



The Judicial Candidates Rating Coalition
1375 East Ninth Street, Floor 2, Cleveland, Ohio 44114

Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association
Cuyahoga Criminal Defense Lawyers
Association

Norman S. Minor Bar Association
Ohio Women's Bar Association
Asian-American Bar Association of Ohio

ANNUAL REPORT AS OF JUNE 30, 2019

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

The Judicial Candidates Rating Coalition, better known as Judge4Yourself.com, has been working since 2002 to inform voters what the legal community in Cuyahoga County thinks of the candidates running for election as municipal, county and state judges.

The work of judges has a tremendous impact on our society. We rely on judges to manage the disputes that come to court, and on administrative judges to manage the courts themselves, in addition to their own caseload. We count on judges to give every party a fair hearing, and to make decisions based on the law and the facts. What happens in court can affect any one of us personally if we appear before a court as a party, a witness, a parent or business owner, or to serve as a juror. These are the reasons that dozens of Coalition participants have volunteered their countless hours to evaluate candidates and to improve our own processes.

During the past 17 years, we have been pleased to see an increase in qualified candidates who do not have familiar last names, and a growing number of people who vote in judicial elections. But there is always more to be done to assure that Cuyahoga County has the best qualified judges.

For almost a year, many members of the bar associations that make up the Coalition have been working to improve the Coalition's process and to increase the confidence of candidates and the public in the fairness of our ratings. Members brainstormed areas of concern and opportunities for process improvements. We seriously considered the criticisms that have been made of the Coalition's work over the past several years. We collected information about the judicial candidate ratings processes used by other bar associations in Ohio and other states. We spoke to a number of judges and other stakeholders. We surveyed the 5000+ members of the Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association. We educated ourselves on implicit bias, and considered how to bring more rigor and objectivity to our candidate ratings. Dozens of lawyers collectively spent hundreds of volunteer hours assessing every aspect of our work, including governance and By-Laws, participant recruitment and training, criteria and ratings, and the processes by which we obtain information from, interview and evaluate the candidates.

As a result of this intensive work, the Coalition has adopted new By-Laws and several new policies. These include:

1. We are making more information about the Coalition available to the public and to candidates. Our website, www.Judge4Yourself.com, will now include an Annual Report, a list of participants from the member Organizations, and a list of our contributors.
2. We have simplified our rating criteria and will rate the candidates separately on each criterion. Our focus remains on a candidate's integrity, diligence, temperament and demeanor, and competence for the position sought. Our rating criteria are stated more concisely, assuring that we have them firmly in mind when we interview and rate the candidates. A candidate's overall rating (Excellent, Good, Satisfactory or Not Recommended) will be the product of the ratings given to the candidate on each criterion.

3. Our [member Organizations](#), which now include the Asian American Bar Association of Ohio, are taking steps to assure that those who evaluate the candidates reflect the full diversity of Cuyahoga County in terms of the work they do, the clients they represent, and the communities in which they live.
4. The Coalition has strengthened the knowledge of those who evaluate the candidates. In June 2019, we held a mandatory training for all participants. An expert in diversity and inclusion raised our awareness of the unconscious biases that all humans develop based on their own culture and experiences, and taught us how to contain those biases in meeting and evaluating candidates. And everyone was reminded of our fundamental principles, including
 - Maintaining independence by abstaining from supporting judicial candidates in any way;
 - Treating candidates with courtesy and respect; and
 - Raising known concerns with a candidate during the interview so that the candidate has an opportunity to respond.
5. The Coalition will give each candidate the opportunity better to understand what is behind their ratings. The Coalition will not provide details that informed Organizations' ratings to anyone except the candidate unless the candidate chooses publicly to mischaracterize what the Coalition has told him or her.

At the Coalition, we are committed to continuous improvement. We invite anyone who has ideas for improving any aspect of our process to send a letter or email to one of the following addresses:

Judicial Candidates Rating Coalition
c/o Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association
1375 East Ninth Street 2d floor
Cleveland, OH 44114

judge4yourselfanswers@gmail.com

It has been a great honor for me to have been one of the founders of the Coalition, and its Chair since 2008. Now, I have turned over leadership of the Coalition to its new co-Chairs, Darrell Clay and C. Ellen Connally. The Coalition is privileged to have at its helm these two experienced and committed community leaders. My thanks to them, to all my Fellow volunteers, and to all of those lawyers, judges, and others who have supported our work with time, cooperation, and enthusiasm. And I extend a special thanks to voters who have sent emails and made financial contributions through our updated website. Comments and contributions have come to Judge4Yourself from all over Cuyahoga County, from University Heights to Westlake, and from Cleveland to Strongsville. All of us who work on Judge4Yourself.com appreciate your input and support.

Sincerely,

Deborah A. Coleman

JUDGE4YOURSELF.COM BY THE NUMBERS:

Candidates Interviewed:

2018 PRIMARIES: 13

2018 GENERAL ELECTION: 21

Volunteer Hours:

Est. Volunteer Hours 2018 Primary and General Election Interviews: 3600+

Est. Volunteer Hours, 2018-19 self-assessment and crafting new policies and procedures: 500+

Website:

70,000+ unique visitors in 2018

CONTRIBUTIONS July 1, 2018-June 30, 2019:

Financial contributions: \$4465

Staff support from Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association – priceless!

EXPENSES July 1, 2018 - June 30, 2019:

Interviewing: \$934.04

Volunteer training: \$2,400.00

Website hosting: \$370.00

Website updating: \$794.40

Miscellaneous: \$219.67

LEADERSHIP:

Darrell Clay and C. Ellen Connally
Co-Chairs of the Coalition

Phillip Bautista and Timothy Chai
Asian American Bar Association of Ohio

John Mitchell and Sheryl King Benford
Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association

David Rowthorn and Tim Riley
Cuyahoga County Criminal Defense Lawyers Association

Chris Santoni and Karen Rubin
Ohio Women's Bar Association

Tyresha Brown O'Neal and Donald C. Williams
Norman S. Minor Bar Association

PARTICIPANTS