - As an African-American, female, immigrant, I have an understanding of what it is to be a member of a marginalized community and what it is like to not be accepted and/or treated as less than simply because of the way that I look and/or sound. It is what informs how I treat other people in my day-to-day life and my determination that each person who enters my courtroom will be treated fairly and with dignity and respect.

Question 6: Please list some of your qualifications and experiences pertinent to the office you are seeking:

Tracie - I am a licensed attorney with an extensive twenty-four (24) years of experience, specializing in bankruptcy, consumer debt, real estate, personal injury, and litigation. Throughout my career, I have demonstrated proficiency as lead counsel in both jury and bench trials within state and federal courts, showcasing my versatility in handling a diverse range of civil law matters.

My expertise spans various areas of civil law, encompassing bankruptcy, consumer debt, real estate and mortgage, foreclosure, personal injury, medical malpractice, construction, contracts, temporary injunctions, and employment discrimination. Notably, I bring unique insights as the only candidate in this race who has served as a law clerk to two federal district court judges.

In addition to my legal qualifications, I hold an MBA in Finance from the prestigious Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth College and a Master of Laws in Securities and Financial Regulation from the Georgetown University Law Center. I am distinguished as the sole candidate in this race with a MBA in finance, experience in Mergers and Acquisitions and Private Equity. My background includes successfully navigating the complexities of taking Real Estate Investment Trust Companies (REITs) from public to private and acquiring portfolios of real estate properties and mortgage loans. I am also the sole candidate that works in the community. In 2010, I started working against "Save Your Home Companies" that were stealing homes from our seniors and unsophisticated community.

Prior to establishing my law firm thirteen (13) years ago in Dallas, TX, I held key roles in prominent organizations, further enriching my skill set. These include serving as an Associate in Merchant Banking in Real Estate at The Walton Johnson Group, Inc. in Dallas, TX; Associate Director of Business Development in GE Capital's Mergers & Acquisition and Private Equity Group in Norwalk, CT; Assistant General Counsel at Sisters in Shape, Inc. in Philadelphia, PA; Law Clerk to the Honorable Petrese B. Tucker and Honorable Clifford Scott Green at the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, PA; and General Counsel for Intimate Battles, Inc. in Washington, D.C. Collectively, my qualifications and experiences uniquely position me as the most qualified candidate for the office, bringing a wealth of legal acumen, business insight, and a proven track record of success to the role.

Kim - I am a graduate of Harvard University and the University of Virginia School of Law. I have over 32 years of civil litigation experience in State and Federal courts in Texas, Georgia, Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, D.C. I am licensed to practice law in Texas, Georgia and the District of Columbia.

Question 7: Once you are elected, what are some of your plans specific to your office's responsibilities?

Tracie - Once elected, my primary focus will be on developing a comprehensive program dedicated to facilitating fairness, access to justice, equality, and due process for all individuals within the jurisdiction. Specifically, I aim to create a program addressing the challenges in consumer debt and judicial foreclosure cases, with the goal of reducing the number of default judgments in the civil district courts.

Recognizing the difficulties faced by individuals navigating the legal system without legal representation, I am committed to implementing a monthly orientation program. This program will cater to those who cannot afford legal counsel, providing participants with a thorough understanding of the civil litigation process. Topics covered will include deadlines, motions, discovery, evidence, and trial procedures.

The initiative is designed to empower every individual, regardless of financial means, with the knowledge and tools to confidently represent themselves in civil district court. By extending access to the court and bridging the gap for those unable to afford private legal representation, we can foster fairness and create a more equitable and inclusive legal environment.

As part of a long-term strategy, I aspire to collaborate with various community groups to organize civil district court seminars. These events will serve to educate the community about the court system and available resources, demystifying the legal process and enhancing awareness of individual rights.

My overarching mission as a judge is to establish a court that prioritizes fairness and impartiality, free from political influences or third-party pressures. I am dedicated to creating a court where fairness and justice are paramount, ensuring that due process is a cornerstone of our judicial system. Furthermore, my commitment extends to fostering a court that upholds equality for all individuals, irrespective of their background or circumstances.

Continuing in this role, my objective is to enhance the efficiency of our judicial system continually. I will work towards streamlining processes, eliminating unnecessary bottlenecks, and ensuring that justice remains the primary objective. Specific measures include the creation of discovery scheduling order conferences at the case's onset, hosting settlement conferences, and establishing a special email for emergency cases and discovery disputes during depositions.

Furthermore, I will allocate one day a week for open court, allowing all parties to walk in and address any issues. By championing these principles, I am steadfast in my commitment to building a judiciary that serves the community with fairness, integrity, transparency, and a steadfast dedication to the principles of fairness, justice, and equality.

Kim - The biggest responsibility of the office is to ensure that parties have their cases resolved in the most efficient and timely manner possible. My first priority will be to address the backlog of cases that still exist due to the courts shutting down during the pandemic. I plan to offer extended times for hearings to be scheduled so that parties can seek rulings on issues that arise during the course of the litigation. I also plan to confer with experienced judges who successfully manage their dockets to get insight into what methods they use to do so. I am also concerned about improving jury diversity. Currently, minority participation on civil juries is low. This is an issue that was brought to light by Judge Maricela Moore and others who served as presiding judge of jury services. I will continue to address this problem and work with my fellow judges to find ways of solving this challenge.

Question 8: If elected how will you recruit, retain, and create a supportive environment for LGBTQ+ staff and affirming staff?

Tracie - When elected, my commitment to fostering a welcoming and inclusive environment for LGBTQ+ individuals within our organization will be unwavering. I believe that diversity and inclusion are not just values to uphold but essential principles that drive success and progress.

Firstly, I will set a clear expectation for all staff and non-staff members, including the District Clerk and vendors, emphasizing the importance of respect and inclusivity. I will establish a zero-tolerance policy for any form of disrespect or discrimination, creating an atmosphere where everyone feels valued and accepted.

In order to actively recruit and retain LGBTQ+ staff, I will openly welcome and consider candidates from the LGBTQ+ community. Collaborating with organizations such as the Stonewall Democrats of Dallas, I aim to leverage their network to effectively communicate job opportunities and connect with potential LGBTQ+ applicants.

Additionally, I am committed to working closely with the District Clerk and vendors to implement strategies that ensure inclusivity in hiring practices. This involves encouraging and facilitating the notification of open positions to the LGBTQ+ community and other under-represented groups, actively promoting diversity in our workforce.

I recognize the importance of diverse perspectives in decision-making processes, and I am dedicated to fostering an environment where the LGBTQ+ community is not only represented as employees but also as key stakeholders in shaping policies and initiatives. It is my belief that by integrating the voices of all diverse communities, including the LGBTQ+ community, we can create a Court and District Clerk's Office that truly reflect the needs and aspirations of our entire society. Together, we will work towards a future where fairness, access, justice, and equality are not just ideals but lived experiences for all.

Kim - I will recruit the most talented and qualified candidates regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. My court will be a safe space in which discrimination of any kind will not be tolerated. I intend to lead by example. I will treat my staff and all who enter my courtroom and/or office for whatever purpose with the same courtesy and respect that I would want to receive. I will make sure that my staff understands that anything less is not acceptable.

Question 9: How would you handle a situation in which you or a subordinate felt the need to not fulfill all the lawful work duties due to “deeply held religious beliefs”?

Tracie - In my capacity as the Judge of this Court, it is imperative that all personnel adhere to the principles of fairness, justice, equality, due process, and respect for the law. In the event that I or any subordinate expresses a reluctance to fulfill lawful work duties based on deeply held religious beliefs, I will approach the situation with a commitment to upholding the core values of our legal system.

While I fully recognize and respect the importance of religious freedom, it is paramount to ensure that the functioning of the court remains unbiased, fair, and dedicated to upholding the rights of all individuals. In such a situation, I would engage in open and respectful communication with the individual, seeking to understand the nature and extent of their religious beliefs and the specific conflict with their work duties.

However, it is crucial to emphasize that my zero-tolerance policy prevails against any form of discrimination, hindrance to fairness and justice, or disregard for the constitution, due process, and the law. The mission of this court is rooted in providing fairness, access, justice, due process, and equality to all, and no personal belief or conviction should compromise the fundamental principles that guide our legal system.

