

# PA Supreme Court

## Candidate Reviews for Judicial Elections Summary Page

### Responsibilities of the Court

The Supreme Court of Pennsylvania is the highest court in Pennsylvania and responsible both for hearing appeals from the two lower appellate courts and setting administrative rules for the state's judicial system. The seven-member court has the final say on the interpretation of Commonwealth statute and the Constitution regarding a range of consequential issues from taxes to redistricting to executive power. In recent years, the justices have ordered Pennsylvania's congressional map to be redrawn and issued rulings on absentee balloting.



**Maria C. McLaughlin**  
Democratic Candidate  
[www.judgemclaughlin.com](http://www.judgemclaughlin.com)  
Philadelphia County



**Kevin Brobson**  
Republican Candidate  
[www.brobsonforpa.com](http://www.brobsonforpa.com)  
Dauphin County (Harrisburg)

### Overall Qualifications Ratings \*

3.5

2.9

**Note:** See Ratings Detail page for the Category Ratings and Reasons for those Ratings

\* Ratings are from 1 to 5, with 1 being lowest and 5 being highest. Overall is the average of the other three.

### Pennsylvania Bar Association Recommendation

Highly Recommended

Highly Recommended

**Note:** See Information Detail page for Pennsylvania Bar Association Recommendation explanation

### Education and Experience

Penn State 1988; Widener University Delaware Law School JD 1992

Lycoming College, BS Accounting/Economics 1992; Widener University Commonwealth Law School, JD 1995

Is currently, and has been since 2017, a Judge on the PA Superior Court. Previously she served as a Judge in the Family Division of the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas from 2011 to 2017. Prior to that was assistant district attorney in Philadelphia from 1992 to 2011.

Kevin has been a Judge on the PA Commonwealth Court from 2010 to present, currently serving as the President Judge and served on the judicial conduct board from 2015-19. Prior to that was in private practice at Buchanan, Ingersoll & Rooney 1996 - 2010, practicing commercial litigation and administrative law.

**Note:** See Information Detail page for additional information on each candidate

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### Candidate Reviews for Judicial Elections Category Ratings and Reasons for those Ratings



**Maria C. McLaughlin**  
Democratic Candidate



**Kevin Brobson**  
Republican Candidate

#### Overall (average of below)

3.5

2.9

#### Integrity, Honesty and Transparency Rating

3.5

3.0

No indication either way, but assumed to be high given her career accomplishments.

Assumed to be reasonably good given his career accomplishment, but his campaign literature wording of his position in opposing the heavily gerrymandering PA 2010 district maps is purposefully misleading: "one of his most notable rulings was in favor of the justiciability of constitutional challenges to congressional districts drawn by the state legislature"

#### Skills and Experience Rating

3.5

3.5

Significant skills and experience, as reflected in the Highly Recommended rated by the PA Bar Association

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#### Balanced Solutions Rating

3.5

2.3

No indication either way, but assumed to be good given her career accomplishments. She is endorsed by liberal organizations (Planned Parenthood, LBGTQ, labor organizations and civil rights groups), but there is no indication/reporting that indicates she has had bias in her rulings.

Assumed to be reasonably good given his career accomplishments, but appears to be partisan in some of his cases (e.g. the ruling he authored to exclude Democratic ballots in a state Senate race on a technically correct but not substantively merited point and the ruling he authored against overturning the heavily gerrymandered 2010 PA voting district maps that favored Republican candidates, incorrectly characterizing the PA Constitution requirements, see Attachment 1).

