

King County Democrats 2026 Endorsement Questionnaire

Candidate name

Heather Barker

PDC Filer_name

Heather Barker, Candidate and Mary Ann Ottinger, Campaign Consultant

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Jurisdiction of office sought

District Court

Specific office

Southeast District Court, Judge Pos.5

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.courts.wa.gov/court_rules/?fa=court_rules.list&group=ga&set=CJC

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

I am a small business owner, attorney, and judge pro tem. Since 2016, I've owned Northwest Community Law, representing owners in association disputes. Condominiums are often an entry point to ownership. Effective legal representation can protect an owner's largest investment while maintaining important neighbor relationships. Before founding my firm, I

practiced at Condominium Law Group and worked in community association management and residential development.

I earned my Juris Doctor from Seattle University School of Law and hold a Bachelor of Arts with Honors in Cultural Anthropology, focused on community structures.

My commitment to community building makes serving as a Judge Pro Tem in King County District Court a natural fit — a community court designed to reduce recidivism through rehabilitation and efficiently resolving civil disputes.

Since 2014 I've volunteered with Washington First Responder Will Clinic, drafting estate planning documents for first responders. From 2024-26 I've presided over YMCA Mock Trials. I volunteered with ISC Gunners & LFCIA as a soccer team manager from 2022-2024 and was co-president of the Children's Garden Pre-School from 2019-2021

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

I am most proud of having consistently volunteered my time to support our criminal justice system at every stage, particularly through my work with the Washington First Responder Will Clinic. Since 2014, I have drafted estate planning documents for first responders and their spouses. This work ensures that firefighters, law enforcement officers, EMTs, and other emergency personnel—individuals who routinely put themselves at personal risk on the front lines of our criminal justice system—have access to essential legal protections.

For many years, I have presided over YMCA mock trials, where I have the privilege of encouraging diverse young people to see themselves with a career in the law. Creating space for students to explore legal careers—and to feel that they belong there—has been especially meaningful to me.

I served on the King County Bar Association's Judicial Candidate Evaluation Committee from 2019 to 2024, including as Co-Chair from 2022 to 2024. There, we were committed to promoting the quality and integrity of the bench.

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

I continue to see women's contributions minimized, in courtrooms, workplaces, and public life. Recently, even our President publicly congratulated the U.S. Men's Hockey team on its gold medal and joked that he would "have to" invite the women's team to the White House as well, despite the women winning gold days earlier against the same national opponent in overtime and being equally decorated with three Olympic gold medals. Comments like that, even in jest, reinforce a culture that diminishes women's achievements.

In the legal profession, I've witnessed subtle, rather than overt, inequities shaped by gendered expectations, disparities in advancement and compensation, and the disproportionate impact of caregiving responsibilities on women's careers. Professional systems were not designed with working parents in mind, where women continue to mostly carry that imbalance.

As a judge pro tem, I work to counter those dynamics in practical ways. I welcome children in my courtroom, make reasonable scheduling accommodations, and ensure every litigant is heard with equal respect. These actions are small, but they affirm dignity and model the fairness our justice system must embody.

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

In King County District Court, faith in the justice system is built one case at a time. There are no published opinions or headlines shaping public perception. Instead, trust is earned in busy courtrooms handling more than 100 matters daily, from infractions and misdemeanors to protection orders and small claims.

For many, this is their first encounter with the judicial system. That single experience will shape their view of its fairness. When litigants struggle with procedural hurdles, such as repeated hearings required to bring a case to a conclusion, confidence can erode. But when a judge listens carefully, treats each person with dignity, and clearly explains the law and the ruling, trust grows, even when the outcome is not in their favor.

Restoring faith in our judiciary is especially vital at this moment. Serving in King County District Court gives me the daily opportunity and responsibility to uphold that trust, a duty I am honored to carry.

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?

In King County District Court, we regularly balance free speech rights with protection from unlawful harassment, particularly on our protection order calendar.

Under RCW 7.105, the Legislature has recognized the distinct and destabilizing harm caused by bias-motivated conduct. In cases involving hate-based acts against a protected class, a single qualifying incident justifies relief where other harassment claims require a course of conduct, defined as two more acts, however short in time. That distinction reflects a legislative judgment that hate-motivated acts can inflict profound fear and harm even if they occur only once.

At the same time, courts must carefully safeguard First Amendment protections. A protection order cannot be based solely on speech that is offensive, inflammatory, or deeply hurtful. The constitutional question is whether the conduct crosses the line into true threats, intimidation, harassment, or other unprotected activity.

Balancing these principles always requires careful judicial analysis.

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

Some new technology issues, such as AI use, are straightforward—for example, ensuring attorneys do not rely blindly on AI, which can misstate holdings, and miscite sources.

Other issues are more complex, such as verifying the credibility and authenticity of evidence in an era when AI can generate highly realistic images or documents. This requires additional expert analysis—increasing litigation costs, and potentially creating access-to-justice issues in otherwise simple cases.

A particularly nuanced question is whether AI-generated statements and reports should be treated like human testimonial evidence—given that AI learns from data and makes judgments—or as mechanical outputs, similar to a breathalyzer or radar gun.

The latter requires only testimony from the witness who prompts the AI. Any novel issue regarding the output would be resolved through computer programmer testimony. Courts would address an output issue in the same way King County District Court recently addressed the novel issue of expired blood vials, confirming correct output.

Treating AI as a declarant, however, could raise significant Sixth Amendment confrontation concerns.

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?

I fully support a criminal justice system that addresses historical and systemic gender inequities. As noted earlier, gender-based disparities remain among the most prevalent injustices I have witnessed both inside and outside the courtroom. Our community must actively work to swing the pendulum toward equality.

The Gender Justice Study identified financial disparity as a key issue. Economic factors surface at every stage of the criminal legal system—from posting bail to paying sentencing fees and probation costs. Historical policies restricting women from owning property, excluding women from financial systems, and promoting discriminatory labor practices created generational wealth gaps that continue to affect our courts today.

No single rule or practice can fully undo decades of policies intertwined with historic discrimination. However, by staying attuned to these economic realities, I can take concrete steps from the bench—such as waiving legal financial obligations for indigent parties under Blazina—which could otherwise perpetuate historic gender-based economic inequality by decreasing access to justice and increasing economic-based sanctions.

Attestation

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

Created on February 24th, 2026.