In addressing such a situation, I would explore reasonable accommodations that respect the individual's religious beliefs without compromising the integrity of our Court, workspace and upholding to my zero-tolerance policy against any form of discrimination. At the same time, I would make it clear that any compromise that hinders the pursuit of justice, fairness, due process, equality, or the rights of others will not be tolerated.

Ultimately, my commitment as a Judge is to foster an environment that is inclusive, fair, just, and respectful of diverse beliefs, while ensuring that the court remains unwavering in its dedication to upholding the law, fairness, justice, equality, and due process and safeguarding the rights of all individuals.

Kim - In my over 30 years of practicing law in numerous courts I have not come across nor been made aware of any lawful work duty of a judge that I would be unable to fulfill due to my religious beliefs. I consider service as a judge to be public service, that should be available to any member of the public, without discrimination. The priority would always be to make sure that all lawful work duties are fulfilled without exception. To the extent that a subordinate felt the need to not fulfill a work duty due to a "deeply held religious belief", I would make sure the lawful work duty is fulfilled in the particular instance and then evaluate what changes need to be made in order to ensure that the situation does not arise again in the future.

Question 10: Understanding that administrative matters can take up a significant percentage of your work day, what are the most important policies or procedures you've identified as needing improvement?

Tracie - One of the most significant policy areas requiring improvement, as identified during my assessment, pertains to lawsuits filed by Pro-se filers. The challenges faced by individuals representing themselves in legal proceedings highlight the need for targeted improvements in policies and procedures to ensure fair and equitable access to the judicial system. Pro-se filers, who navigate the legal landscape without professional representation, often encounter obstacles that can hinder their ability to present their cases effectively.

Recognizing this, I aim to address the following key aspects within this policy area:

1. **Pro-se Litigant Support Programs:** Implementing and enhancing programs specifically tailored to support Pro-se litigants. These programs would provide guidance, resources, and assistance to individuals representing themselves, helping them understand the legal processes and requirements.
2. **Accessible Legal Information:** Improving the accessibility of legal information for Pro-se litigants, including clear and user-friendly guides outlining procedural steps, required documentation, and relevant deadlines. This initiative aims to empower individuals to navigate the legal system with confidence.
3. **Courtroom Assistance:** Establishing mechanisms for Pro-se litigants to receive limited courtroom assistance, such as procedural guidance or clarification, without compromising the neutrality of the proceedings. This ensures that individuals representing themselves have a fair opportunity to present their cases.
4. **Alternative Dispute Resolution Options:** Exploring and promoting alternative dispute resolution options, such as mediation or settlement conferences, to facilitate resolution without the complexity of a full trial. This approach aims to streamline the legal process for Pro-se litigants while promoting efficient case resolution.
5. **Feedback Mechanisms:** Creating feedback mechanisms to gather insights from Pro-se litigants about their experiences within the legal system. This valuable input can inform ongoing improvements and adjustments to policies and procedures, ensuring they remain responsive to the evolving needs of individuals representing themselves.

By focusing on these key areas, the goal is to foster a more inclusive and supportive legal environment for Pro-se litigants. Through thoughtful policy enhancements and procedural improvements, we can work towards a judiciary that accommodates the unique challenges faced by individuals navigating the legal system without professional representation, ultimately promoting fairness and justice for all.

Kim - One of the procedures I want to address first is the procedure by which cases are called down to trial. I plan to set up a system whereby parties are given more advance notice as to whether they will actually be called to the courthouse on their scheduled trial date. This will allow all involved (parties, attorneys, witnesses, etc.) to better plan their schedules to meet their other obligations. I also plan to set up a system whereby parties will receive a response from the court (order signed, ruling, judgment entered, etc.) within a certain set timeframe.

Question 11: Do you have ideas to improve access to the courts and court-related services? Yes. If so, what are they?

Tracie - Certainly, my commitment to improving access to the courts and court-related services is integral to my vision for a more inclusive and equitable and fair judicial system. As mentioned earlier in my responses, I have concrete ideas aimed at enhancing fairness and accessibility for all individuals, particularly Pro-se filers:

1. **Pro-se Filer Orientation Program:** I propose the creation of a comprehensive orientation program specifically tailored for Pro-se filers. This initiative will provide essential information and guidance on navigating the legal system, helping individuals representing themselves to better understand procedural requirements, deadlines, motions, discovery, evidence, and trial procedures. By equipping Pro-se litigants with the knowledge and tools they need, we empower them to confidently navigate the complexities of the legal process.
2. **Partnerships with Ethnic and Civic Groups:** Recognizing the diversity within our community, I am committed to forging partnerships with various ethnic and civic groups. Through collaboration, we will organize civil litigation seminars aimed at educating the community about the court system, legal resources, and available support services. These seminars will serve as valuable platforms to demystify the legal process, enhance awareness of individual rights, and foster a stronger connection between the community and the judiciary.
3. **Online Resources and Virtual Assistance:** In addition to in-person initiatives, I will work to expand online resources and virtual assistance for Pro-se filers. This includes the development of user-friendly guides, informative videos, and virtual assistance platforms that provide real-time support to individuals navigating court procedures from the comfort of their homes.

4. Community Outreach and Mobile Court Services: Implementing community outreach programs to bring court-related services directly to neighborhoods, especially those with limited access to legal resources. Mobile court services can include on-site assistance, document filing facilities, and informational sessions conducted in collaboration with community centers or local organizations.

5. Feedback Mechanism for Continuous Improvement: Establishing a feedback mechanism to gather insights from Pro-se filers about their experiences with court-related services. This will ensure that our initiatives remain responsive to the evolving needs of the community, allowing for continuous improvement in the delivery of accessible and effective court services.

Through these proactive measures, my goal is to break down barriers to access, empower individuals to engage with the legal system confidently, and foster a more inclusive and fairer judicial environment. By combining practical orientation programs with strategic partnerships and leveraging technology, we can create a judiciary that truly serves the diverse needs of our community.

Kim - The starting point is educating the public about how the civil court system works and the resources that are available to assist in the process. One way to do this would be to hold a series of town hall type meetings at community organizations, churches, etc. in which a short presentation about the civil court system is made, attendees are given an opportunity to ask questions, and, contact information for organizations that provide assistance is distributed.

Question 12: Do you believe the composition of juries adequately and fairly reflects society at large? Why or why not? If not, what can we do to change this?

Tracie - I believe that the composition of juries in Dallas County does not adequately and fairly reflect our community. Unfortunately, I see a lack of awareness among some voters regarding the crucial role jurors play in the justice system, leading them to avoid jury service through various excuses. To address this issue, I am committed to conducting civil litigation seminars in collaboration with diverse ethnic and civic groups. These seminars will focus on educating about the significance of serving on a jury and how it directly impacts the fairness and integrity of our justice system.

Moreover, I acknowledge the existence of biases in jury selection, whether intentional or unintentional, by some attorneys. As a prospective Judge, I am dedicated to promoting fairness in the courtroom. I will take proactive measures to educate attorneys about the importance of having juries that genuinely represent the community at large. To combat biases, I will allow attorneys and pro-se litigants to challenge peremptory challenges based on factors such as race, sex, ethnic group, sexuality, and religion.

In addition, I will advocate for the use of Baston Challenges as a valuable tool during jury selection. This method ensures that challenges to potential jurors are made with a legitimate, non-discriminatory basis. By incorporating these initiatives, I aim to contribute to a more inclusive and equitable jury system that truly reflects the diverse makeup of our community, ultimately fostering a stronger sense of justice for all.

Kim - Diversity on civil juries needs to increase. This is an issue that the prior judge of the 162nd Civil District Court, Judge Moore, noticed and began addressing and I intend to continue to address. The issue is related to jury summons response. Improved outreach and education on the importance of jury service is needed. I would also draw on the experience of those who have presided over jury services to gain insights.

Question 13: What is your general judicial philosophy?

Tracie - At the core of my judicial philosophy lies a steadfast commitment to the principles of fairness, access, justice, due process, and equality for all individuals who come before the court. I firmly believe that the judiciary plays a pivotal role in upholding the values that form the foundation of a just and equitable society.

