

So, You're Applying for a Judgeship

By Hon. Gail Hagerty

North Dakota's judicial system depends on having qualified applicants for vacant judicial positions. Since 2013, North Dakota's governors have made 24 appointments to judicial offices, and there are current vacancies.

Under state law, when there is a vacancy in a judicial office because of a death or resignation between elections, the Judicial Nominating Committee receives notification from the Governor's office and must submit a list of qualified nominees within 60 days of the notification. The list must include at least two nominees and may not include more than seven nominees. Of course, if a sitting judge decides not to run for re-election, the judgeship is filled through the election process.

Once a list is presented, the Governor may fill the vacancy from the list of nominees, return the list to the Judicial Nominating Committee and ask for a new list, or call a special election.

The Judicial Nominating Committee consists of six permanent members. The Governor, the Chief Justice, and the President of the State Bar Association of North Dakota (SBAND) each appoint two members, with one being a judge or attorney and the other a lay person. When a district judgeship is vacant, each of those who make appointments appoint an additional temporary member from the judicial district having the vacancy.

Currently, the committee is chaired by John Olson. Other permanent members are Monte Rogneby, Susan Sisk, Tom Dawson, Jeremy Bendewald, and Gail Hagerty. Tony Weiler, SBAND executive director, serves as secretary of the committee. Together, committee members have developed the following suggestions for applicants.



- Talk to a district judge or Supreme Court justice to get an understanding of the day-to-day work of the judgeship. Having a good understanding of how judges spend their time will help you focus on the skills necessary for the position and to tailor your application to the position.
- Read the Code of Judicial Conduct.
- Take time to prepare your application carefully. Committee members study them and details are important.
- Include a diverse list of references, if possible. Committee members attempt to contact each reference and share the information which is gathered. The committee gets a better idea of your qualifications if information is obtained from individuals who have worked with you in a variety of settings.
- Submit a recent writing sample, which has not been edited by anyone (other than you). Because judicial positions require strong writing skills, the writing sample is an important part of your application.
- Use the interview to sell yourself and your abilities. Interviews are typically a half-hour and the same questions are asked of each applicant. Generally, there is no right or wrong answer to the questions. Instead, the committee is looking for thoughtful and focused responses. Be prepared to tell the committee why your name should be on the list of nominees.
- Prepare for the interview by visiting with attorneys who have been through the interview process. This will give you an opportunity to think about questions you might expect to be asked.
- Understand the committee knows it takes some courage to put your name forward and appreciates your time and effort. Even if your name is not on the list of nominees submitted to the Governor, your application makes the system work as it is intended to work.
- Encourage others who are qualified to apply. Members of the Bar are best served when there are highly qualified applicants for vacant judicial positions. The committee relies on attorneys to seek out and encourage colleagues to apply.