#### Definition for each Rating Category:

Overall - average of the below three ratings

Integrity, Honesty and Transparency: Candidate has integrity, is honest and will be transparent

Skills and Experience: Candidate has the skills and experience required for the role

Balanced Solutions: Candidate will evaluate all liberal and conservative perspectives and reach balanced solutions in the public interest

**Note:** Ratings range from 0 (lowest) to 5 (highest).

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## Candidate Reviews for Judicial Elections Information Details

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### Pennsylvania Bar Association Recommendation

#### Highly Recommended

The candidate was elected to the Court of Common Pleas of Philadelphia County in 2011, serving in its Family Court until being elected to the Superior Court in 2017. During her time on the Superior Court, she coordinated and developed policies enabling the court to hold arguments during the pandemic. This task required her to liaise with numerous members of the bench and bar from each of Pennsylvania's 67 counties. Prior to her election to the bench, the candidate worked for 19 years in the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office where she was appointed chief of the Child Support Enforcement Unit. She managed 18 attorneys and was also appointed director of the Family Justice Center Initiative. In addition, she developed an initiative setting appointments of counsel for child support enforcement cases and a jobs program matching unemployed parents with employers. She participates actively with local and statewide bar associations. She has received awards and recognitions from community, educational and governmental organizations. The candidate is described by other judges and lawyers as hard working, intelligent, patient, caring, approachable, an excellent listener and a superb mentor. Lawyers who appeared before the candidate recount her superior knowledge and practical application of the law. For these reasons, the commission highly recommends her candidacy for the Pennsylvania Supreme Court.

#### Highly Recommended

The candidate was elected to the Commonwealth Court in 2009 and was retained in 2019 for a second 10-year term. Prior to being elected to the bench, he worked at a law firm for 14 years with a practice including commercial litigation, as well as appellate and administrative law. Since joining the court, the candidate has authored opinions exhibiting his breadth of experience and knowledge of the law. The candidate has distinguished himself by serving as a member and chair of the Judicial Conduct Board of Pennsylvania. He has earned the respect and confidence of his peers on both the Commonwealth and Pennsylvania Supreme courts as evidenced by being elected as president judge of the Commonwealth Court despite not having the most seniority. He also obtained special appointments to the Supreme Court for pending cases and to preside over an expedited bench trial of a case involving a Pennsylvania constitutional matter. The candidate has engaged in a wide range of community service. His commitment to the citizens of Pennsylvania, combined with the high degree of respect and trust of his colleagues and his demonstrated excellence and integrity in his jurisprudence from the bench, leads the commission to highly recommend the candidate as a justice of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania.

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### Vote 411 Voters Guide Questions

#### What can you do, both on and off the bench, to ensure that all individuals have equal access to justice?

Along with being our highest appellate court, The Supreme Court oversees our statewide court system and legal community. As such we have the opportunity to set rules, educate the legal community and create special court programs dealing with human services issues like substance abuse & mental health challenges, veteran's issues & initiatives focused on autism. All geared toward providing fair treatment and equal access for people with unique circumstances.

I would work cooperatively with the governor and the legislature to increase funding for legal aid programs. While in private practice, I created a program in Dauphin County to expand pro bono opportunities for lawyers to provide services to nonprofit organizations. I would encourage county bar associations to think creatively about expanding pro bono service to small and minority-owned businesses and nonprofits. I want to ensure our courts have access to interpreters for parties with limited English proficiency. I would build upon the excellent work of Philadelphia Legal Assistance with respect to the representation of low-wage workers and the unemployed by engaging law schools and other legal aid associations throughout the state.

#### What can you do, both on and off the bench, to ensure an equitable and fair court?

As a lawyer & a judge I have always worked to ensure everyone who comes into a courtroom has an opportunity to be heard and the law applied without bias. This is the cornerstone of our legal system. As a Justice I will not waiver from that driving principle. My work on the bench and in my life will always reflect my dedication to fairness and equality.

