



Hays County Tejano Democrats
Primary Election March 2024
Candidate Questionnaire: District Judge, 483rd Judicial District
(Alphabetical Order)

Joseph Aragon

joearagonforjudge.com

Current Member of the Hays County Tejano Democrats

Why are you seeking the office of District Judge? What is your background and how does it pertain to the office you are seeking?

I am seeking the office of District Judge because I want to try to make meaningful changes with the Hays County Courts from within. I have been a Criminal Defense Attorney running my own practice for over 13 years. I have practiced in many counties across the state, and every county along I-35 from San Antonio to Georgetown, Texas. I have seen a lot of courts handle their dockets a lot of different ways. I think there are some flaws in the way Hays County operates that I can correct. Most Judges in Texas are ex-prosecutors, so I can offer a unique perspective to the position and a wide range of experiences working with different counties' court staff, law enforcement, and prosecutors.

How would you approach managing your caseload to ensure timely and efficient resolution of cases while upholding the quality of justice?

I would set different types of cases on different types of tracks. Oddly enough, the courts see many of the same types of cases and there is a finite number of outcomes for any case. From my experience the reason why cases get backed up are because someone is not doing their job. Either the Prosecutor, Law Enforcement, Defense Counsel or Defendant are delaying on purpose or out of laziness. All of these problems have a solution. Whether it means calling Law Enforcement into court to answer as to why evidence is taking so long to process/gather/turn over, calling the District Attorney to see why line prosecutors aren't analyzing cases and making recommendations fast enough, or calling defense counsel and defendants to see what the hold up is with getting classes done/paying restitution or just choosing to accept or deny an offer. All of these issues can be resolved, but it involves calling out those slow or weak links in the process. When all of these parties involved are diligent in their duties, I believe Justice can be upheld.

What is your judicial philosophy, and how do you approach making decisions in cases that come before you?

My Judicial philosophy is that almost everyone that goes to Prison will get out. I also believe most people do not benefit from Prison. Prison often has the opposite impact and turns many people into career criminals. If you accept these factors as true, we should be trying to find ways to solve the underlying issues of a Defendant that put them on the path to Prison to begin with. This is a lot of work. This involves more mental evaluations, financial evaluations, and it means thinking outside the box for solutions that don't take the easy route of putting someone in Prison and forgetting about them. I believe these changes will take more than the Courts to deal with. It will take community leaders, local organizations and a shift in local culture to helping your neighbor.

In a Nov 2023 survey conducted by UnidosUS, the United States's largest Latino nonprofit advocacy organization), when asked about the Democratic Party, 49% of Texas' Latino voters say the party cares about Latinos, 37% say it doesn't care too much, and 14% say it is hostile toward the Latino community. If elected, how does being a Democrat impact how you carry out the duties of your office?

I am the 1st and 4th generation son of Mexican Immigrants. My Mother was born in Mexico. I was not raised to be a Republican or a Democrat. I was raised to respect certain values. One of the most important values is compassion for others. I think it is essential that a District Court Judge show compassion not only to the Defendant, but the victims of crimes. The Criminal Justice system often focuses on punishment of the Defendant and forgets about the victims. I think having a high level of compassion for all parties involved will show the correct path for this office.

Can you share a personal story or experience that highlights your commitment to public service?

I take court appointed clients because I think all Defendants deserve a competent Defense Attorney to look at their case and fight to get them the best outcome. I started my career doing the same thing. I have spent many hours in jails around the state visiting my court appointed clients and fighting for their rights.



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Sarah Brandon

Website: SarahBrandon4Judge.com
Facebook.com/SarahBrandon4Judge

Why are you seeking the office of District Judge? What is your background and how does it pertain to the office you are seeking?

Everything I have done in my career to date has prepared me for this moment. My grandfather and I used to watch trials together at the courthouse. I asked questions and he would explain what was happening. That's how I knew I wanted to spend my life helping people. My undergrad was in criminal justice and social work. I have served 30-plus years as a courtroom litigator, 27 of which happened in Hays County. I have been a staunch advocate for a strong judiciary. I have pushed for fair and efficient courtrooms. I have held other legal professionals accountable to the law and for our legal ethics. I shut down a lucrative and successful law practice in the fall of 2023 to prepare to take the bench by watching jury trials and miscellaneous courtroom cases. It's been a long journey, and taking a seat on the bench is the final step.

How would you approach managing your caseload to ensure timely and efficient resolution of cases while upholding the quality of justice?

Our courtrooms *should* be operational from 8-5pm, yet many of them sit dark and empty. As a result, we have courtroom dockets that are clogged up without any sign of relief. A clogged up docket slows down the wheels of justice, leaving those who need it stuck in limbo. We desperately need a back up docket system. . Our community deserves better - full stop. If elected, my courtroom will be open when it's supposed to be open, five days a week. My courtroom will run efficiently, effectively and, most importantly, fairly.