Fairness: I am dedicated to ensuring that every individual who enters the courtroom is treated with fairness and impartiality. Every individual, regardless of background or circumstances, should have confidence that their case will be heard impartially, and decisions will be made based on the merits of the arguments presented. I am committed to bringing fairness to the community that cannot afford to hire private attorneys to combat against the large number of default judgments in consumer debt and judicial foreclosure cases.

Access: Access to the courts is a fundamental right that I am dedicated to preserving and enhancing. I believe in breaking down barriers, be they financial, informational, or procedural, to ensure that every member of the community can navigate the legal system with confidence and without impediments.

Justice: The pursuit of justice is at the heart of the judicial system. I am dedicated to interpreting and applying the law in a manner that upholds the principles of fairness, justice, and equity. The goal is to foster a legal environment where fair and just outcomes prevail.

Due Process: I place a strong emphasis on due process as a foundational element of a fair and impartial judiciary. Every individual appearing before the court is entitled to a fair and transparent legal proceeding, ensuring that their rights are protected and that decisions are made based on a thorough and unbiased consideration of the facts and the law.

Equality: I am committed to fostering a legal environment where equality is not only a principle but a lived reality. Regardless of one's background, identity, or standing in the community, everyone should be treated equally before the law. I advocate for a judiciary that actively works to eliminate disparities and promotes equal protection under the law.

In applying this philosophy, I am mindful of the impact of judicial decisions on the lives of individuals and the broader community. Through a dedication to transparency, accountability, and the principles of fairness, access, justice, due process, and equality, I strive to contribute to a judiciary that stands as a beacon of trust, fairness, and justice for all.

Kim - My general judicial philosophy will be to make sure each party has a full and fair opportunity to be heard. I will allow the parties to present their cases and arguments as fully as possible within the Rules of Civil Procedure and the Rules of Evidence.

Question 14: Is there anything in your past or background that has not been covered by the previous questions that might – without careful explanation - cause our organization to reconsider or withdraw our endorsement of you?

Tracie - No, there is not.

Kim - No

Question 15: How long have you been a current member of Stonewall Democrats of Dallas? If you are not a member, will you pledge to join before the endorsement screenings? If no, why not?

Tracie - I have been a member for at least 2 years or so.

Kim - I have been a member of Stonewall Democrats of Dallas since September 2023.

Question 16: How would you showcase your endorsement by Stonewall Democrats of Dallas if received? Would you include the endorsement in your campaign media?

Tracie - The endorsement from Stonewall Democrats of Dallas is a badge of honor, symbolizing my unwavering commitment to the LGBTQ+ community and the values of equality and justice.

To ensure that this endorsement is widely recognized and celebrated, I will prominently showcase it across various platforms throughout my campaign, website, and social media.

First and foremost, the endorsement will have a dedicated space on my campaign website. This online platform serves as a central hub for information about my candidacy, and the Stonewall Democrats of Dallas' endorsement will be featured prominently on the homepage. This will not only demonstrate my alignment with the organization but also serve as a visible commitment to advancing LGBTQ+ rights.

Harnessing the power of social media, I will share the endorsement across all social media platforms. From impactful posts on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to stories that highlight the significance of this endorsement, my social media presence will reflect the pride and honor I feel in being endorsed by an organization dedicated to championing LGBTQ+ rights.

Campaign literature, including brochures, pamphlets, and mailers, will prominently feature the Stonewall Democrats of Dallas' endorsement. This ensures that potential voters, supporters, and community members receive a tangible representation of the endorsement, reinforcing the message of inclusivity and advocacy.

In addition to the digital and print media, any advertisements produced during the campaign will proudly display the endorsement. Whether through print, radio spots, or online ads, I will seize every opportunity to communicate the importance of Stonewall Democrats of Dallas' support and the shared commitment to fostering a more inclusive and equitable community.

By consistently featuring the endorsement across these diverse mediums, I aim to reach a broad audience and emphasize the value I place on LGBTQ+ rights. The endorsement is not just a formality; it is a testament to the shared vision of a society where everyone is treated with dignity and respect. Through this multi-faceted approach, I am confident that the Stonewall Democrats of Dallas' endorsement will resonate with voters and community members alike, solidifying my dedication to championing LGBTQ+ rights in the role I seek.

Kim - If received, I would include my endorsement by Stonewall Democrats of Dallas in my campaign media as appropriate.

This completes the questions and answers for this race.

STONEWALL DEMOCRATS OF DALLAS

2024 Endorsement Screening

Judicial Questionnaires

Court of Crim. Appeals - Presiding Judge

Candidates:

Holly Taylor - HT

Note: The answers provided in this document are direct copies of the answers provided by the candidates. They have not been edited or changed in any way by Stonewall Democrats of Dallas.

Question 3: Pronouns

Taylor - She/Her/Hers

Question 4: As an organization affiliated with the Texas Democratic Party, Stonewall Democrats of Dallas will only endorse candidates who affirm an affiliation with the platform and policies of the Texas Democratic Party. Do you make such an affirmation? What is your previous voting history?

Taylor - I am a lifelong Democrat. I am running as a Democrat because the platform and policies of the Democratic Party are consistent with my values. I regret that I cannot be more specific than this regarding individual planks or policies. The Texas Ethics Commission has interpreted Canon 5(1) of the Code of Judicial Conduct to prohibit a judicial candidate from answering questions regarding the candidate's position on specific planks of a political party's platform. See Opinion No. 250 (1999).

Question 5: Please share any experience that illustrates your understanding of and interest in the needs of the LGBTQ+ community in your District/Role sought.

Taylor - Three of my family members are part of the LGBTQ+ community. I love, respect, and support them. I have also attended local bar association and community events related to the concerns of the LGBTQ+ community. I have endeavored to be sensitive to the individual circumstances and needs of LGBTQ+ community members when I encounter them in my practice, for example as witnesses or victims of criminal activity.

Question 6: Please list some of your qualifications and experiences pertinent to the office you are seeking:

Taylor - I have over two decades of experience practicing criminal law. I currently serve as Assistant Director for Post-Conviction Matters and Complex Litigation Support in the Civil Rights Division of the Travis County District Attorney's Office. I have worked in a supervisory capacity with our Civil Rights Unit, Conviction Integrity Unit, and Appeals Team. I have also worked in the Public Integrity Unit prosecuting fraud involving public officials and government agencies. This background will allow me to bring a fresh and diverse perspective to the Court's work.

I formerly served as a staff attorney and as the Rules Attorney for the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals. In addition, I served as an adjunct professor at the University of Texas School of Law teaching an advanced legal writing course.

I received my BA from Rice University. I also have a J.D. from the University of Texas Law School and a Master of Public Affairs from the LBJ School of Public Affairs. I am Board Certified in Criminal Appellate Law, a Texas Bar College member, and I have been admitted to practice in the United States Supreme Court. I have recently served as co-chair of the Austin Bar Association's CLE Committee which presents free continuing legal education courses.

I have written articles on topics including domestic violence and the juvenile justice system, jury unanimity, and recent legislative changes to criminal laws. I have been invited to present at several continuing legal education events, including the Robert O. Dawson Conference on Criminal Appeals, the Texas State Bar's Advanced Criminal Law Course, and the Center for American and International Law's Criminal Writs & Habeas Training.

Question 7: Once you are elected, what are some of your plans specific to your office's responsibilities?

Taylor - The Court of Criminal Appeals is the appellate court of last resort for criminal cases in Texas. The Court generally has discretion to decide which cases it will hear, but death penalty cases are automatically appealed directly to this Court. The Court has jurisdiction over writs of habeas corpus and handles numerous writ proceedings each year.

I look forward to taking on the duties of Presiding Judge, including: fully and fairly evaluating the critical constitutional issues and other important legal and factual questions before the Court, giving due consideration to the constitutional rights of all litigants before the Court without bias or partiality, regularly entertaining oral argument, and authoring carefully considered judicial decisions.

As Presiding Judge, I would discharge my administrative responsibilities diligently and efficiently without bias, prejudice, or animus. I look forward to serving with diligence and dedication on the Texas Indigent Defense Commission, the Texas Judicial Council, and the other agencies on which the Presiding Judge serves by virtue of her position.

