

King County Democrats 2026 Endorsement Questionnaire

Candidate name

Colleen Melody

PDC Filer_name

Retain Justice Melody

Campaign phone

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

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Campaign manager name

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Jurisdiction of office sought

State Supreme Court

Specific office

Supreme Court, Justice Pos. 1

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 received my JD and undergraduate degrees from the University of Washington. During law school I worked for the Innocence Project NW legal clinic and the King County Department of Public Defense. I served as the associate editor-in-chief for the Washington Law Review and on committees with the Washington Supreme Court's Access to Justice Board. After law school, I clerked for Judge Ronald Gould on the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals and served as a Trial Attorney in the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice. In 2015, I was asked to build the Civil Rights Division for the Washington State Attorney General's Office. Over the next decade of work we turned our fledgling civil rights enforcement team into one of the strongest programs in the country. I am proud to have held the Trump Administration accountable for its immoral policy of separating children from their parents at the border, beating the NW Detention

Center at trial to stop its abusive practice of paying detained workers just \$1/day to run the facility, standing up for pregnant workers whose rights were flouted by their employers, and defending farmworkers who were subjected to wage theft and harassment.

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

Without question, building the Civil Rights Division of the Washington State Attorney General's office from the ground is my proudest accomplishment. At the heart of that work is enforcing the rights of all Washingtonians, and particularly members of marginalized communities whose rights are abused by powerful companies and government entities. We made it our mission to build deep relationships of trust and credibility with communities across the State and to choose cases that private law firms would not pursue. In doing that, we took on cases against Fortune 100 companies, special interest groups, and the Federal government. From trial courts in every corner of our state to the U.S. Supreme Court, we stood firm for the rule of law and all of our rights. Many of these cases required years of investigation, litigation, appeals, and often required complex and novel legal analysis to ultimately protect people's rights. I'm most proud of developing this creative, skilled, and diverse team and to have built a division whose culture is to be unafraid of tough fights and that worked tirelessly to make a positive difference in communities across Washington.

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

All of my civil rights cases were in response to discrimination and injustice: those issues remain as pervasive as they've ever been and I've spent my career fighting them. Within the legal system itself, issues of access to justice pervade every level of our legal system. Barriers to access to justice are layered, with many people experiencing multiple roadblocks to accessing justice. This include the high cost of filing fees and attorneys' fees, the length of legal proceedings, a lack of physical and language access, and the very real risk of retaliation against people who assert their rights. As a lawyer, I brought several cases seeking to improve access to the courts, challenging civil immigration arrests at courthouses, lack of interpreter services, court fines and fees imposed on poor people contrary to law, and lack of physical and technological access for people with disabilities. Since my appointment to the Court, I asked the Chief Justice to add me to the Washington Supreme Court's Rules Committee. In this role, I evaluate existing and proposed court rules that may affect meaningful access to the civil and criminal justice systems, with a goal of improving access.

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

In a moment where we are seeing unprecedented attacks on our rights and democratic institutions, the Washington Supreme Court plays an indispensable role in ensuring that state courts—regardless of what is happening in the federal court system—serve our state with transparency, efficiency, credibility, and the highest of ethical standards. My goals are simple: to uphold the rights of all Washingtonians with integrity and fairness. My court, as the highest court with administrative responsibility for the judicial branch, has a unique role to ensure Washington is a safer and more just place for everyone. I believe:

Courts must safeguard Washington's independence and longstanding protection of individual and constitutional rights, including in the workplace, at school, and in healthcare.

Everyone deserves to be safe and free from violence, harassment, or discrimination. Crime victims and discrimination victims deserve dignity, respect, and safety.

Our Courts are a cornerstone of our democracy and must be transparent and accessible to everyone.

Judges are public servants. They must listen, work hard, and approach each case with impartiality and humility.

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?

At the Civil Rights Division, we regularly navigated the interplay between free speech rights and the rights of Washingtonians to be free from discrimination and hate speech that threatens their safety. Ultimately, the First Amendment protects speech, even when offensive, but it does not protect threats, harassment, discrimination, or violence. When criminal conduct is motivated by bias then local, state, and federal law considers the offense more seriously. We regularly collaborated with federal, state, and local partners who were investigating hate incidents, including helping them build relationships of trust with individuals and groups who were wary of trusting the police. There is so much more we need to do to ensure that law enforcement, prosecutors, judges and juries understand how to approach conduct that is motivated by a person’s hateful biases. These kinds of cases are often extremely difficult to prosecute precisely because of that lack of education. At the same time, the expression of political and policy views that some people may find offensive is not criminal, and I am concerned with efforts by governments to classify non-threatening speech as criminal conduct.

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

AI and novel legal issues from emerging technologies present significant new opportunities for access to justice, and also pose major risks for misuse and abuse. These issues are some of the most difficult challenges that this court will deal with over the coming years. At the core of our approach to these complex issues should be respect for human dignity, the need for the public to trust that judges (and not robots) are making the decisions that affect their lives, and constitutional protections for privacy. Judges have an obligation to learn as much as they can about new technologies including taking training and other continuing education from experts in emerging technology. We are doing that at the Supreme Court, including participating in workgroups convened by the National Center for State Courts, participating in Stanford University’s AI & Access to Justice Initiative, hiring technical specialists for key staff positions, developing and refining model policies, and coordinating with judges and practitioners statewide to compare notes and learn from each other.

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 read the 2021 Gender Justice Study when it came out in September 2021 and found the conclusions frustrating, though not surprising. I know from my civil rights work that gender impacts justice-system access, especially when compounded by race, LGBTQ+ status, and poverty. When I joined the Supreme Court, I asked Chief Justice Stephens to appoint me to the Gender & Justice Commission and she did. We have much work to do.

In terms of the criminal justice system specifically, we need reforms to reduce the gender-influenced burdens on parties, witnesses, and jurors. This includes fully funding public defense, increasing juror pay and witness stipends to offset the expense of transportation and missed work, and improved childcare supports. I will advocate for those as part of the Board for Judicial Administration’s legislative advocacy program. I will also continue to support SB 5133, which would make a criminal defendant’s status as a primary caregiver a mitigating factor in felony sentencing.

Attestation

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

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