

How Do Judges Become Judges?



California, judges are both appointed to their positions by the Governor of California and elected to a judgeship on a nonpartisan ballot at a general election. Here's how the process works:

APPOINTMENT PROCESS:

When there is a vacancy in a judicial position because of a death, retirement or any other reason, the judgeship is filled by an appointment by the governor.

Candidates interested in pursuing a judgeship through appointment first fill out a long application detailing their work and personal history, and their experiences and philosophies on the rule of law and the justice system.

To assist the governor in the selection process, once applications have been reviewed, candidates are reviewed by the statewide Judicial Nominees Evaluation Commission (JNE – generally pronounced “jenny”), which is run by the State Bar of California.

The role of the JNE Commission is to gather information about the candidates and to conduct a confidential evaluation of the judicial qualifications of candidates whose names have been submitted to the commission by the Governor and to report its findings, in absolute confidence, to the Governor.

JNE Commission members evaluate whether a candidate is qualified for a judicial position by using the following criteria:

ELECTION PROCESS:

State Court judges are elected to 6-year terms in a general election, which takes place in even-numbered years. When their term ends, a judge must run again to retain their seat.

Much like any other election, when there is an open judgeship, qualified candidates run against one another, with the popular vote determining the outcome.

Who is qualified to be elected as a judge?

In California, in order to be considered for a judgeship, a candidate must have been practicing law or have been a judge for at least 10 years.

How do I know which candidate to vote for?

There isn't a lot of information publicly available to citizens about judicial candidates, so it is important to do your research. Most of the time, prior to a judicial election, the local bar association may review and evaluate the candidates and will publicize their evaluations broadly as a public service. Therefore, in your research process, you may want to visit your local bar association's website.



APPOINTMENT PROCESS CONTINUED:

Applicant's industry, judicial temperament, honesty, objectivity, community respect, integrity, health, ability and legal experience. The JNE Commission also evaluates a candidate's experience including litigation and non-litigation experience; legal work for a business or nonprofit entity; experience as a law professor or other academic position; legal work in any of the three branches of government and; legal work in dispute resolution.

Once the JNE Commission receives a candidate's information, they have only 90 days to evaluate the candidate and return their evaluation to the governor's office. Here are the evaluations that the JNE Commission gives each candidate:

Exceptionally Well Qualified:

Possessing qualities and attributes of remarkable or extraordinary superiority that enable them to perform the judicial function with distinction.

Well Qualified: Possessing qualities and attributes indicative of a superior fitness to perform the judicial function with a high degree of skill and effectiveness.

Qualified: Possessing qualities and attributes sufficient to perform the judicial function adequately and satisfactorily.

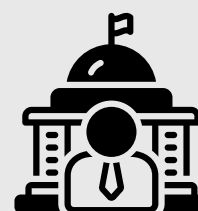
Not Qualified

While the Governor uses the JNE Commission's evaluations to aid in their decision, ultimately, the Governor can appoint any qualified candidate, regardless of their JNE Commission nomination.

FAST FACTS:



Judges serve 6-year terms.



When there are vacancies between terms, judges are appointed by the governor.



Qualified judicial candidates have been practicing law or serving as a judge for at least 10 years.



JUDICIAL FAIRNESS COALITION
A Committee of the California Judges Association

PRESENTED BY THE CALIFORNIA JUDGES ASSOCIATION JUDICIAL FAIRNESS COALITION.