

1. What do you consider to be the most important issue before the court today?

The most important issue before the court today is access to justice which can be limited by several factors such as absence of representation, language and cultural barriers, and limited technology which can all result as a matter of budgetary restrictions. While the Judicial Branch is equal to the other two branches of government being the Legislative and Executive Branches, the Judicial Branch receives the least amount of funding. Even though there are efforts underway to seek engagement of the community to help fill these gaps such as forming non-traditional partnerships to help provide services, it is still important that the Judicial Branch is recognized as an equal branch to receive more appropriate funding.

2. Explain to our readers why the North Carolina Court of Appeals is so important?

The North Carolina Court of Appeals is the first level of the appellate courts reviewing appeals from the Superior and District Courts as well as appeals from administrative agencies. This is the Court that will literally make the final determination for most cases as this is where most appeals are determined with many fewer that are heard by the Supreme Court. Because these decisions rendered by the Court of Appeals will have significant impact on people's lives throughout the state for long period of times, it is critical that trial court judges who actually understand that impact sit on the Court of Appeals.

3. Why should citizens of North Carolina vote for you to sit on the Court of Appeals?

North Carolina deserves judges who are experienced, fair, committed and respected. Having been reared in rural eastern North Carolina and practiced for 14 years in eastern, middle and urban western North Carolina in criminal and civil areas of law at the state and federal court levels, I have gained varied legal experience as well as broadening analytical and research and writing skills. I have presided in District Court for 18 years over thousands of the very types of cases heard by the Court of Appeals "seeing faces and not just cases" and have been recognized and respected by judges/attorneys and the community alike for my demonstrated fairness, judicial demeanor and integrity, high competency, outstanding judicial leadership and exceptional commitment to the community. Additionally, I train judges at the local, state, national and international levels and am the only judge from North Carolina on the leadership team designing curriculum and developing the protocols and best practices as faculty with the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ). As such, I am exceptionally and uniquely qualified to serve on the North Carolina Court of Appeals.

4. What is one area you want to affect or change as a member of the North Carolina Court of Appeals?

While it has taken time and development of trust and support from others, I will pursue the appellate judges participating in efforts like Race Matters for Juvenile Justice to understand and confront implicit bias as the trial judges now have begun to participate. Clearly, there is implicit and sometimes explicit bias in the Justice System with stakeholders and even judges being "gatekeepers." That is why at the appellate level it is also critically important that the judges and stakeholders there also acknowledge the existence and intentionally participate in programs and advance tools which address the implicit/explicit bias which will create a more effective and just system.