



**WEST LA DEMOCRATIC CLUB APPLICATION
FOR CONSIDERATION OF ENDORSEMENT
AND CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE**

JUSTIN CLAYTON

Election Information

Election Date: **June 2, 2026**

Complete Name of Office Sought
Court Judge Office No. 65

District/Seat Number: **Los Angeles County Superior**

I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of California that I am a registered Democrat and that the statements in this document and those in any attachments are true and correct. If any part of this application or any information provided during the endorsement process is found to be false, it may be cause for an immediate revocation of any endorsement. I understand that my application is available to any WLADC member upon request.

Sign

idate

Justin Allen Clayton

Print Full Name

04/21/2026

Date

West LA Democratic Club understands that, as a judge, you have to remain impartial and follow the law, regardless of your particular beliefs. Some of the questions we ask you pertain to your personal beliefs and not how you would rule as a judge who is beholden to applying the law. It is understood by everyone in this committee that sometimes your personal beliefs and the law do not coincide and your answers in this committee do not commit you if you should happen to rule otherwise in a case.

Please provide written answers to the questions below:

1. Why are you running for this office?

After more than a decade as a public defender, I've seen the system from the inside: how decisions are made, where it works, and where it falls short. I've handled everything from misdemeanors to serious felony and life cases, stood next to clients at their most vulnerable, and tried cases in front of juries. That kind of experience doesn't just teach the law-it builds judgment.

I am running because I understand that a judge's role isn't just to apply the law, but to do so fairly, consistently, and with an appreciation for the real-life consequences of each decision. I've seen how bail, diversion, sentencing, and courtroom management impact not just defendants, but families and communities.

I am also running because I've already demonstrated a commitment to service beyond the courtroom-through community outreach, youth engagement, and programs like expungement clinics. That shows I don't see justice as confined to a courtroom, but as something that should be accessible and equitable.

At its core, my candidacy is about bringing experience, fairness, and perspective to the

bench-someone who knows the stakes, respects the law, and treats every person who comes into the courtroom with dignity.

2. What is your preliminary rating from the LA County Bar Association? Qualified

3. Briefly describe your educational and employment background.

Education: Thomas Jefferson School of Law J.D., June 2011 Activities: Black Law Student Association Mock Trial Los Angeles County Office of the Public Defender, Law Clerk San Diego County Office of the Public Defender, Law Clerk

University of New Mexico B.A., in Criminology, Minor in History, June 2006 Activities: Football

Employment: Los Angeles County Office of the Public Defender
Deputy Public Defender III, Deputy in Charge, June 2023- Present

As the Deputy in Charge of the Los Angeles County Office of the Public Defender's Inglewood branch I supervise, consult, and train misdemeanor and felony attorneys about case preparation and trial strategy. I consult with subordinates regarding conflicts of interest and client's competence to stand trial. I am a working supervisor that conducts arraignments and appear on client's behalf at preliminary hearings and other pre and post-trial hearings. I address public inquiries and work with justice partners to assure court efficiency. I regularly meet with judicial officers to address court business like, court hours, inmate transportation, court procedure, and community outreach.

Los Angeles County Office of the Public Defender
Deputy Public Defender I-III, December 2014- June 2023

Represent juveniles and adults in a broad spectrum of criminal cases, ranging from misdemeanors to serious felonies. I provide comprehensive legal counsel to clients, ensuring they understand their rights, the legal process, and their options at every stage of their case. Tried over 35 jury trials and adjudications and handled more than 50 life cases.

- 4. Have you previously run for or held any elective or appointive public offices? If so, which and when? Have you run for a judicial seat before? If so, please state when, the result, and any ratings you received from any bar associations. I ran for Los Angeles City Counsel, District #9, in 2013. I have not run for a judicial seat.**
- 5. Are you a bench officer? If yes, please identify the position you currently hold. No**
- 6. Have you ever been disciplined for a breach of ethics or unprofessional conduct including sanctions required to be reported to the California State Bar by any court, administrative agency, bar association, disciplinary committee, or another professional group? If so, please give particulars. No**
- 7. List the five most significant cases in which you have been involved during your legal career and the nature of your involvement. Alternatively, if your practice does**

not involve litigation, describe the five most significant matters in which you have been involved during your legal career and the nature of your involvement. If currently a judge, list the five most significant matters with which you were involved prior to your appointment.

a. The People of the State of California V. Dontee Green

XCNBA469369

Criminal Case.