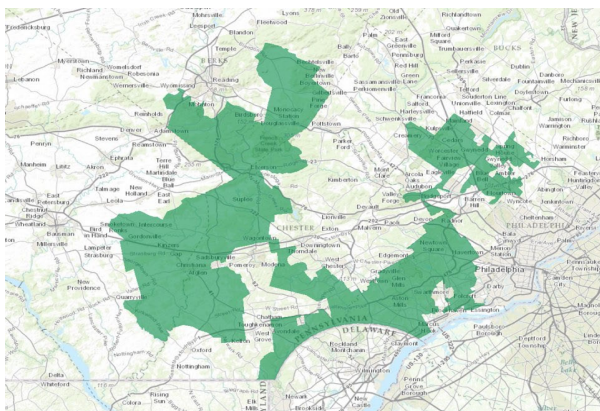
I believe I have earned a reputation as a fair and impartial arbiter of the law. I treat everyone who enters my courtroom, or has a matter before me, with equal respect and dignity. I strive to appreciate the perspectives and points of view of all parties. It is important to me that every litigant, represented and unrepresented, be given every opportunity, within the rules and the law, to present their case. Moreover, as a former Chair of the Pa. Judicial Conduct Board, I am keenly aware of how important it is to Pennsylvanians that our judges observe the highest ethical standards on and off the bench. I hold myself to this high standard. All Pennsylvanians deserve to have faith in a fair and impartial judiciary.

## Attachment 1

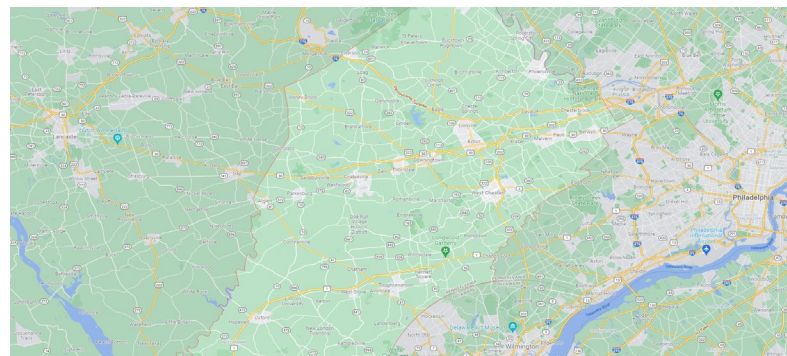
Following is the section in the PA Constitution that requires redistricting of voting districts to be compact and contiguous and to not divide counties, towns, etc.:

**§ 16. Legislative districts.** The Commonwealth shall be divided into 50 senatorial and 203 representative districts, which shall be composed of compact and contiguous territory as nearly equal in population as practicable. Each senatorial district shall elect one Senator, and each representative district one Representative. Unless absolutely necessary no county, city, incorporated town, borough, township or ward shall be divided in forming either a senatorial or representative district. (Apr. 23, 1968, P.L.App.3, Prop. No.1)

Following is the PA's 7th US Congressional District after the 2010 Redistricting, which was considered one of the most gerrymandered districts in the country and often referred to as the "Goofy kicking Donald" district:



Following is a map of Chester County, whose borders were completely ignored in the 2010 redistricting of PA's 7th US Congressional District:



Following is the opinion of the Commonwealth Court, authored by Judge Kevin Brobson, denying the Petitioners' request to have the heavily gerrymandered redistricting plan that favored Republican candidates found unconstitutional. The opinion said that although the criticism of the 2010 redistricting was valid, the Petitioners did not provide support that it violated the PA Constitution, which was not correct.

**Ruling of the Commonwealth Court on Gerrymandering in the 2010 redistricting:** "While Petitioners characterize the level of partisanship evident in the 2011 Plan as 'excessive' and 'unfair,' Petitioners have not articulated a judicially manageable standard by which this Court can discern whether the 2011 Plan crosses the line between permissible partisan considerations and unconstitutional partisan gerrymandering under the Pennsylvania Constitution. ... A lot can and has been said about the 2011 Plan, much of which is unflattering and yet justified. Petitioners, however, have failed to meet their burden of proving that the 2011 Plan, as a piece of legislation, clearly, plainly, and palpably violates the Pennsylvania Constitution. For the judiciary, this should be the end of the inquiry."