



Judicial Candidate Questionnaire
20th Judicial Circuit Judge
August 2026 Primary Election

Your name: Ryan Kuhl
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Your phone number: 239-248-0293
Your age: 53
Today's date: 6-11-26

Please limit each response to 150–200 words

1. Why do you want to serve as a judge as opposed to practicing law?

I am seeking judicial office because I believe I have the experience, temperament, and integrity necessary to serve the public in that role. Over the course of my 26-year legal career, I have appeared before many judges and have developed a deep appreciation for the judiciary's vital role in our system of justice. The judges I have respected most share certain qualities: professionalism, patience, preparation, fairness, and a commitment to treating everyone who enters the courtroom with dignity and respect. They listen carefully, remain even-tempered under pressure, and faithfully apply the law regardless of the parties involved. Throughout my career, I have admired those qualities and worked to embody them in my own practice. I have long viewed judicial service as the highest form of public service within the legal profession, and I believe the time is right for me to pursue that responsibility.

2. Circuit court judges in Florida may be assigned to handle criminal, civil, family, probate, or juvenile matters. Which areas are your strongest, and how will you prepare to serve effectively across all of them?

My strongest areas are civil and criminal litigation. I began my career as a prosecutor and later developed an extensive civil trial practice, representing clients on both sides of complex disputes. That experience has given me a broad perspective and an understanding of how different participants experience the legal system. Since 2012, I have been Board Certified by The Florida Bar in Civil Trial Law. Board certification is established by the Florida Supreme Court and recognizes attorneys who demonstrate exceptional knowledge, skill, professionalism, and ethics in their field. Fewer than one percent of Florida lawyers are board certified in Civil Trial Law. If assigned to a division outside my primary practice areas, I would prepare the same way I have throughout my career: through study, diligence, and consultation with available legal resources. Judges must be lifelong learners, and I would approach every assignment with the preparation and commitment necessary to serve the public effectively.

3. How do you ensure self-represented litigants receive a fair hearing without compromising your impartiality or the integrity of the proceedings?

Self-represented litigants deserve the same respect, courtesy, and access to justice as parties represented by counsel. At the same time, a judge must remain impartial and cannot act as an advocate for either side. My responsibility would be to ensure that all parties understand the procedures governing the proceeding, have an opportunity to be heard, and are treated fairly and

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respectfully. While judges may provide procedural guidance where appropriate, they must avoid giving legal advice or creating an advantage for one side over another. Every case presents unique circumstances, but the guiding principles remain the same: fairness, patience, respect, and adherence to the law.

4. Who are your judicial role models? Why?

Judge James Shenko has long been one of my judicial role models. I knew him before he joined the bench and have appeared before him several times since. He consistently demonstrates the qualities I believe are essential in a judge: preparation, professionalism, patience, courtesy, and respect for everyone who enters his courtroom. Lawyers and litigants may not always agree with a ruling, but they know they have been heard and that the decision was reached thoughtfully and fairly. That commitment to integrity and consistency is something I would strive to emulate as a judge

5. How do or would you approach a case where the law as written produces an outcome that seems unfair or harsh? Where do you draw the line between interpreting the law and making policy?

A judge's duty is to apply the law as written and interpreted by binding precedent, not to substitute personal preferences for the law. There may be cases where the result appears harsh or unfair, but judges take an oath to uphold the constitutions and laws of the United States and Florida. The proper role of the judiciary is to interpret and apply the law within established legal principles. The role of making policy belongs to the legislative branch. Maintaining that distinction is essential to preserving public confidence in the courts and the separation of powers. Judges must follow the law faithfully, even when doing so requires setting aside their personal views about what outcome they might prefer.

6. Have you ever been disciplined by the bar association or any other authority on attorney or judicial conduct, or been the subject of a Judicial Qualifications Commission inquiry? If yes, please describe the matter and its resolution. If no, please confirm that directly.

No.

7. What do you want Collier County voters to know about you that they are unlikely to find anywhere else?

One thing voters may not know is that my original career goal after law school was to serve in the United States Navy JAG Corps. My father served in the Navy for 25 years, and I grew up on and around naval bases. Although I was professionally accepted, a prior knee injury ultimately prevented me from serving. Public service has always been important in my family. My grandfather served as an FBI agent for nearly 30 years, and that tradition of service has influenced my own career path. Most important to me is my family. My wife, Jodi, and I have been married since 2000 and moved to Southwest Florida in 2003. We raised our two children in Collier County public schools, and we are incredibly proud of the adults they have become.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR WILLINGNESS TO SERVE.
Please email your responses to sandy@sparkers-soapbox.com
no later than June 5, 2026.

8. Most incumbent judges whose terms were up in 2026 are running unopposed and will be automatically re-elected for another six-year term. You chose to challenge a sitting judge rather than wait for an open seat. What led you to this decision, and what do you bring to this seat that you believe is not currently there?

This decision was not a sudden one. For several years, I have actively pursued judicial service through both available paths established under Florida law: appointment and election. Beginning in 2023, I was nominated by the Judicial Nominating Commission for judicial vacancies on seven separate occasions. In 2024, I intended to run for what was expected to be an open judicial seat, but circumstances changed when the position ultimately became an appointment rather than an election. At that time, I chose not to challenge a sitting judge. This year, there are again no open circuit court seats available for election. After considerable thought, I concluded that if I wished to continue pursuing judicial service, I could no longer wait for circumstances beyond my control to create an opportunity. It would be inappropriate for me to comment on what I believe is lacking in another judge. My campaign is not about criticism of an opponent. Instead, it is about offering voters a choice. I bring 26 years of legal experience, a background that includes criminal prosecution, civil trial practice, mediation, and board certification in civil trial law. My goal is simply to earn the opportunity to serve.

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