

King County Democrats 2026 Endorsement Questionnaire – Judge Sean O’Donnell



Candidate name

Sean O'Donnell

Candidate name pronunciation

"Shawn" "Oh Don-ell"

Candidate pronouns

He/Him

PDC Filer_name

Friends for Justice O'Donnell

Campaign phone

206-588-6172

Number we can text or call if we have questions about this form

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Campaign email

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Campaign website

<https://www.odonnellforjustice.com/>

Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/odonnell4judge>

LinkedIn

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/sean-p-o%E2%80%99donnell-418a20b/>

Link to candidate headshot

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1FSXic7EUydQY1jo6Y69R4_qC3hZly7Xv/view?usp=sharing

Campaign manager name

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Jurisdiction of office sought

State Supreme Court

Specific office

Supreme Court, Justice Pos. 4

Does your campaign have a code of conduct for staff and volunteers?

Yes

Will you share a link to your code of conduct?

<https://www.odonnellforjustice.com/campaigncodeofconduct>

Please describe your background (education, employment, community and civic activity, union affiliation and political activity).

I've dedicated my 25-year legal career to public service. I graduated with honors from Georgetown University and Seattle University School of Law. Early in my career, I worked for Attorney General Gregoire. As a King County Prosecutor for 12 years, I handled serious felony matters, including homicides and sexual assaults involving children. I helped prosecute the Green River Killer and I tried the state's first human trafficking case. As a King County Superior Court Judge for 13 years, I have presided over complex criminal, civil, and family law cases. I was named President of the Superior Court Judges' Association, Chief Family Law Judge, Chief Criminal Judge, and Special Inquiry Judge. I am currently the Lead Judge at our Involuntary Treatment Act Court at Harborview. I have been a pro tem justice on the Supreme Court and have co-led branch-wide task forces to increase court security, provide funding for interpreters, and reform bail practices. My values are rooted in compassion, impartiality, following the rule of law, and ensuring our civil liberties are protected.

Please tell us about your proudest accomplishment either through your civic, public and/or community involvement?

As a member of the Green River Task Force, our team prosecuted Gary Ridgway for 49 aggravated murders. That experience sadly confirmed that crime victims, especially from marginalized communities, are often ignored. Many of the murdered young women and girls had been looked down on because they were involved in the commercial sex trade. I have never forgotten the tragedy of their deaths. I am proud of my leadership on pretrial reform, courthouse security, remote jury selection, and video testimony, which expanded access to courts. I livestream some civil cases to give the public more transparency into what is occurring in their courts. In the Montesi case, I upheld Washington's weapons surrender statute against a 2nd Amendment challenge. I ensured firearm surrender hearings continued which resulted in hundreds of guns surrendered to police. In *Bleakney v Providence*, I ruled that Washington's equal pay laws were not preempted by federal law. I have helped lead the judiciary's response to artificial intelligence. I am steadfast that AI must never replace

human judgment. Most of all, I am proud of decisions I made that have helped people resolve their complicated disputes.

What injustices have you perceived, either within or outside the courtroom, and what was your response to those events?

A persistent injustice in our court system is a lack of help for people who can't afford a civil attorney. In family law, litigants appear without counsel and must independently navigate complex proceedings. This happens when their time with their children is at stake. The in court experience of these cases is a far different experience than reading about them. I have seen language access inequities, especially involving small jurisdictions. This is often tied to interpreter funding. Without fully funded interpreter services, litigants will not understand proceedings in which they are participants. This is unacceptable and I have worked to lessen this injustice. I volunteer as a mediator for low-income litigants, mostly in family law matters which can help resolve disputes short of costly litigation. Through my work on statewide committees and with the legislature, I have advocated for interpreter funding, text reminders for criminal defendants, and improved courthouse security. I have supported judicial education that raises awareness of bias in the courtroom. I call it out when it happens in my court or in proceedings over which I am presiding.

