



A Message From the President

Susan A. Feeney, Esq.

New Jersey State Bar Association President Susan A. Feeney authored an op-ed column published in today's Star-Ledger about the important, non-partisan role the New Jersey State Bar Association plays in vetting judicial candidates through our Judicial and Prosecutorial Appointments Committee.

To read the column, [click here](#) or continue reading below.

Bar association a vital voice in nominations

by Susan A. Feeney

Since 1969, the New Jersey State Bar Association has had the only non-partisan role in reviewing judicial and prosecutorial candidates, by virtue of the Hughes Compact.

Every governor has signed the compact since Gov. Richard J. Hughes, but that is not what makes the agreement important. The NJSBA's role in the process was designed and continues to protect and promote a fair, impartial and independent judiciary, which is a hallmark of the rule of law in a vigorous democracy. This is especially true at a time when political acrimony runs high.

Gov. Chris Christie has nominated Phillip Kwon and Bruce Harris to serve on the state Supreme Court, and some have raised questions about the bar association's role in the vetting process.

The Association's Judicial and Prosecutorial Appointments Committee, a 26-member group that includes lawyers from every county, conducts an extensive investigation into a lawyer's qualifications to serve as justices, judges and county prosecutors. That investigation includes interviewing judicial and personal references, talking to other lawyers from the candidate's home county and reviewing a list of matters the person has handled.

During the past 40 years, the committee has reviewed thousands of candidates with the purpose of providing information, insight and guidance to numerous governors to find the very best people to preside in the state's courts and prosecutor offices.

The committee does not enter into the investigation and review process with any preconceived idea of selecting someone who represents a particular political, sociological or demographic definition. The review process is independent and confidential, and the committee's deliberations are separate and apart from those of the Association's Board of Trustees.

The only goal is to aid in getting the most qualified people to the bench. The result is that New Jersey's judges reflect people from every political party, from every area of practice and from all walks of life.

In its evaluation of judges for initial appointment to the bench, the committee has identified eight criteria to instruct their deliberations.

The criteria the committee uses in determining whether a candidate is qualified includes:

- Undisputed integrity,

- A high degree of knowledge of established legal principles and procedures and a high degree of ability to interpret and apply them to factual situations,
- That they have been a licensed attorney in New Jersey for at least 10 years,
- An appropriate judicial temperament, which includes common sense, compassion, decisiveness, firmness, humility, open-mindedness, patience, tact and understanding,
- A commitment to diligence, punctuality and effective management skills
- The requisite physical and mental abilities to be able to perform the essential functions of the job,
- Demonstrated financial responsibility, and
- Demonstrated participation in public service activities.

The quality of a court system is determined chiefly by the quality of its judges. Judges should be selected on the basis of ability, character, training and experience, by a process that assures that selection is made on a merit basis.

The State Bar Association's long history of reviewing judicial candidates has ensured that the New Jersey Judiciary, in service to the public, fulfills these goals. It is a role we are proud of and one we will continue to perform with the highest degree of integrity.