

# **MIAMI-DADE JUDGES VOTER GUIDE**

## **Circuit Court**

**LODY JEAN**

**ROBERT WATSON**

**ARIEL RODRIGUEZ**

**JASON EDWARD BLOCH**

## **County Court**

**FRED SERAPHIN**

**JEFFREY KOLOKOFF**

**SCOTT JANOWITZ**

**Circuit Court Group 3:**  
**Lody Jean v. Teressa Maria Cervera**



Judge Lody Jean is the first Haitian-American woman Judge in Miami Dade County. Many speculate this made her a sitting target for Tessa Tylman, who's using her married name, Teressa Maria Cervera, on the ballot.

Setting name games aside, Tylman has avoided most Judicial Forums (including one we co-hosted with many other groups last week) like a non-Covid plague. We heard she spoke at the Tuesday Morning Breakfast Club's Circuit Court Judicial Forum and found a video from the event. Compared to Jean, she comes off as a lightweight. Lawyers should be terrified she could don a judicial robe and be entrusted to make important decisions that impact lives.

That's probably why Miami attorneys are filling the coffers for Jean's campaign and a whopping 87% voted her more qualified than her opponent in the Miami-Dade Bar's just-released Judicial Poll. Lawyers want smart, impartial, experienced, and well-spoken judges. Jean, who was vetted through the JNC's rigorous screening process and appointed to County Court before being promoted to Circuit Court, fits the bill.

Tylman doesn't. She's also taken the support of the anti-Roe, anti-Obergefell (same-sex marriage) Christian Family Coalition (CFC), which a former Republican politician described as "the least Christian group there is." Nope!

**We recommend Lody Jean**

**Circuit Court Group 20:**  
**Robert Watson v. Brenda Guerrero**



Judge Robert Watson comes off as a brilliant guy, which is likely how he was appointed to fill not one but two judicial vacancies, “a grueling process that speaks well of most jurists,” as described by the Miami Herald. His experience and educational credentials are top-notch: Georgetown, Stanford Law, Fulbright Scholar, and US Attorney’s office as a federal prosecutor, before he was appointed to County Court and then promoted to Circuit Court.

Watson is known to be smart, fair, and good, but stern to a fault. That seems to be pretty common among relatively new judges navigating running a courtroom. But lawyers tend to be satisfied with how he runs his courtroom and 74% of lawyers in the Miami Dade Judicial Bar Poll voted him “most qualified” in his election against his opponent.

Brenda Guerrero is an experienced attorney. But some folks who had donated to her campaign or planned to vote for her said they were unimpressed with her performance at judicial forums and switched their vote.

We note that the Miami Herald scrutinized candidate’s trial records in terms of bench trials, jury trials, and evidentiary hearings, but accepted Guerrero saying she has done 1,500 trials. Her website says she did most of those trials at Child Support Enforcement, which we understand means brief hearings before a hearing officer, not a judge or jury, against mostly *pro se* parties. That kind of courtroom experience doesn’t necessarily translate to adjudicating a bench trial or overseeing a jury trial.

**We recommend Robert Watson**

**Circuit Court Group 34:  
Mark Blumstein v. Ariel Rodriguez**



This is the toughest race because neither candidate is that impressive.

Many lawyers told us that Judge Mark Blumstein deserved a challenger and noted as a judge, his rulings have been reversed more than any other candidate. As the Miami Herald further noted, the number is dwarfed by the seriousness of his legal errors. Some lamented they wished he drew a more qualified challenger. Others said they feared future challengers will be emboldened if yet another challenger with a Hispanic surname ousts an incumbent judge without one. 6 of 7 contested races on the ballot feature this exact scenario.

The general consensus is that Ariel Rodriguez is a nice guy and a good lawyer. Lawyers tell us they are willing to give him a chance because they figure he can't be worse than the status quo and could turn out to be pretty good. Our vote was not unanimous, but did tip in favor of Rodriguez.

