

Name: Sajeel Khaleel

Court: Collin County Court at Law #3

1 What current or past judge do you most want to inspire your approach to judicial excellence, and why?

Former Judge Greg Willis represents the judge whom I most want to inspire my approach to judicial excellence. Firstly, he is committed to the just prosecution of criminal cases within the Collin County judicial system. A judge should not be determined to be effective based on the number of convictions that he is able to dole out to defendants, but how many convictions were appropriately entered based on the facts and the law of each specific case. Secondly, as a judge, he supported increasing diversion programs to reduce the rates of recidivism and prevent incarceration.

2 What has been the greatest accomplishment in your legal career? In your personal life?

The greatest accomplishment of my legal career was helping a U.S. Armed Forces veteran save his business from an embezzling partner. I was able to help this soldier clear up all of the situations that resulted from this embezzlement. This soldier was shocked when I did not charge him any fees for my help. He is now a successful business owner and my best friend.

3 What, if anything, would you change to improve the procedures and efficiency of the court you are seeking?

Our county has grown dramatically and continues to do so with every passing month. Resultantly, the procedures of the current court system must be improved to address the ever-increasing load on the county courts. Firstly, I would allow for later hours in my courtroom. In our current situation, defendants must attend court when they are usually supposed to be working. The reality is that most hearings for a defendant are just appearance settings. Now although the average citizen feels unaffected by this, eventually he/she does. This same defendant would lose his job if he/she is consistently attending court and missing work. Then, this defendant would become a burden on the taxpayers through various assistance programs. I propose that we circumvent this by allowing the defendant to appear in court after work. Although there are several concerns here with staff hours and overtime, by utilizing a minimal court staff for later hours to minimize costs, this could be accomplished. Secondly, I would propose Saturday hours for courts at least once a month. With this change, we increase access to the Court by peace officers attempting to obtain a warrant for blood and by defendants. Thirdly, I intend to make myself accessible after-hours and on the weekends when these issues arise most commonly. Fourthly, I would implement new technologies to improve the efficiency of the court. I would propose that lawyers conduct certain hearings via video conferencing, submitting evidence electronically, utilize the vast current technologies that aid in docket control, etc.

4 Do you feel that ALL citizens have equal and adequate access to justice in our county? How would you improve that access?

Although I believe that all citizens have equal access to the Collin County justice system, I have seen that many citizens have a perception that they do not have equal access. In one particular conversation, one voter complained about the defense attorneys that are appointed to represent the indigent. I believe that we should address this issue by monitoring the level of representation provided by attorneys appointed to represent indigent defendants. Additionally, I would support reductions in bail bonds for nonviolent defendants so that they may not be a burden on the taxpayers. As mentioned before, I would also increase access to the Court so that justice may be implemented when the courts are not traditionally open.

5 Collin County tracks indigent defense dollars ordered by each judge. What effect would that reporting have on your decisions to order that the county pay for a defendant's defense?

None.

6 What do you perceive as the greatest obstacles to justice in Collin County?

The greatest obstacle to justice in any court system is congestion. Any court must take advantage of all available efficient methods to handle its ever-increasing caseload.

7 Incarceration is the most expensive criminal sanction available. How would that fact affect your sentencing decisions?

When incarceration is the appropriate sentence, a judge must have the power to order such a confinement. I do cover my preference to alternative sentences, which are more cost-effective to the taxpayers, in my next response.

8 Without commenting on a specific case or type of cases, should Collin County explore more or different types of alternative sentencing? What do you think works? What would you like to try?

Yes. I would favor diversion for non-violent offenders that have a substantiated desire to change their behavior. Additionally, I support other programs for rehabilitation such as specialized DWI and/or drug rehabilitation programs with frequent and random UAs, ignition interlock devices, frequent contact with probation officers, etc. Lastly, I also support preventative measures such as community involvement, education, group therapy programs, etc.

9 Recently a Dallas judge made the news when he replaced a white juror with a minority one in a capital trial where the jury was all white and the defendant was not. Do you believe it is important for a minority defendant to have a jury that contains minority members?

This question concerns matters that may be brought before my court (if I am elected), therefore I do not ethically believe it is appropriate to respond.

10 When a judge's sense of justice appears to be at variance to the strict application of the law, what approach should an ethical judge take to resolve the conflict?

If a judge cannot adhere to the strict application of the law in a specific case, then he should recuse himself from that case.

11 Do you believe that our system of partisan election of trial judges should be continued? How can it be improved?

No. Our current partisan method of electing judges prevents Collin County from obtaining the best judiciary. A better method would be a special election, similar to city council elections, where candidates do not identify which party they belong to. With this method, the candidate elected is the most qualified candidate for the position without regards to his political affiliations.

12 Tell the voters one thing about yourself that isn't on any website, nor discussed at any forum.

I'm a very calm and collected individual, even in the worst of calamities. I pride myself on making logical and well-thought decisions in challenging and stressful situations.