As the former Rules Attorney for the Court, I am looking forward to advancing the rulemaking function of the Court, which is tasked with reviewing, developing, and--when needed--amending Rules of Appellate Procedure, Rules of Evidence, and other rules impacting the administration of criminal justice in Texas.

Question 8: If elected how will you recruit, retain, and create a supportive environment for LGBTQ+ staff and affirming staff?

Taylor - The Code of Judicial Conduct requires that a judge shall not, by words or conduct, manifest any bias or prejudice based upon race, sex, religion, national origin, disability, age, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status, and shall not knowingly permit staff, court officials and others subject to the judge's direction and control to do so. Further, the Code requires that judges must require lawyers who practice before them to refrain from manifesting, by words or conduct, bias or prejudice based on race, sex, religion, national origin, disability, age, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status.

I intend to be open and transparent through communications with employees, interns, educational institutions, litigants, applicants, and other judges that the Court will strictly abide by these rules. I'll have an open-door policy for employees to express any concerns and provide regular approved trainings to keep all personnel apprised of the policies.

Furthermore, through communications and gatherings, I intend to cultivate a welcoming and collegial environment where all employees understand that they are supported and valued.

Question 9: How would you handle a situation in which you or a subordinate felt the need to not fulfill all the lawful work duties due to "deeply held religious beliefs"?

Taylor - As noted above, the Code of Judicial Conduct requires that a judge shall not in the performance of judicial duties, by words or conduct, manifest any bias or prejudice based upon attributes such as race, religion, national origin, and sexual orientation. Further, a judge must not knowingly permit staff, court officials or others subject to the judge's direction and control to do so. Thus, neither my own religious beliefs, nor those of my staff, justify a manifestation of bias or prejudice based on these impermissible factors or a failure to perform lawful work duties resulting from a manifestation of such a bias or prejudice. I intend to make this clear to staff.

However, regarding any hypothetical situation that might involve the consideration of a particular case or legal issue, the Code of Judicial Conduct requires that I abstain from public comment.

Question 10: Understanding that administrative matters can take up a significant percentage of your work day, what are the most important policies or procedures you've identified as needing improvement?

Taylor - As the former Rules Attorney for the Court, I am looking forward to taking part in the important rulemaking function of the Court. The Court's website suggests that the Court's Rules Advisory Committee may not have convened in recent years. I hope to reinstitute regular Rules Advisory Committee meetings which are open for the public to attend and submit comments.

The Court periodically hears oral arguments in locations outside Austin to allow members of those communities to attend and observe. In the interest of educating the public about the Court, I support this practice and would explore the possibility of doing it more frequently and with greater public notice.

A judge should diligently and promptly discharge the judge's administrative responsibilities. I intend to look for ways to streamline processes to facilitate more expedient resolution of cases pending before the Court.

Regarding any policies or procedures that might impact the Court's consideration of a particular case or legal issue, the Code of Judicial Conduct requires that I abstain from public comment.

Question 11: Do you have ideas to improve access to the courts and court-related services? Yes. If so, what are they?

Taylor - Please see the answer to the above questions.

Question 12: Do you believe the composition of juries adequately and fairly reflects society at large? Why or why not? If not, what can we do to change this?

Taylor - Due to the prevalence of legal issues involving jury composition in criminal cases that may come before the Court of Criminal Appeals, I believe that the Code of Judicial Conduct requires that I abstain from public comment on this matter.

Question 13: What is your general judicial philosophy?

Taylor - The Court of Criminal Appeals, like other Texas courts, should treat all litigants justly and equitably without bias or partiality. Courts should give full and fair consideration to the Constitutional and statutory rights of all accused persons.

Question 14: Is there anything in your past or background that has not been covered by the previous questions that might – without careful explanation - cause our organization to reconsider or withdraw our endorsement of you?

Taylor - I am not aware of anything that has not been discussed.

Question 15: How long have you been a current member of Stonewall Democrats of Dallas? If you are not a member, will you pledge to join before the endorsement screenings? If no, why not?

Taylor - I was not previously a member of the Stonewall Democrats of Dallas as I do not live in the Dallas Area, but I have now joined.

Question 16: How would you showcase your endorsement by Stonewall Democrats of Dallas if received? Would you include the endorsement in your campaign media?

Taylor - Yes, I intend to display the endorsement on campaign media.

This completes the questions and answers for this race.

STONEWALL DEMOCRATS OF DALLAS

2024 Endorsement Screening

Texas Senate 16 Questionnaires

Candidates:

Senator Nathan Johnson

Representative Victoria Neave Criado

Note: The answers provided in this document are direct copies of the answers provided by the candidates. They have not been edited or changed in any way by Stonewall Democrats of Dallas.

Question 3: Pronouns

Nathan - he/him/his

Victoria - She/ Her/ Ella

Question 4: As an organization affiliated with the Texas Democratic Party, Stonewall Democrats of Dallas will only endorse candidates who affirm an affiliation with the platform and policies of the Texas Democratic Party. Do you make such an affirmation? What is your previous voting history?

Nathan - I affirm my affiliation with the platform and policies of the Texas Democratic Party. My voting history reflects consistent support for Democratic values and principles that align with the party's core values. I am committed to working collaboratively to advance the interests and well-being of the diverse communities I represent.

Victoria - Yes. I am a lifelong Democrat and vote in Democratic primaries, general elections, and local elections.

Question 5: Please list some of your qualifications and experiences pertinent to the office you are seeking

Nathan - I was first elected to the Texas Senate in 2018, flipping a district that was held by Republicans for over three decades. During three regular legislative sessions, and seven special sessions, I've passed 150 bills into law and fought hard against destructive bills that harm Texans and Texas families.

Victoria - I am the daughter of an immigrant dad and a strong Tejana mom who raised me to treat people right and to not forget where we came from. From Pleasant Grove to the courtroom to the Texas House of Representatives, I have carried with me the hopes and dreams of our constituents as I have worked hard to pass landmark legislation addressing various complex issues like the backlog of thousands of untested rape kits. As a result, I have been recognized by Texas Monthly as one of the Best Legislators and have been named Legislator of the Year by various organizations. As Chair of the Mexican American Legislative Caucus, the largest and oldest Latino caucus in the nation, I have led the fight to kill numerous discriminatory bills by leading floor strategy, coordinating points of order, amendments, committee hearing strategy, and more all while also passing significant bills tackling domestic violence and sexual assault in our state. As a member of the LGBTQ Caucus in the Texas House, I also assist with arguing amendments and on front/ back mic debate to help lay the record for litigation when bills that attack our LGBTQ community come to the House floor or committee.

I was initially elected in 2016 when we worked hard to flip House District 107 and mounted a challenge against an incumbent who was voting against the interests of his constituents. Today, we similarly launched our State Senate campaign for the same reasons. Senate District 16 was substantially redrawn and is now a strong Democratic district with a constituency of 49.6% Latino and more than 70% people of color. The incumbent through multiple votes has thrown the residents of SD16 under the bus. We need a Senator who is going to fight back against Republican attacks against our LGBTQ community, not one who doesn't understand the urgency of the times that we are in for our LGBTQ community and people of color. That's why I've stepped up to run, and plan to take our fight from the House to the Senate. I would be honored to earn the support of Stonewall Democrats of Dallas.

Question 6: How long have you been a current member of Stonewall Democrats of Dallas? If you are not a member, will you pledge to join before the endorsement screenings? If no, why not?

Nathan - I am a current member and longtime supporter. I believe in the organization's values and mission and am committed to continuing my membership and support.

Victoria - I have been a proud member in the past and recently renewed my membership.

Question 7: Please share any experience that illustrates your understanding of and interest in the needs of the LGBTQ+ community in your District/Role sought.

Nathan - From my early years to the present, I have been fortunate to build meaningful friendships within the LGBTQ+ community, providing me with valuable insights into their unique challenges and aspirations.

As a legislator, I have made it a priority to consult and collaborate with community leaders and organizations, allowing me to address specific needs at important times, and to advocate for and file legislation to advance policies that move us closer to equal rights and respect for LGBTQ+ people.

This past year, I had the privilege of presenting senate resolutions to two remarkable organizations, namely, The Resource Center and Lambda Legal. The celebration of The Resource Center's 40th anniversary and Lambda Legal's five decades of noble service were profoundly moving and memorable experiences. These events not only highlighted the progress we've made but also underscored the challenges that persist.