In a 2016 poll of lawyers regarding judicial hopefuls, less than half rated Blumstein as qualified. In last week's Miami Dade Bar poll, these two literally tied when lawyers were asked to choose who is more qualified. That sounds about right. #SomethingNew may be a winning slogan in this race.

**We recommend Ariel Rodriguez**

**Circuit Court Group 52:**  
**Oscar Rodriguez-Fonts v. Jason Bloch**



Voters should be relieved they have the opportunity to replace Judge Oscar Rodriguez-Fonts with Jason Bloch, a former Judge whose last stint on the bench was via the rigorous appointment process. Lawyers confirm Bloch is the better choice. In a previous poll of lawyers asked to rate judges and judicial candidates, Bloch received more than twice as many votes of being “exceptionally qualified” than Rodriguez-Fonts did.

Multiple attorneys told us that Rodriguez-Fonts doesn’t like to try cases or work hard. Meanwhile, since leaving the bench, Bloch has devoted his legal practice to representing folks who cannot afford lawyers for free.

Bloch says 100% of his rulings when he was a Judge from 2014-2017 were affirmed on appeal. We checked and that’s correct. Rodriguez-Fonts said at a forum he was “virtually” never overturned on appeal and told the Miami Herald it was only 3.5 times. A records search revealed that number is more than double, at 8 reversals/remand. That lack of candor is concerning.

Rodriguez-Fonts was the only candidate at the forum we co-hosted to interrupt his opponent’s speech.

That Jason Bloch was the only challenger to be voted more qualified than the sitting Judge by fellow attorneys in last week’s Miami-Dade Bar Judicial Poll seals the deal.

**We recommend Jason Bloch**



**THE CFC CONTROVERSY: We question how Rodriguez-Fonts could give the appearance of being fair to everyone, when he attended and spoke at an event that was an open celebration of political victories.**



News broke that in late June, Rodriguez-Fonts gave a speech at an overtly political event. Although long-planned as a Legislative Victory breakfast to celebrate Florida's abortion ban and the Parental Rights in Education bill, aka the Don't Say Gay bill, it turned into a Judicial Victory breakfast of Roe v. Wade being overturned.

The Code of Judicial Conduct mandates that: "A judge shall refrain from inappropriate political activity and must avoid all appearance of impropriety." Yet Rodriguez-Fonts refuses to acknowledge he was wrong to be there and give a speech; meanwhile, the Herald reported none of Miami's other 125+ judges even attended.

The CFC accuses teachers of "grooming students to be homosexual" and opposes same-sex marriage and abortion rights. They were strong backers of Rodriguez-Fonts in 2016 and again in 2022. He is their guy. He is not ours. We deserve better. Again, we recommend Jason Bloch.

**County Court Group 5:**  
**Fred Seraphin v. Renier Diaz de la Portilla**



Renier Diaz de la Portilla is a career politician who doesn't deserve to get anywhere near being a Judge. Judge Fred Seraphin is likely to retire after this or his next term when age limits require him to retire. When that happens, voters are entitled to a healthy competition between qualified candidates competing in an empty seat. That isn't this term.

The Diaz de la Portilla family is flooding mailboxes with misleading smear flyers against Seraphin. Even the lawyer they quoted, Maritza Altman Glatzer (who had choice words about Fred Seraphin in 2015 after appearing in his courtroom, and who supervised Diaz de La Portilla at the Public Defender's office) has publicly voiced her 100% support for Seraphin. Diaz de la Portilla has also avoided most judicial forums, as has his fellow Christian Family Coalition buddy, Tessa Tylman a.k.a. Teressa Maria Cervera.

Seraphin also came out far ahead in the Miami-Dade Judicial Bar Poll, and voters should consider who lawyers want to bring their cases and clients before.

**We recommend Fred Seraphin**

**County Court Group 19:**  
**Jeffrey Kolokoff v. Lissette de la Rosa**



The comments during our judicial forum were that Judge Jeffrey Kolokoff was the most qualified and impressive candidate of all 12 who spoke. It should be no surprise he passed the rigorous vetting of the Judicial Nominating Commission to earn his seat.

