

King County Democrats 2026 Endorsement Questionnaire

Candidate name

Katharine Edwards

Candidate pronouns

she/her

PDC Filer_name

Katharine Edwards for Judge

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Jurisdiction of office sought

Municipal Court

Specific office

Seattle Municipal Court Judge Position 2

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

No

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

I grew up in Redmond and first walked into SMC as an eighth grader for a school passion project on public defense. That visit shaped my career. I attended Lewis & Clark Law School, where I interned at The Defender Association in Seattle's misdemeanor division. For merely 16 years, I have served as a public defender at King County's Department of Public Defense, representing individuals facing misdemeanors, serious felonies, as well as those involved foster care or involuntary psychiatric hospitalizations. I have tried homicide cases, negotiated treatment alternatives, and spent thousands of hours in courtrooms across Seattle and King County—including Seattle Municipal Court throughout my career. Since 2018, I have served as the supervising attorney in SMC, training and mentoring new attorneys as they embark on their career. I am a member of the WSBA and the WDA. My work has brought me into close contact with community organizations, treatment providers, and social services across the region. Nearly sixteen years of courtroom experience across the full spectrum of criminal cases has given me a deep understanding of how this court works, where it succeeds and where it falls short.

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

Since 2018, I have served as the supervising attorney for new public defenders in King County and SMC specifically. In that role, I have trained and mentored a generation of new attorneys. Put simply, many people entangled in the criminal legal system do not trust people within this system, including public defenders. Because many people start from a place of significant distrust, it can be very difficult to build a meaningful attorney-client relationship. In my supervisory role, my first and primary focus is on how we can build trust, respect, and faith in public defenders and our legal system. This training means understanding how the legal system has historically failed so many of the communities it interacts with. It also means learning principles of nonviolent communication, engaging with individuals from a place of empathy, not judgment, and being continually aware of how your own life experiences and biases subconsciously impact your own behaviors. Establishing faith and trust in public defenders helps communities have faith and trust in our legal system as a whole. I am proud of how I have instilled this training and these principles into a generation of attorneys.

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

In over a decade of practice, I have seen how trauma, poverty, addiction, racism, and lack of access to services shape who ends up in court—and how the court too often fails them. I have represented clients whose mental health crises were treated as criminal matters, whose poverty made them unable to meet bail or comply with conditions, and whose race affected how they were perceived at every stage of the process. My response has been to do the work: to ensure every client is seen as a whole person, to challenge evidence and procedural shortcuts, and to advocate for alternatives to incarceration when appropriate. I have also witnessed a structural problem that troubles me deeply: people held in custody on misdemeanor charges while individuals facing more serious offenses are released to supported services and treatment. This undermines both fairness and rehabilitation. Accountability should fit the offense. The court can do better—and I am running because I believe it must. Justice requires consistency, humility, and the willingness to ask whether what we are doing is actually working.

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

Trust in the justice system is earned through consistency, transparency, and genuine fairness. As a judge, I would earn it by applying legal standards evenly—not selectively. Every person who appears before me would be heard fully and respectfully, regardless

of who they are or what they are charged with. Not only would I make decisions grounded in the actual law, but I would also make decisions grounded in evidence: supporting programs with demonstrated outcomes, demanding real data before mandating participation, and remaining open to innovations supported by practitioners. I also believe proportionality builds trust. When minor charges carry outsized consequences—when accountability does not fit the offense—people lose faith in the system's fairness. Proportional, meaningful accountability is not in conflict with public safety; it reinforces it. And I would ensure every person in my courtroom is treated with dignity—not because dignity is a luxury the court can extend when convenient, but because it is a foundation of legitimate judicial authority. A court that sees the whole person earns the community's trust. That is the court I intend to run.

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?

Hate crime cases present a genuine constitutional tension when the conduct charged is based solely on speech. The 1st Amend. provides broad protection for speech, including speech that is offensive or deeply harmful. But the law also recognizes that targeted conduct—harassment directed at individuals because of their race, religion, sexual orientation, or other protected characteristics—can cross from protected expression into criminal behavior. As a result of this tension, the law related to criminalizing speech is continually changing. As a judge, my role is to apply the law as it stands while remaining attentive to both values at stake. I would evaluate carefully whether the conduct charged meets the statutory definition of the crime, and whether the evidence supports that finding. I would apply 1st Amend. protections rigorously and consistently. At the same time, I would take seriously the real harm caused to individuals and communities targeted because of who they are. These cases require careful attention to the facts, precise legal analysis, and a commitment to applying the law evenhandedly. That is what every defendant and victim in our community deserves.

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

The law has always had to adapt to new technologies and emerging realities. My approach to novel legal issues begins with first principles: What does the applicable statute require? What does the Constitution protect? What does the evidence actually show? I would not allow unfamiliarity with a technology to substitute for legal analysis—nor would I allow novelty to lower the evidentiary and procedural standards

that protect defendants and the public alike. For cases involving AI-generated evidence, digital surveillance, or other emerging technologies, I would rely on expert testimony, consult available legal scholarship, and engage seriously with how courts in other jurisdictions have addressed similar questions. I would remain genuinely open to new approaches when supported by evidence and practitioner expertise—and appropriately skeptical of mandating participation in programs before real outcome data exists. My decade of practice has required continuous learning: new forensic methods, evolving case law, changing best practices. I approach the bench with the same disposition—curious, careful, and committed to getting it right.

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?

This study documented what many practitioners have long observed: gender shapes outcomes in Washington courts in ways that are not consistent with equal justice. As a woman trial attorney and supervisor, I experience first-hand how people react differently to me based on my gender orientation. As a judge, I would examine my own decision-making for implicit bias—particularly in the areas the study identified, including bail determinations, sentencing, and treatment of domestic violence cases. I would support ongoing education on gender equity for myself and court staff. I would apply legal standards evenhandedly, ensuring that gender—like race, class, and other identity factors—does not function as an invisible variable in judicial outcomes. I would be attentive to the ways poverty and lack of access to services intersect with gender to produce unjust results. Many people I have represented have been women whose circumstances—including domestic violence, economic instability, and mental health challenges—brought them into contact with the criminal system. Seeing them fully, and judging their cases on the law and the facts, is the obligation of every judge. I intend to honor it.

Attestation

- The candidate hereby attests that, to the best of their knowledge, the provided information is true and accurate.