These experiences have strengthened my understanding of the challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community, and I am unwavering in my dedication to championing their rights in my role as state senator. I will continue to work tirelessly to ensure that the LGBTQ+ community in Senate District 16 is not only heard but also supported through meaningful legislation and advocacy efforts.

Victoria - I'm deeply committed to equity for our LGBTQ+ community and am proud to be a member of the Texas House LGBTQ Caucus. Throughout my service in the Texas House, we have seen numerous discriminatory attacks on LGBTQ Texans from the bathroom bill to bills regarding gender-affirming care. I have served on committees in the past where transgender children and their families would come testify about how harmful even discussing these bills is for LGBTQ youth who are at a greater risk of suicide. These hateful bills don't deserve to see the light of day; however, we know that Republicans are going to continue these attacks, and we must try to block them at every turn. As a member of the LGBTQ Caucus in the Texas House, I have fought for the community by arguing amendments, debated on the front and back mic, called points of order, and helped lay the record for litigation when bills that attack our LGBTQ community come to the House floor or committee.

I have stood with our LGBTQ community. The incumbent has not. Nathan Johnson was one of two Senators to vote "Present Not Voting" on Senate Bill 15, a bill which attacks our transgender community and was authored by Mayes Middleton, one of the most extreme right-wing Senators. We need a Senator who will fight back against GOP attacks against LGBTQ Texans. I have a record of fighting in the House, and plan to take that fight from the House to the Senate.

Question 8: Once you are elected, what are some of your plans specific to your office's responsibilities?

Nathan - I plan to continue to file bills to ensure systems within state government are reliable, effective, efficient, and allow Texans to live a safe, supported, and fulfilling life. Specific measures include: increasing access to healthcare, including expanding Medicaid and expanding access to reproductive healthcare; supporting public education by increasing the basic allotment and providing educators with a pay raise; and ensuring good government policies by identifying needs in state agencies, such as improved technology, so they can better serve the needs of Texans.

Victoria - I plan to take the same approach that I've taken in the House—fierce advocacy for constituents while also delivering big wins on critical issues facing our state. I will fight back when Republicans attack our LGBTQ community.

Question 9: When elected:

A. how will you recruit, retain, and create a supportive environment for LGBTQ+ staff and affirming staff?

Nathan - One of my top priorities as an elected official is to create a work environment where every staff, including LGBTQ+ staff members, feel supported, are encouraged to think independently and contribute to the team, and have

fun. I currently have one member of the LGBTQ+ community on my Senate team and every member of my staff has been with my office for a year or more. Additionally, since I've been in office, eighteen interns, including LGBTQ+ interns, have either extended their time in the office or returned for an additional semester.

Victoria - I will make sure that the office of Senate District 16 has a welcoming environment to members of the LGBTQ+ community and will ensure a culture of inclusiveness where people are celebrated for their diversity. I will also make an active effort to recruit and retain talent from the LGBTQ+ community. I'm honored that we have had members of the LGBTQ community on our team and as interns.

B. Would you be willing to appoint a liaison to meet with the LGBTQ+ community on an ongoing basis? If not, why?

Nathan - Yes, of course.

Victoria - Absolutely!

C. What non-discrimination policies will you support for employment and protection of LGBTQ+ constituents based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression?

Nathan - Sexual orientation and gender identity and expression are not valid criteria for employment. The law should say so. Likewise, with respect to insurance benefits and other societal rights and benefits that have no grounding in gender. Please see responses below for specific examples of legislation I have filed.

Victoria - I support laws like the non-discrimination legislation by Rep. Jessica Gonzalez. I will continue to fight against discrimination and will advocate for non-discrimination laws and policies to protection LGBTQ+ employees, including protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Question 10: If applicable to your office, how would you lead or support legislation and/or constitutional amendments pertaining to: A. LGBTQ+ Couples adopting and providing foster care to children?

Nathan - In both the 87th (SB 135) and the 88th (SB 676) sessions, I filed a bill to expand insurance coverage for in vitro fertilization to cover certain LGBTQ+ couples. Currently in statute, in vitro fertilization is only covered by group health benefit plans when a spouse's sperm is used for fertilization. This requirement excludes couples in which sperm is not produced; my bill changes that. I would gladly support other measures to ensure that LGBTQ+ couples can adopt and foster children without prejudice.

Victoria - I would analyze the possibility of amending the Texas Family Code which governs adoptions and family law cases in Texas. The U.S. Supreme Court's decision in the Obergefell case should help. There are other issues that need to be addressed, such as permitting same-sex parents to be listed on the amended birth certificate. Rep. Rafael Anchia has introduced legislation in the past regarding this issue and I would work with him and other potential partners. I would also analyze the possibility of amending the Texas Family Code and authoring statutes to ensure that the Texas Dept. of Family and Protective Services employees evaluating families for foster care do not discriminate against potential LGBT foster parents.

B. Supporting the repeal of the sodomy law that was ruled unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court?

Nathan - In the 88th session, I filed SB 82 to repeal criminal provisions that prohibit "homosexual conduct", including sodomy.

Victoria - I would support or file legislation repealing the sodomy law that was struck down as unconstitutional in Lawrence v. Texas. It only makes sense that this discriminatory law is taken off our books.

C. Supporting the repeal of the Texas Marriage/Civil Union Amendment?

Nathan - In the 88th session I filed SJR 15 to repeal the constitutional amendment prohibiting same-sex marriage. I also filed SB 129 (87R) and SB 81 (88R) to amend several existing statutes in Texas code to eliminate anti-LGBTQ laws and create a rule that gender-neutral terminology must be used in all future statutes regarding marriage and parenting.

Victoria - I would support or file such legislation to amend the Texas constitution so that our constitution complies with the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in the Obergefell case.

D. Supporting safe schools for LGBTQ+ students, staff, and families?

Nathan - In 2021, I passed SB 123 to add Social Emotional Learning (SEL) components to existing character development curriculum for Texas public school students. Individual students, and the campus community as a whole, benefit from students who are able to develop soft skills, such as recognizing & regulating their emotions, learning self-management and relationship skills, and making responsible decisions.

In 2023, I passed SB 26 to expand mental health resources in schools through the hiring of master-level social workers. This legislation not only addresses the diverse needs of the student body but also contributes to creating a safer and more supportive and understanding school environment.

Victoria - I would look at the Texas Education Code and for other opportunities in other statutes to provide LGBTQ students equal treatment and coverage under statutes concerning discriminatory treatment of LGBTQ students, including bullying by employees and/or other students.

E. If applicable to your office, how would you address recent laws enacted such as laws requiring transgender Student Athletes to participate in sports based on their gender assigned at birth?

Nathan - The Texas legislature overstepped its role as a legislative body with passage of SB 15 in 2023. Sport governing boards, such as the NCAA or the International Olympic Committee, should determine standards for competition in individual sports. A complete ban - it extends beyond athletic competition, in fact - based on a student's gender on their birth certificate is a lazy, harmful policy.

Victoria - I will vote against any bills that discriminate against our transgender community, and voted against SB 15. Transgender individuals deserve dignity and respect just like anyone else in our society. They experience higher rates of suicide than the general population and stigmatizing them in this way will only isolate them more.

I have stood with our LGBTQ community. The incumbent has not. Nathan Johnson was one of two Senators to vote "Present Not Voting" on Senate Bill 15, a bill which attacks our transgender community and was authored by Mayes Middleton, one of the most extreme right-wing Senators. We need a Senator who will fight back against GOP attacks against LGBTQ Texans. I have a record of fighting in the House, and plan to take that fight from the House to the Senate.

F. How would you address Texas Abortion bans that interfere between a private individual's right to all healthcare options as medically determined between the pregnant person and their healthcare provider?

Nathan - That's the perennial question. Many of us have fought consistently to preserve abortion rights. In fact, I have voted against every measure that attempts to restrict abortion access. And I've spoken against them on the senate floor often. Among many such instances was HB 16 in the 86th session, known as the "Born Alive Infant Protection Act". While only two House members voted against HB 16, and 49 House Democrats chose to abstain from the vote entirely, I took on the Senate Bill author, with an extended debate and a procedural attempt to defeat it.