Client was charged with Murder.

September 20, 2021-March 17, 2022

I represented the defendant.

Proved client acted in self-defense. The murder charge was dismissed and client admitted to unlawful possession of a firearm.

This case is significant because my client avoided a life sentence without a jury trial.

b. The People of the State of California v. Raymond Graham

Los Angeles Superior Court, Long Beach Branch

Criminal Case

Client charged with violating a protective order

September 26, 2016

I represented the defendant.

Jury Trial- Not Guilty Verdict

This case is significant because my client was a reformed gang member. We've kept in touch, and he reminds me of the impact our trial had on his life. He has not had a criminal case after our trial.

c. The People of the State of California v. Lema Wordofa

LACSCA08307

Criminal Case

LAMC 71.02- Taking a cash fare without a license

04/17/2015-06/12/2015

I represented the Defendant

Jury Trial- Not Guilty Verdict.

This case is significant because it is my first experience with government influence in a private case. The Department of transportation performed a planned operation to get my client to take a cash fare as an Uber Driver, in violation of LAMC 71.02. Mr. Wordofa avoided immigration consequences and was able to keep his job as an Uber driver.

a. The People of the State of California v. Carlos Loera

NJ29169

Criminal Case

243d Battery Causing Serious Bodily Injury

12/11/2018-03/06/2018

I represented the defendant

Case Dismissed

This case is significant because I learned the power of further investigation. I was able to prove my client was not the suspect because I found an attendance record that showed he was at school at the time the crime occurred. My Juvenile client was able to keep his record clean.

b. The People of the State of California v. Erick
Holder XCNBA475908
Los Angeles Superior Court, Criminal Courts Building
June 2, 2022
Criminal Case
Client was charged with murder
Jury Trial- Guilty Verdict
I represented the defendant

This case is significant because it was a high-profile media case. I was able to observe how the court handled cameras and journalists in the courtroom. I was able to assure Mr. Holder's rights were not violated as a consequence of it being a high-profile case.

8. **If elected, people from disparate educational and socio-economic backgrounds are likely to appear before your court.**
 - a. **How important is it to you that any of these members of the public have a basic understanding of the proceedings in your court?** High Priority
 - b. **Practically speaking, why do you think this is or is not important?** It is extremely important that all parties have a basic understanding of the proceedings so they can make informed decisions.
 - c. **What steps would you take to make sure that lay-people who appear before your court fully understand the proceedings?** Step 1, Explain the roles of all involved in the case (plaintiff/prosecution, Defense, Court, Bailiff, Judicial Assistant, Court Reporter). Step 2, give a broad overview of timing and what to expect in the case. Step 3, ask if we have an understanding. Step 4, Ask if there are any questions. Step 5, refer the person to legal aid or third party programs that can assist with questions.
 - d. **Do you believe the answers to these previous questions vary at all depending on if you're dealing with criminal defendants versus civil litigants versus jurors and other non-party members of the public?** As stated above, a clear understanding is important for all parties in any case, however, a court should be extremely aware of a criminal defendant's understanding of proceedings because their liberty is at stake.
9. **Please list your top five (5) individual and organizational endorsements.** Los Angeles County Democratic Party, Avance Democratic Party, Culver City Democratic Party, Judge Allen Webster, and Judge Mark Arnold.
10. **How long have you been a registered Democrat? Have you been registered as a member of another political party? If so, which party and why?** I registered as a democrat on my 18th Birthday. I have never been registered as a member of another political party.
11. **Please list any organizations you are a member of, including the length of your membership and any leadership positions you have held in each organization.**
Name: California Bar Association
From: June 1, 2012- present
Details: N/A