He's also another white man, albeit Jewish like Janowitz, not openly gay like Watson, who is targeted by a Hispanic woman attorney. There is not a single reason that Kolokoff should not be promptly elected to keep his seat, and upon a vacancy, immediately elevated to Circuit Court or the Third District Court of Appeal.

His opponent, Lissette de la Rosa, made little impression at the judicial forum we co-hosted and others we watched. She hasn't earned many endorsements either and it seems the scope of her legal experience and practice areas is mostly limited to representing insurance companies.

We were impressed with the breadth of Kolokoff's legal experience before becoming a Judge, and the seriousness with which he approaches his judicial responsibilities in presiding over mental health diversion cases.

Kolokoff received overwhelming support in last week's Miami Dade Bar Judicial Poll and has dominated in endorsements, including UTD, SAVE, League of Prosecutors, the Miami Herald, and many others.

**We recommend Jeffrey Kolokoff**



**County Court Group 42:**  
**Scott Janowitz v. Alicia Garcia Priovolous**



This race is the opposite of the quandary presented by the Blumstein/Rodriguez race. These are two very qualified candidates who have the utmost respect from their fellow lawyers, though lawyers gave Janowitz the nod as being more qualified than Garcia Priovolous in the Miami-Dade Bar Judicial Poll.

They were both impressive in our judicial forum but we concluded Janowitz is the better choice. When most judges identified affordable housing as the biggest crisis facing Miami-Dade County residents, Janowitz is doing something about it. He has taken the reigns of the County Civil division and created a landlord-tenant portal, which permits swift access to justice for an often underserved community.

Garcia Priovolous took the endorsement from the CFC, while Janowitz was taken to task for being a member of the Federalist Society. Both were chalked up by forum attendees as careerists after both admitted those moves were done to advance their careers or boost their election chances.

We can't in good faith recommend anyone who would ask for and take the support of the CFC, agree to their rules to accept their endorsement, and be willing to appear on their "Voter Guide" with the disgusting and discriminatory criteria they list to evaluate candidates. Although we suspect Garcia Priovolous has a real shot of winning, we encourage folks to vote for Janowitz.

**We recommend Scott Janowitz**

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**\*MIAMI-DADE JUDICIAL VOTING GUIDE FOR CIRCUIT & COUNTY COURT:** Our voting guide team all attended a Judicial Candidate Forum we co-hosted with many other groups; watched several other judicial candidate forums; read League of Women Voter candidate questionnaires; reviewed the Daily Business Review candidate profiles; reviewed the Miami Herald recommendations and multiple other voter guides and endorsement lists; reviewed candidate websites and social media; checked candidate's public donor/expenditure reports; reviewed judicial poll results from different bar associations; interviewed many lawyers and folks who attended our forum; and much more.\*

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**\*We note that much is made from folks of the DeSantis/Scott/Bush appointments to fill judicial vacancies pending the next election. Some believe this means a Judge is conservative and depending on their political beliefs, this determines their votes either for or against the judge. We don't think it is that simple. We've determined these appointments aren't political (unlike, say, appointments to the Florida Supreme Court) and only the most qualified lawyers are appointed to be a trial judge. Every lawyer nominated by the Judicial Nominating Commission to fill a judicial vacancy in the last 20+ years was appointed by a Republican governor...for obvious and unfortunate reasons. 🙄 That includes 6 of the 7 judicial races: Lody Jean, Robert Watson, and Jason Bloch in Circuit Court, and Fred Seraphin, Jeffrey Kolokoff, and Scott Janowitz in County Court. The JNC includes lawyers chosen by the Florida Bar Board of Governors. Their process is serious. It's a 70+ page application. The JNC contacts lawyers they had cases against and judges they had cases before. They undergo grueling interviews. Our independent analysis led us to recommend all 6.\***

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