Meanwhile I've taken specific actions in support of abortion rights. In the 88th regular session, I filed SB 78 to authorize medication abortion per FDA guidance, SB 79 to repeal pre-Roe v Wade abortion statutes, and SB 1280 to prohibit prosecution of companies that provide travel assistance to employees to obtain medical services that are legal in other states. In the 4th special session in 2023, I filed – in flagrant contravention of procedural propriety – SB 45 to prohibit counties and municipalities from enacting local abortion travel bans.

We have to reverse the tide of theocratic rule, and restore respect for the proper limits of government.

Victoria - I am pro-choice. As a member of the Women's Health Caucus in the Texas House, we have fought against abortion bans. I will fight against laws that infringe on Texans' reproductive rights and human right to access abortion care. I will also seek to pass legislation to overturn Republicans' radical ban on abortion.

G. What specific ideas do you have and/or what current legislation would you support to improve our state economy and address the income inequality and growing poverty rate in Texas?

Nathan - I led the negotiations to give the first-ever tax incentive preference to the underserved parts of my district (HB 5, 88R). I amended that same legislation to add accountability measures to ensure businesses fulfill their promises or face penalties. Economic development must be inclusive. Alleviation of poverty has vexed policy leaders forever, I and will continue to listen to the many great advocates in Texas.

Meanwhile there are some things we know: people need fundamental systems to allow them to advance. This means we have to make shopping for groceries possible where currently it is not, support public schools, promote access to greenspace (parks) and healthcare systems (note: Medicaid expansion has been shown to improve family financial stability) and adult education and childcare and transportation, even electrical power. There are various means to promote these ends, if we can forge the collective political will to deploy them.

Victoria - We need jobs with benefits — jobs that let parents take care of their kids and pay workers a living wage. As it is, single parents working multiple jobs can hardly pay the rent. It's time to raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour for every worker in every job.

Question 11: If applicable to your office, how would you lead or support efforts to provide better funding for health care and better health care options for all Texas residents?

Nathan - Since I took office in 2019, I have led the effort to expand Medicaid in Texas and filed "Live Well Texas", my plan to expand Medicaid, the Texas way. Although it never received a hearing in either chamber, the companion to SB 117 was supported by a bipartisan majority of the House of Representatives, with 75 co-authors. I also took measures to engage the public on the importance of expanding Medicaid by releasing a video on YouTube titled "Cutting Through the Fog" (please watch!), where I explain that the benefits of expanding Medicaid go way beyond ensuring that close to a million Texans have access to affordable, quality healthcare.

Despite the demonstrated success of Medicaid expansion in 38 states, Texas continues to lose out on the opportunity to keep hospitals and community health clinics open, bring home billions in federal tax dollars, expand the Texas economy with billions in economic growth, reduce property tax pressures, create hundreds of thousands of jobs, stabilize family finances, and lower the cost of health insurance for individuals and employers. While leadership was refusing to expand Medicaid, I found a way to get nearly free health insurance for an estimated 200,000 uninsured low-income Texans: SB 1296 (87R). I will continue the work to expand Medicaid in Texas.

Victoria - Health care is a human right and I support moving our state towards a more inclusive system to take better care of our families. We need to expand access to quality health care, lower drug prices, ensure that vision and dental benefits are included in health plans, and expand Medicaid to everyone in the state who needs it.

Question 12: What are your ideas to respond to evidence of climate change?

Nathan - Central to responding to climate change is electrical power: generation and consumption. I led efforts to preserve the clean renewable energy industry in TX, and passed legislation to begin adapting our grid to accommodate clean energy generation by individual consumers (rooftop solar, home batteries). I used that bill as a vehicle to also pass a bill by Senator Jose Menendez, creating Texas's first ever consumer demand-side response program. I was the first legislator in nearly a decade to pass clean air legislation for Texas.

This past session, I was a member of the Texas Sunset Advisory Commission which evaluates state agencies and makes recommendations for improvement or abolishment of those agencies. I was able to pass climate-centric requirements, specifically when it comes to long-term planning at the TX Water Development Board and increasing fines administered by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality for companies that violate environmental standards.

In prior sessions, I passed bills to promote ozone reduction, and to incentive preservation of healthy soil & clean water.

Victoria - Climate change is real and we must take action now. I support legislation to expand green energy sources that are good for the environment and will create good paying jobs.

Question 13: If applicable to your office, what specific ideas do you have to strengthen the reliability of electric power supply to all Texans?

Nathan - "Fixing" the grid is no simple task and will not happen overnight. My "Texas Power Promise" passed in two pieces in 2023 and will help ensure that no Texan goes without power for more than four consecutive hours. It resulted in \$1.8B in funding for critical facilities backup power generation (approved as part of Proposition 7), and a directive to electrical distribution utilities to find ways to better and more safely manage future power outages.

We must balance the needs of reliable electric generation and the environment. That means expanding consumer incentives, demand response, more wind energy in South Texas, including offshore, building more transmission, more solar facilities to meet afternoon demand and feed more batteries, as well as nuclear power and the flexibility to maximize the use of emerging technologies.

My SB 1699 will facilitate the aggregation of small generation sources (ADERS), like residential rooftop solar, into groups that can participate in the energy market. It also incorporated part of Senator Menendez's demand response programs bill, SB 114, requiring electric providers to achieve load reduction goals by offering monetary incentives to residential consumers.

Victoria - Our power grid should not fail in the middle of a deadly winter storm. When elected, I will continue to push for legislation that strengthens our power grid and holds electric and gas companies accountable for any price gouging during climate emergencies like we saw in 2021.

Question 14: If applicable to your office, how would you lead or support legislation restoring previous funding for HIV prevention in Texas including access to PrEP?

Nathan - I support providing everyone with access to healthcare, particularly preventive care. I would support any measure to restore funding for HIV prevention and expanding funding to cover PrEP.

Victoria - I would research any past legislation and then work to build consensus for much needed access to health care and key medication for HIV prevention like PrEP.

Question 15: In light of the Supreme Court decision in December 2023 against reparative/conversion therapy, how would you lead the fight against reparative/conversion therapy in Texas?

Nathan - As with abortion, we're going to need to move Texas away from fundamentalist rule. I firmly believe in upholding the principles of equality and dignity for all individuals. The December 2023 Supreme Court decision against reparative/conversion therapy should give us hope and determination.

Victoria - I will fight against "conversion therapy" and support legislation to prohibit it.

Question 16: What are your ideas for immigration reform at the state level? How would you support the right of immigrants to seek asylum, hold employment, and have a clear path to citizenship?

Nathan - The implementation of SB4 in 2018 [85(R)] has resulted in a concerning increase in deportations, family separations, and racial profiling cases within our state. Recognizing the urgency of this matter, I have taken proactive steps to advocate for policies that protect the rights of all residents, irrespective of their immigration status.

In the last two legislative sessions, I filed a bill to mitigate the adverse effects of SB4 and promote a more inclusive and just approach. The proposed legislation focuses on facilitating legal driving for all individuals residing in Texas, including migrants who are undocumented.

The key components of my plan include: Inclusive Driver's License Program: I proposed a bill that allows anyone who pays taxes in Texas, regardless of their immigration status, to apply for a Texas driver's license. This measure is designed to ensure that all residents, including undocumented migrants, can legally drive without the fear of arrest for lacking a valid license.

Vehicle Registration: The bill includes provisions allowing individuals, irrespective of immigration status, to register their vehicles. By extending this right to all residents, we aim to create a safer environment where individuals can comply with the law without being subjected to unnecessary risks.

Reducing Racial Profiling: One of the primary goals of this legislation is to address racial profiling issues that have emerged since the implementation of SB4. By providing a legal avenue for all residents to obtain a driver's license, we aim to minimize the instances of racial profiling during routine traffic stops.

Advocating for Alternatives to Deportation: We need a vastly expanded guest worker program, one that would reduce the legal pressures on deportation and enable families to stay together.

By implementing these measures, we take steps towards a more inclusive and equitable environment for all residents of Texas. It is crucial to recognize the contributions of immigrants to our state and ensure that they can live and work without the constant fear of separation from their families. Finally, the dialog and cooperation among federal and state officials is at best poor, and must improve if we are to make significant strides with respect to immigration.

