

King County Democrats 2026 Endorsement Questionnaire

Candidate name
Lindsay Calkins
Candidate name pronunciation
Lin-see Kal-kins
Candidate pronouns
She/Her
PDC Filer_name
Calkins for Judge
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Jurisdiction of office sought

Municipal Court

Specific office

Seattle Municipal Court, Judge Pos. 5

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 graduated from Princeton University with honors. My main research there focused on reproductive health in the Andes. I later attended The University of Chicago Law School, where I was a member of the Law Review and the Civil Rights & Police Accountability Clinic. I published a paper regarding the drug quantity disparity between the punishments for crack and powder cocaine. In addition, I lead Spring Break of Service, an effort that involved taking students to work at the Mississippi Center for Justice to assist clients with the processing of long-overdue assistance from the government following Hurricane Katrina as well as serving as a translator for the Federal Criminal Justice Clinic.

I began my career as an attorney at Washington Appellate Project, handling cases at all levels on behalf of both criminal defendants and parents whose children were in termination and dependency proceedings. I then clerked for The Honorable Betty B. Fletcher of the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. Afterward, I spent several years in commercial litigation practice. In 2019, I opened my own firm, which is devoted to criminal appeals, post-conviction, and resentencing work.

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

My proudest accomplishment in my career has been winning appeals on behalf of my clients. Several are illustrative. In one case, my client was convicted of identity theft for taking mail out of a friend's garbage, but there was no clear intent. In another, the appellate judge conceded that my client had been mischarged after he was convicted of hit-and-run attended—but had been the passenger, not the driver, of the vehicle. In yet another case, the appellate court overturned my client's conviction for DUI after holding that there was no reasonable jury that could have found that there was enough evidence to convict.

These cases make me proud because I believe that the government must be accountable to its people. That is especially true when individual liberty interests are involved. While we all deserve to live in a society that is safe and productive, we all also deserve—and are entitled by the Bill of Rights—to live in a society free of government overreach. It is an honor to be able to untangle a bit of a case that violates that principle.

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

The injustices within our legal system are legion. Many have their roots in economic disparities and systemic barriers to equal justice. However, smaller trends have appeared to me as well. For instance, the order a defendant appears before a judge may have an impact on the amount of patience and attention that individual's case receives. This is the tip of an iceberg that affects our entire society: typically, defendants with private attorneys are called first, and permitted to leave court in misdemeanor cases. If they have jobs or other obligations, they may still have time to attend to them, ensuring that they can continue to earn income and achieve a whole host of positive societal outcomes on that day and with ripple effects going forward. On the other hand, for individuals who are called later in the calendar, and who experience both a judge's fatigue and must miss an entire day of work and/or enlist childcare, the adverse consequences may compound. This is one example of where the mere administration of the court has a real impact on societal equity. As an advocate, I make every attempt to highlight areas that may have been overlooked in busy trial courts.

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

The first pillar of trust is transparency: every courtroom must stay open to all. Sidebars should be extremely curtailed. It is absolutely essential that every plea agreement is knowing, voluntary, and intelligent, even if reaching that understanding requires additional time and resources. Second, consistency is key: like cases must be treated alike. This begins with the law itself but must be followed with attention to analogous cases and those cases' outcomes. Third, and at the same time, every case must be examined for its own facts and distinctions. The principle that undergirds all of this is respect and compassion for every person that enters the courtroom.

I will ask hard questions of both the prosecution and defense, which will help to reduce the perception of "one-sidedness" that often accompanies criminal cases. Too often, attorneys on both sides, who are overworked and are burdened by crushing caseloads, cannot brief out every relevant case. Still, arguing about and analogizing to the law, rather than to whether one particular DUI is "worse" than

another, is usually the stronger way to ensure the perception of fairness. I would attempt to ensure this in my courtroom.

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?

Throughout history, many groups were forced into hiding or underground due to hate speech—in many instances, before violence had yet to be committed. Part of the wisdom of malicious harassment legislation is that it recognizes this truth: that violence often follows when hate speech is not properly identified, named, and addressed.

In my opinion, there is a natural tendency when addressing hate speech and hate crime legislation to cite cases in the past where the contours of the First Amendment were fleshed out, such as cases addressing flag burning or a student’s ability to wear a shirt that read “bong hits for Jesus” to school. Those cases turned less on the offensiveness to the observer and more on actual danger—for example, true threats are not protected any more than yelling “fire!” in a crowded theater.

As we move into the second quarter of the twenty-first century, we must demand more. Not only should traditionally marginalized groups be free from harassment, they should be afforded the same safety, space, and respect as anyone else who is protected by the U.S. and Washington State Constitutions. Beyond this, and most important: everyone must be equal under the law.

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

I currently serve as co-chair of the King County Bar Association Judicial & Litigation Committee. In that role, I had the chance to work with judges and attorneys to prepare and present the 2024 bench-bar conference, which was devoted to the use of AI in the legal profession. Truth be told, much of the information that was presented is likely already obsolete. When it comes to tools like AI that have the ability to both greatly improve efficiency but at the same time be abused, it is important to consult with others in the profession to discover their perspectives and the reasons for them. Unfortunately, judges have needed to sanction practitioners in our area (and many jurisdictions around the country) due to the unethical use of AI in legal briefing. I believe that honest and open communication about the challenges that these technologies present can lead to solutions that, while not perfect, are workable as we collectively adapt to and confront this moving target. Many bar associations are working on crafting guidelines that are helpful but need to be monitored as AI continues to evolve. I would continue to work collaboratively on this and other novel issues.

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?

With regard to court staff, there are at least three practical approaches that I would take to this multifaceted problem. The first is being a trusted individual that any member of court staff could and would feel comfortable to when facing an issue of harassment. This begins with mutual respect—the feeling that no individual, no matter what his or her title, is above or below anyone else. The second approach would be to ensure that there were guidelines in place that were up-to-date, consistent with other courts in the region, and widely displayed and available. Any investigation into violation of those guidelines should be handled by a neutral third party and any resulting recommendations followed.

With regard to women in the courtroom, I believe that representation is extremely important. I was mentored by a wonderful woman judge who also had multiple children. The fact that she could, and was, doing it gave me the feeling that it might also be possible for me. Currently, I work with students as a judge for mock trial competitions at UW; we give feedback and answer questions following the rounds. I hope to continue doing this work on the bench.

Attestation

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