



alaska judicial council

510 L Street, Suite 450, Anchorage, Alaska 99501-1295 (907) 279-2526 FAX (907) 276-5046
<http://www.ajc.state.ak.us> E-mail: postmaster@ajc.state.ak.us

Press Release

June 10, 2014

The Alaska Judicial Council Recommends that Alaskans Vote “**YES**” to Retain Thirteen Judges on the Ballot in 2014 and that Alaskans Vote “**NO**” Against Retaining Palmer District Court Judge William Estelle.

Alaskan voters will decide whether 14 judges should serve another term in office in the general election on November 4, 2014. To help voters make informed decisions about judges on the ballot, the Alaska Judicial Council has evaluated each of the judges standing for retention. The Public and Attorney members of the Alaska Judicial Council unanimously make the following recommendations to the voters.

Vote “**YES**” to retain

The Alaska Judicial Council unanimously recommends that Alaskans vote “**Yes**” to retain these thirteen judges on the ballot in 2014:

- Supreme Court Justice Craig F. Stowers;
- Superior Court Judge Louis James Menendez, Juneau (First Judicial District);
- District Court Judge Kevin G. Miller, Ketchikan (First Judicial District);
- Superior Court Judge Paul Roetman, Kotzebue (Second Judicial District);
- Superior Court Judge Andrew Guidi, Anchorage (Third Judicial District);
- Superior Court Judge Gregory Miller, Anchorage (Third Judicial District);
- District Court Judge Jo-Ann M. Chung, Anchorage (Third Judicial District);
- District Court Judge Brian K. Clark, Anchorage (Third Judicial District);
- District Court Judge Gregory Motyka, Anchorage (Third Judicial District);
- District Court Judge Stephanie Rhoades, Anchorage (Third Judicial District);
- District Court Judge Sharon A.S. Illsley, Kenai (Third Judicial District);
- District Court Judge John W. Wolfe, Palmer (Third Judicial District); and
- District Court Judge Ben Seekins, Fairbanks (Fourth Judicial District).

Vote “NO” against retention

The Alaska Judicial Council unanimously recommends that Alaskans in the Third Judicial District vote “No” against retention of the following judge:

- District Court Judge William L. Estelle, Palmer (Third Judicial District).

➤The Council recommends a “No” vote on Judge Estelle because he filed 16 untrue affidavits under oath, from September 2011 through February 2013, swearing that he had completed or issued decisions in all matters that had been pending before him for more than six months, when in fact he had not completed those decisions.

➤Because he signed the untrue affidavits swearing that he had no decisions or uncompleted matters outstanding for more than six months, Judge Estelle continued to receive his salary on time, contrary to state law that prohibits a judge from being paid on time if the judge has undecided matters outstanding for longer than six months.¹

➤The Judicial Council concluded that by filing the 16 untrue affidavits, Judge Estelle failed to conduct himself in a manner that promotes public confidence in the integrity and competence of the judiciary.

The Alaska Judicial Council is an independent citizens’ commission established in Article IV of Alaska’s constitution. The members include three non-attorneys who are appointed by the governor and confirmed by the legislature and three attorneys who are appointed by the Alaska Bar Association Board of Governors. By seniority they are:

- Kathleen Tompkins-Miller, public member from Fairbanks;
- Julie Willoughby, attorney member from Juneau;
- Ken Kreitzer, public member from Juneau;
- Aimee Oravec, attorney member from Fairbanks;
- Dave Parker, public member from Wasilla; and
- Jim Torgerson, attorney member from Anchorage. Mr. Torgerson did not participate in the discussion, decision, or vote on Judge Estelle to avoid a conflict of interest.

The Council members volunteer their time and serve staggered six year terms. The Chief Justice of the Alaska Supreme Court presides as chair ex officio, and only votes when his or her vote can change the result.

The Alaska Judicial Council conducts an in-depth evaluation of the judicial performance of each judge standing for retention. For its recommendations this year, the Judicial Council evaluated

¹ Attached is the affidavit form that all judges use every pay period.

the 14 judges' legal ability, impartiality and fairness, integrity, temperament, diligence, and overall performance. To obtain this information the Judicial Council:

- surveyed thousands of Alaskans including peace and probation officers, court employees, attorneys, jurors, social workers and guardians ad litem;
- solicited specific feedback from attorneys who appeared before the judges in recent cases;
- reviewed ratings and observations of the Alaska Judicial Observers, independent community-based volunteers;
- Tracked how often a judge was disqualified from presiding over a case and how often a trial judge was affirmed or reversed on appeal;
- examined any civil or criminal litigation involving the judge; APOC and court system conflict-of-interest statements filed by a judge; any disciplinary files or actions involving the judge; and whether a judge's paycheck was withheld for an untimely decision;
- listened to court proceedings, and interviewed judges, attorneys, court staff, and others as necessary;
- solicited feedback from the public about judges on its website and held a statewide public hearing.

The Alaska Judicial Council publicizes more information about the performance of judges than any other judicial evaluation in the country.

Alaskan voters can learn more about the Alaska Judicial Council's evaluation of judges by visiting the Council's website at: <http://www.ajc.state.ak.us/>.

The State of Alaska's Official Elections Pamphlets, published by the Division of Elections in October, will include the Council's recommendations and summaries of the Council's evaluations.