Victoria - We need comprehensive immigration reform. As Chair of MALC, I have led the fight to protect the immigrant community from Abbott's attack.

The incumbent voted in favor of horrible legislation like SB 4, in the 3rd session, a bill that we had been working to kill and that civil rights groups said will lead to mass incarceration of people of color. This bill will sow fear in Latino communities across the state and impose 10 year prison minimums for driving family members and friends who happen to be undocumented. We need a State Senator who will stand up for our communities, not throw residents under the bus. That's why I'm running.

Question 17: Would you lead or support legislation to require mandatory sexual harassment and Equal Employment Opportunity training similar to the resolution passed in the U.S. Senate that requires Senators, staff, and interns to complete training each session and submit certification to be published online that their office staff fulfilled the requirements?

Nathan - Yes, I would support such legislation.

Victoria - The Texas House now requires this. I have filed and passed legislation relating to sexual harassment including passing a law to extend the statute of limitations for sexual harassment in the workplace. This bill is a huge win and not something that was easy to accomplish in a Republican majority legislature.

Question 18: If applicable to your office, how would you address voter suppression in Texas and work to expand access to voting by all eligible voters?

Nathan - I voted against 87(2)/SB 1 and supported House Democrats in their quorum break by traveling to Washington, D.C. I also opposed 88R/SB 2 to enhance the penalty for illegal voting as well as efforts to discourage voter participation.

Moreover, I filed bills to provide for online and same-day voter registration, to allow 17-year-olds to pre-register to vote, to create a non-partisan redistricting commission, and to make harassment of election officials a state jail felony.

Victoria - I was a member of the House Democrats that broke quorum to protect our right to vote. I will continue to fight and use every tool at my disposal as a State Senator to expand access to the ballot box.

Question 19: How would you showcase your endorsement by Stonewall Democrats of Dallas if received? Would you include the endorsement in your campaign media?

Nathan - If honored with the endorsement of Stonewall Democrats of Dallas, I would showcase this support across various platforms including social media channels and on my campaign website. Moreover, the endorsement would be integrated into other campaign materials, such as newsletters and brochures.

Victoria - We would highlight it across our social media, mail, digital, and on our website. I will be proud and so honored to earn the endorsement of Stonewall Democrats of Dallas.

Question 20: Is there anything in your past or background that has not been covered by the previous questions that might – without careful explanation - cause our organization to reconsider or withdraw our endorsement of you?

Nathan - No.

Victoria - No.

This completes the questions and answers for this race.

STONEWALL DEMOCRATS OF DALLAS

2024 Endorsement Screening

Judicial Questionnaires

Court of Crim. Appeals Pl. 7

Candidates:

Nancy Mulder - NM

Note: The answers provided in this document are direct copies of the answers provided by the candidates. They have not been edited or changed in any way by Stonewall Democrats of Dallas.

Question 3: Pronouns

Mulder - She/her

Question 4: As an organization affiliated with the Texas Democratic Party, Stonewall Democrats of Dallas will only endorse candidates who affirm an affiliation with the platform and policies of the Texas Democratic Party. Do you make such an affirmation? What is your previous voting history?

Mulder - Yes! I became a precinct chair during Obama's presidency, and worked on his second campaign. I've been a member of Stonewall Democrats of Dallas for 10 years now.

Question 5: Please share any experience that illustrates your understanding of and interest in the needs of the LGBTQ+ community in your District/Role sought.

Mulder - Judges and court personnel must use and individuals' pronouns and address each individual using that person's identifying gender. All persons deserve to be treated with dignity and respect, and I will typically ask what a person's pronouns are when they come before me in court.

Question 6: Please list some of your qualifications and experiences pertinent to the office you are seeking:

Mulder - I have practiced criminal law for almost 30 years here in Dallas county. 12 years as a prosecutor, 8 years as a criminal defense, attorney, 8 years as a county criminal court judge, and now one year as a criminal district court judge.

Question 7: Once you are elected, what are some of your plans specific to your office's responsibilities?

Mulder - There hasn't been a Democrat elected to the court of criminal appeals for 30 years. I will first draft a code of conduct for all employees to use a person's preferred pronouns and address individuals using the gender with which they identify. In addition, I will explain that all employees must carry out their job duties, no matter their religious beliefs or they will face termination.

Question 8: If elected how will you recruit, retain, and create a supportive environment for LGBTQ+ staff and affirming staff?

Mulder - Please see the answer to number seven. In addition, I will make sure that there is equal opportunity for employment, and meet with staff who are LGBTQ and ask them how they're doing, and if they're facing any kind of discrimination. I will not tolerate anyone being treated as "less than".

Question 9: How would you handle a situation in which you or a subordinate felt the need to not fulfill all the lawful work duties due to "deeply held religious beliefs"?

Mulder - I would refer that employee to the code of conduct that I implemented when I became a Justice, and tell them that if they don't fulfill their lawful work duties, they will be terminated.

Question 10: Understanding that administrative matters can take up a significant percentage of your work day, what are the most important policies or procedures you've identified as needing improvement?

Mulder - Right now we are in desperate need of free housing for members of the LGBTQ community who are drug addicted sex workers. Individuals can go to the Salvation Army, but those spaces for transgendered persons are a few. I

would like to join with community partners and create a program that would allow temporary – about three months – free housing in studio apartments for transgendered sex workers trying to get clean. Then we can get started on getting them free counseling!

Question 11: Do you have ideas to improve access to the courts and court-related services? Yes. If so, what are they?

Mulder - During Covid, we all started streaming our court proceedings. I think this is really helpful as it allows the general public to get a glimpse of what really happens in court. It is not as exciting as what you see on TV, but it is informational. We all have streaming links on the Dallas county website.

Question 12: Do you believe the composition of juries adequately and fairly reflects society at large? Why or why not? If not, what can we do to change this?

Mulder - I would say we are halfway there. The current computer program algorithm uses a person's address that is on their driver's license to send a jury summons. Since a lot of single people have a tendency to live in apartments, that can result in people, moving and not changing the address on their driver's license. I would like to switch to using someone's water or electric bill to summon them for jury service

Question 13: What is your general judicial philosophy?

Mulder - I believe that we need to help people first rather than punish. Most of what we see in the criminal justice system is due to alcohol and drug abuse. We provide a lot of opportunities for counseling and rehabilitation. We give people multiple chances, even if they relapse or pick up a new case. addiction is a terrible disease that takes a lot of time and effort to conquer. Even if someone commits a violent crime, I will give them a second chance, provided they are remorseful, and want to get treatment. I'm all for that.

Question 14: Is there anything in your past or background that has not been covered by the previous questions that might – without careful explanation - cause our organization to reconsider or withdraw our endorsement of you?

Mulder - I have never been disciplined by the state bar or the state commission on judicial conduct. In addition, I have never been arrested or charged with a criminal offense.

Question 15: How long have you been a current member of Stonewall Democrats of Dallas? If you are not a member, will you pledge to join before the endorsement screenings? If no, why not?

Mulder - I've been a member for at least 10 years, and served on the board as the Pride Float Chair when Jay Narey was President.

Question 16: How would you showcase your endorsement by Stonewall Democrats of Dallas if received? Would you include the endorsement in your campaign media?

Mulder - I would put it on my mailers, my other literature, and on my website!

This completes the questions and answers for this race.

STONEWALL DEMOCRATS OF DALLAS

2024 Endorsement Screening

Judicial Questionnaires

5th Court of Appeals - Chief Justice

Candidates:

Justice Dennise Garcia

Judge Staci Williams

Note: The answers provided in this document are direct copies of the answers provided by the candidates. They have not been edited or changed in any way by Stonewall Democrats of Dallas.

Question 3: Pronouns

Garcia - She, her

Williams - She/Her

Question 4: As an organization affiliated with the Texas Democratic Party, Stonewall Democrats of Dallas will only endorse candidates who affirm an affiliation with the platform and policies of the Texas Democratic Party. Do you make such an affirmation? What is your previous voting history?

Garcia - I am a lifelong Democrat who has voted democratic for as long as I have voted (from the 80s to the present) and will continue my affiliation with the party.

As to management and administrative duties, I affirm an affiliation with the TX Democratic platform and policies. As to Judicial duties, I affirm my oath to support the Constitutions of the United States and of the State of Texas.