What is your judicial philosophy, and how do you approach making decisions in cases that come before you?*

I will listen to all facts of the case. This may appear obvious, but I have been before judges that clearly have made a decision about the case without listening to all the evidence provided by the litigants and the lawyers. It's then and only then, can a good and fair decision be rendered. My approach to being 483rd District Court Judge is conducting myself with kindness, fairness and humility.

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The results of UnidosUS poll sounds a lot like the what I heard from my clients for 30 years and now when I'm out talking to residents while block walking. As Democrats, we must acknowledge that the latino community, other communities of color, and low-income communities continue to be underserved and over policed at the local, state and federal level. If elected, I will interpret the law without bias or ideology, while never forgetting that most individuals navigating our judicial system are doing so because of system inequalities and lack of access to their basic needs.

Can you share a personal story or experience that highlights your commitment to public service?

Mentoring young people always has been a priority for me. Serving on the board for the Hays-Caldwell Women's Center (HCWC) gave me opportunities to bring awareness to issues that affect young men and women - domestic violence. That's why I used my position as a lawyer and Vice President of the Hays County Bar Association (HCBA) to create what's called, "Dating Violence Mock Trial," which allowed high

school students to learn more about domestic violence and the law. This effort was in collaboration with Dripping Springs High School, HCWC, HCBA and a collection of judges from the Hays County Justice Center. With ~120 students involved as lawyers, witnesses and jurors, lawyers from the HCBA volunteered two months of their time every year to help the students prepare for the trial. Then the education team from
Page 2: Sarah Brandon

HCWC would have their education team provide information about healthy relationships and domestic violence. Several of these students have gone on to get their legal education and have become lawyers. This is one of many things that I have done in my career that I have done and it has been the most gratifying by seeing these kids learn, grow and achieve.



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Alicia Key

My campaign website is at KeyforJudge.com

My social media contact is Nancy Gray at
communications@keyforjudge.com

Current Member of the Hays County Tejano Democrats

Why are you seeking the office of District Judge? What is your background and how does it pertain to the office you are seeking?

I am the only candidate with experience trying both criminal and civil cases, and the only candidate in the primary with prior judicial experience. I believe my experience, temperament, knowledge of the law, and dedication to Texas families and the values of the Democratic party make me the candidate most likely to defeat the incumbent Republican appointee. Prior to starting my private practice 6 years ago, I served for 26 years as a public servant. I have been an assistant district attorney, an associate judge, Director of the State Office of Court Administration, and statewide Director of the Child Support Division of the Office of Attorney General. At both of those agencies, I testified before the legislature countless times and shepherded bills through the legislature to improve the laws for Texas families. I would be honored to continue my public service in the role of district judge. I believe that a fair and independent judiciary is essential to our democracy, and I would work to ensure that all participants in the judicial process have access to the effective assistance of counsel. I will not allow the litigant with more money to always have the advantage, or a low-income criminal defendant to be at a disadvantage.

How would you approach managing your caseload to ensure timely and efficient resolution of cases while upholding the quality of justice?

During my time as Administrative Director of the Office of Court Administration, I learned a great deal about resources that are available to improve the efficiency of trial courts. While I will work diligently to move cases expeditiously through my court, hard work is not always enough. For example, the National Center for State Courts recommends measures for improving efficiency, such as providing information to litigants often and in an accessible way; standardizing processes across all the courts; using scheduling orders; requiring attorneys to confer and attempt to resolve disputes before filing motions; and, providing opportunities for parties to reach resolutions. In criminal cases, I would work with other county personnel to improve and expand the specialty courts to provide specialized handling of criminal defendants with mental health, substance abuse, and veterans' issues so they don't sit in jail for months or years awaiting trial while they are presumed innocent.

What is your judicial philosophy, and how do you approach making decisions in cases that come before you?

A trial judge in Texas is bound by the Canons of Judicial Conduct, which require that the judge be independent, fair, and competent in interpreting and applying the law. My philosophy may not fall squarely into a traditional definition such as "activist" or "strict constructionist." I believe a judge should be independent, fair, and unbiased. A judge should be faithful to the law and maintain professional competence in the law, and be patient, dignified and courteous to litigants, jurors, witnesses, and lawyers.

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I am acutely aware and concerned about the number of individuals who are accused of a crime and sitting in jail in Hays County for months or years awaiting trial because they cannot afford to pay a cash bond. On top of being poor, many of them are mentally ill, perhaps with substance abuse issues, and disproportionately people of color. I will work with other county personnel to improve and expand efforts to provide meaningful assistance to those individuals rather than incarceration, such as pre-trial diversion services, mental health courts, drug courts, and other specialty courts.

Can you share a personal story or experience that highlights your commitment to public service?

Early in my career, I was an assistant district attorney where I had a huge eye-opening, life-changing experience. I worked first in the civil division of the DA's office, handling child abuse cases, family violence protective orders, and mental health commitments. I saw the same families weaving through all these cases. It was a big segment of the community that I had never really seen up close. People with poverty and disadvantage, with substance abuse issues, experiencing violence in their homes, and mental health problems. I decided then that I would spend my career as a public servant, and I did that for 26 years. My legal career is not just a job for me. It is a calling.