Name: California Public Defenders Association

From: January 1, 2015- present

Details: N/A

Name: National Association for Public Defenders

From: January 1, 2015- present

Details: N/A

Name: Los Angeles County Black Public Defenders Association

From: January 1, 2015- present

Details: President Elect September 1, 2019- September 1, 2022

President: September 1, 2023- January 1, 2026

Treasurer: January 1, 2026-Present

12. Please feel free to include any other information you would like us to know about you.

Both sets of my grandparents migrated to California from the southern United States in the 1920s, settling in South Central Los Angeles and joining the working class. I was raised in that same community, in a two-parent household grounded in the values of education, hard work, and service to others. My father, a salesman, modeled tireless work ethic and perseverance. My maternal grandmother, a teacher, deeply valued education-so much so that she jokingly dismissed my athletic scholarship as a "dummy scholarship," reminding me that academic achievement was paramount. Education was a central value in my home, and my mother made sacrifices to ensure I had access to the best opportunities.

Although we lived in South Central, she had me bused to Pacific Palisades for high school because it offered better academic programs, more financial resources, and a safer learning environment than the neighborhood schools. This decision exposed me to vastly different socio-economic realities and educational experiences, and it reinforced the lesson that education is both a tool for advancement and a shield against systemic inequality. It also showed me the lengths a parent will go to ensure their child's success-a lesson that stays with me in every juvenile or family case I handle.

My mother served as a rehabilitation counselor with the California Department of Rehabilitation, where she worked with formerly incarcerated and disabled individuals to support their reentry into society through employment, education, and housing. Our dinner table conversations often revolved around her efforts to uplift and empower her clients. From her, I learned the importance of public service and recognizing the humanity in all people. These early lessons shaped my character and inspired my lifelong commitment to justice and fairness. Attending school in one of Los Angeles's most affluent communities while living in one of its most underserved gave me insight into disparities in wealth, opportunity, and perception. I learned firsthand that socio-economic status does not define a person's worth-and that all people deserve dignity, empathy, and equal protection under the law.

These formative experiences taught me impartiality long before I ever entered a courtroom. My perspective was further broadened through sports. Athletics brought me into contact with people from across the country and taught me discipline, resilience, and teamwork. I earned a Division I football scholarship to the University of New Mexico, which demanded hard work and sacrifice but also gave me the opportunity to travel, expand my worldview, and engage with diverse communities. I majored in Criminology, drawn to the law from an early age. My academic studies helped me see how systemic inequities influence the justice system-particularly how poverty and race impact policing and prosecution. Those lessons came into sharper focus during my career as a Deputy Public Defender.

Following college, I worked as a substitute teacher for grades 5 through 12, sharpening my ability to communicate clearly, listen deeply, and relate to youth navigating difficult circumstances.

In law school, I participated in the Street Law program, teaching legal concepts to high school students-another reflection of my belief in civic education and community empowerment. Beyond the courtroom, I serve as President of the Los Angeles County Black Public Defenders Association, where I work to support attorneys of color, encourage professional development, and promote equity within the legal field. This role has deepened my leadership skills and strengthened my commitment to collaboration, mentorship, and public service.

Over the past decade, I have represented both adults and juveniles in felony and misdemeanor cases, tried over 35 jury trials and adjudications, and handled more than 50 life cases. I have witnessed how a fair and impartial judge can level the playing field and ensure justice is accessible to all-not just the privileged. These experiences solidified my belief in the vital role of judicial integrity.

More recently, I was honored to be promoted to Deputy-in-Charge-a responsibility that I do not take lightly, especially considering my age. I currently supervise 12 attorneys, five of whom have more years of legal experience than I do. To be trusted with leading an office is a reflection of the confidence my supervisors and colleagues have in my judgment, leadership, and ability to foster professional growth. It's a role that challenges me daily to lead with humility, consistency, and accountability.

In summary, my family history, lived experiences, professional achievements, and personal values collectively make me a well-qualified and well-rounded candidate to serve as Judge. I am committed to serving with humility, integrity, and a steadfast dedication to fairness and justice for all.

Candidate's Signature



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