Williams - I do. I am a life-long Democrat who has voted consistently in Democratic primaries. I have run for, and currently hold office, as a Democrat.

Question 5: Please share any experience that illustrates your understanding of and interest in the needs of the LGBTQ+ community in your District/Role sought.

Garcia - As a family court district judge from 2004 to 2019, I've worked with LGBTQ+ individuals on all types of family matters including performing marriages, granting divorces, approving adoptions, and considering family violence allegations and gender/name change petitions.

I've also been a member of reconciling United Methodist Churches since 2001. As such, I've worked alongside members of the LGBTQ+ community re: inclusion in the United Methodist Church. We have been blessed to raise our daughter alongside LGBTQ+ families in our churches, Northaven UMC and Kessler Park UMC.

Williams - I have long been an ally of the LGBT community. My earliest awareness of the LGBT community came from having members of my family and friends who identified as LGBT. As a lawyer and judge, I have interacted with the LGBT community on a much larger and different scale, from participating in various activities such as the annual Dallas Pride Parade and LAMBDA Legal dinners. I have also attended various forums on issues of importance to the LGBT community. Additionally, on the day that the U.S. Supreme Court released the Obergefell decision, I suspended my docket and performed marriages for many LGBT couples.

Prior to my service as a judge, my advocacy for issues important to the LGBT community goes back many years. In 1986, I created a training program entitled, "The New Disability Issues: Alcohol, Drugs and AIDS," for a conservative defense company. Although I was threatened with being fired for presenting this training if the General Counsel received any negative comments, I pushed for the training and the training received rave reviews. The supervisors appreciated hearing "cutting edge information" on how to handle AIDS related issues in human resources.

Question 6: Please list some of your qualifications and experiences pertinent to the office you are seeking:

Garcia - I have 19 years judicial experience. From January 1, 2021 to the present, I have actually served on the Dallas Court of Appeals. This experience gives me insight into the management requirements of the court and an understanding of its processes. To the extent that the position requires communication with the legislative branch, I've testified to legislative committees about the judicial branch in relation to proposed legislation.

Williams - I'm in my third term on the 101st District Court. I have served as an arbitrator for DART, USPS, Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, NASD/FINRA, and the Washington Metropolitan Airport Board. My experience includes being in-house corporate counsel positions in several industries, trial attorney, an administrative judge for the EEOC, and I am a Senior Professional in HR (SPHR).

Question 7: Once you are elected, what are some of your plans specific to your office's responsibilities?

Garcia - I will continue to work on behalf of the court to inform the legislature (as appropriate under the Judicial Canons of ethics) about the needs of the court, and the effects of proposed legislation on judicial administration. Prior to my service on the Dallas Court of Appeals (CoA), I did this in relation to family court issues. Since serving on the CoA, I expanded this outreach to include issues affecting state courts in general. I've testified on issues relating to court re-districting and re-structuring. I intend to work with the Council of Chiefs to also look into pay disparities within the judicial branch.

Currently, the court has among the highest number of cases older than 6 months from submission to disposition in the state. In conjunction with our administrative conference (AC), I intend to implement policies to bring that number down to appropriate levels.

The court also needs to update its employee handbook, which has not been updated in several years. Under the court's internal operating procedures, this process needs to be started within the AC and at least two of its committees (Rules and Personnel).

Williams - I want to make the court more transparent and accessible by working with courts in the district to open the system to everyone.

Question 8: If elected how will you recruit, retain, and create a supportive environment for LGBTQ+ staff and affirming staff?

Garcia - For most of its 130-year existence the court was run in an environment actively and politically hostile to LGBTQ+ individuals. In the decades just prior to 2019, I believe it existed in a "don't ask, don't tell" type of environment. Since 2019, the court has shifted to a more *politically* supportive environment for LGBTQ+ staff, but I'm not sure that shift has resulted in an overall *personally* supportive environment. Overcoming a century of active hostility requires more than a political shift among the elected leaders of the court.

Changes to the employee handbook, along with education aid in creating a more supportive environment (and those things need to happen), but the work doesn't end there. An intentional shift in attitudes and culture that engender trust needs to occur as well.

Since coming to the court, at least one staff member has expressed gratitude for my being supportive of their non-traditional family. As community and staff members *see* and *feel* an environment that is supportive of them and their families, retention follows.

We all want a work environment where it is safe to share the joys and hardships of our families and our lives, or to be free not to share. We also want to be free to care for ourselves and our families (biological as well as chosen) without the legitimacy of our families and realities being questioned. I want to continue to work on creating the culture necessary for this type of environment and I commit to doing so.

Williams - I will work to make sure all staff are properly trained and educated on creating a tolerant and open workplace, devoid of prejudice. To me, this is about more than fairness, it's about attracting top tier support staff, which is impossible within an intolerant environment.

Question 9: How would you handle a situation in which you or a subordinate felt the need to not fulfill all the lawful work duties due to "deeply held religious beliefs"?

Garcia - I don't hold any "deeply held religious beliefs" that interfere with my lawful work duties. Depending on the "deeply held religious belief" of a hired subordinate and their lawful work duties, I would either re-assign the duties so that the duties are adequately completed, or re-evaluate whether the subordinate is able to fulfill their positions duties.

Williams - I am concerned that giving an answer on this would create the appearance that I could not be impartial in a matter that may come before this court. Respectfully, I must decline to answer.

Question 10: Understanding that administrative matters can take up a significant percentage of your work day, what are the most important policies or procedures you've identified as needing improvement?

Garcia - As indicated above, the employee handbook needs updating. Pandemic issues revealed weaknesses in our court's technology and the court has moved toward addressing these. I would like to continue this work, as it is not complete. I would also like to focus on improving communication within the court, and among justices.

Williams - The biggest issue I've identified so far is working with the district courts throughout the 5th District. I truly believe we can create a stronger, more transparent platform in the justice system.

Question 11: Do you have ideas to improve access to the courts and court-related services? Yes. If so, what are they?

Garcia - Yes. The court district spans a large geographic area and can sit in parts other than its current courthouse. I would like to periodically sit in other parts of the district to encourage interaction with the entire district. We've implemented pro se instructions related to appeals on our website and I would like to continue similar work that demystifies the court's policies, procedures and practices.

Williams - I do and I've been running the program for years. I founded the CCA (<https://ccadallas.com/>) specifically to help people understand what the courts do and how they can effectively work within the system.

Question 12: Do you believe the composition of juries adequately and fairly reflects society at large? Why or why not? If not, what can we do to change this?

Garcia - We do our best under the circumstances and we can do better. A significant number of people do not answer a jury summons. The reason for this varies from disinterest to economic inability to participate. While the duty to ensure adequate juries falls to district judges, I intend to work with district judges to see what the CoA can do to help. We currently have two former district judges who served as jury room presiding judges for Dallas county and I would draw on their knowledge and experience to help in this area.

Williams - Unfortunately, I must decline to answer as any response I give may show bias in a case which may come before the Court.

Question 13: What is your general judicial philosophy?

Garcia - To support the Constitutions of the United States and the State of Texas.

Williams - Strict application of the law may not always be the best solution and our laws must give judges the flexibility to interpret, and apply, them in seeking justice.

Question 14: Is there anything in your past or background that has not been covered by the previous questions that might – without careful explanation - cause our organization to reconsider or withdraw our endorsement of you?

Garcia - I am not aware of anything.

Williams - No. I've always been supportive of the LGBTQIA+ community in Dallas and proud to be supported by the community.

Question 15: How long have you been a current member of Stonewall Democrats of Dallas? If you are not a member, will you pledge to join before the endorsement screenings? If no, why not?

Garcia - I have periodically attended meetings since 2004. I joined in 2016, and had a hiatus of about two years since then. I am currently a member.

Williams - I am currently and I have been a member for more than 10 years.

Question 16: How would you showcase your endorsement by Stonewall Democrats of Dallas if received? Would you include the endorsement in your campaign media?

Garcia - If endorsed, I would include the endorsement in social and campaign media.

Williams - I would display the endorsement prominently on the campaign website, in written materials, and in social media posts. I would absolutely make note of it in earned and paid media.

This completes the questions and answers for this race.