What will you do to restore faith in the integrity of the justice system?

Restoring faith in the justice system begins with a collective effort (judges and lawyers) to improve how people are treated in the courtroom. For many people, appearing in court is one of the most important and stressful moments of their lives. Judges must ensure that people are treated with dignity. They must work to explain their decisions in ways that are practical and understandable. People may not agree with an outcome, but they should understand how and why the judge reached it. Clear, well-reasoned rulings grounded in the law are essential to public trust and confidence. I believe judges should help the public and the legal profession better understand how courts work. If elected to the Supreme Court, I will devote time to engaging with students who may become lawyers and with colleagues across the legal community so they can see the efforts being made to improve our justice system. I will invite their participation to help make these

improvements. I have a successful record of collaboration with justice system partners. I will prioritize ensuring that the public's trust in the judiciary is high.

In cases involving “malicious harassment” or hate crimes, what are some of the issues in balancing free speech rights against the need to control offensive activity?

Malicious harassment cases require judges to balance constitutional protections and unlawful conduct. The First Amendment protects speech, even when offensive, but it does not protect threats or violence motivated by bias. Judges must distinguish true threats from statements that are not credible, including situations involving mentally ill litigants. As a prosecutor, I handled hate crimes, the most difficult case involving a young gay man viciously attacked during the Pride Parade. As a judge, I approach cases by carefully applying statutory law, case law and constitutional principles to protect public safety and individuals' rights. I make sure I have a clear understanding of the facts. The central challenge is ensuring that courts do not punish protected speech while also recognizing when conduct crosses the line into criminal behavior. That requires close attention to both the facts and the law. And it means sometimes making hard choices when terrible things have been said. Trial court judges do this, with real people in front of them, regularly. This experience provides excellent context and background when reading about these difficult cases in an appeal.

New technologies like AI and advances in practice are continually changing. How would you approach cases involving novel legal issues or emerging technologies?

My approach to changing technologies is grounded in respect for human dignity and existing law. Although AI seems like an attractive solution, courts must resist it replacing human oversight or the lived experience of a court proceeding. That is a core commitment every judge should make. At the same time, judges can recognize that emerging technologies are already affecting judicial workflow, the quality of briefing, and the kinds of disputes before the courts. AI will continue to raise difficult legal and societal questions, including major concerns about privacy. Through my service on State AI Task Forces, I have helped the bench and legal profession develop guiding principles for responding to this fast-moving technology. Our existing rules, ethical standards, and legal framework provide a strong foundation for addressing these challenges. Courts and

lawyers have done this before, with other major technological advances, without abandoning our values. AI presents serious educational and ethical issues and potential opportunities that will require attention from the judiciary. I am engaged and prepared to help the branch and profession respond thoughtfully.

A 2021 Gender Justice Study of Washington Courts found evidence of many gender inequities. How would you support a criminal justice system that rectifies these historical and systemic inequities?

My support of a justice system that has gender inequities will be to work to eliminate them. Addressing gender inequities requires awareness and action. Judges must ensure that bias plays no role in the courtroom. I have supported this work through judicial education and working with the Superior Court Judges' Association to put more emphasis on recruiting judges from disadvantaged backgrounds to be in leadership positions. I have regularly supported colleagues in their pursuit of greater roles in court leadership. And, I have encouraged data collection on criminal justice matters as a means to evaluate necessary focus areas for improvement. I call out gender bias when I see it. As an example, I recently addressed conduct where a male attorney questioned the competence of female opposing counsel, suggested a lack of empathy because she was not a mother, and treated male attorneys differently. I found that this violated court rules prohibiting gender-based bias. That case reflects a broader truth: bias undermines fairness and public trust. I am not afraid to take active and concrete steps to address bias in the justice system.

Attestation

- The candidate hereby attests that, to the best of their knowledge, the provided information is true and accurate. YES Judge Sean O'Donnell