



**SFDCCC Candidate Questionnaire
Superior Court Judge - March 2020**

Name Kulvindar "Rani" Singh

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Are you a registered member of the Democratic Party? **YES x** No

Have you read the California Democratic Party Platform? **YESx** No

Will you fight for its implementation in policies? Yes No

CANON 5: Judge or candidate for judicial office shall not engage in political or campaign activity that is inconsistent with the independence, integrity, or impartiality of the judiciary.

What office and which seat are you running for? Judicial Seat 21

What other elected positions have you held previously?

I have never held an elected position.

PART I: GENERAL QUESTIONS (200 words or less)

- 1) Are you a registered member of the Democratic Party?

Yes I am.

- 2) Please describe your contributions to the Democratic Party and/or increasing civic engagement in the democratic process at the local, state and or/national level in recent years.

Contributing to the democratic process through legislation is an important part of making a difference in criminal justice reform work. I do a lot of legislative work in the at the state level. As part of our Collaborative Justice Council we have a hand in the legislative work that is done around many of the justice reform initiatives that effect or enhance collaborative courts (ie. mental health diversion Penal Code Section 1001.36). The legislative work and recommendations have implications for the way we do business in justice reform.

In my teaching at Abraham Lincoln High School, City College, and Skyline College there is an engagement piece in the presentations. At Lincoln I speak to Seniors in the Government and Policy seminar. In my presentations we talk about the legal profession, jury system, and governmental issues regarding laws and the implementation of how laws are fairly and unfairly applied. We talk about voting rights, and the importance of getting involved. One of my first questions in every class is "How old are most of you?" I then ask if they are registered to vote. I think it is very important for us to highlight and importance of being civically engaged.

- 3) Are there any other civic causes or organizations that you are involved with currently? Please describe.

I am a member of several organizations, and boards including but not limited to: SF Youth Ballet Advisory Board (our mission is to provide arts to communities that do not get to experience the ballet), St Gabriel Parent Board Co-Chair (supporting the parish community with outreach and community building activities) SCAHT (San Francisco Collaborative Against Human Trafficking), California Judicial Council Advisory Board on Collaborative Courts (Nominated and appointed by Judicial Council and Chief Justice). SABA(South Asian Bar) AABA (Asian American Bar Association) BASF (Bar Association of San Francisco) Alice B Toklas Dem Club, United Dem Club, Harvey Milk Dem Club (New member), SF Young Dem Club (New member non-voting).

- 4) Please list any organizations or elected officials who have endorsed you.

David Chui (State Assemblymember)

Carmen Chu (Assessor-Recorder, City and County of San Francisco)

Dianne Feinstein (United States Senator)

Cynthia M. Lee (San Francisco Superior Court)*

Andrew Cheng (San Francisco Superior Court) *

Jeffrey S. Ross (San Francisco Superior Court) *

Paul Miyamoto (Sheriff Elect)

Aaron Peskin (San Francisco Supervisor)

Scott Weiner (State Senator)

PART II: SHORT-ANSWER QUESTIONS (250 Words or less)

- 1) What do you perceive as the strengths of the Superior Court? What are the current weaknesses and how would you like to see the judicial system improved?

There are both strengths and areas in which we can improve the service it provides. The strengths include, the jury process, the fairness in the proceedings and the ability to be able to have a public forum to hear cases. The weaknesses that I see can be improved are the lengthy process, the delays in hearings and the backlog of trials. I think we need to streamline cases much quicker and be able to also do more front end work on analyzing criminal cases for possible settlement or diversion out of the system so that they do not languish in the system month after month.

- 2) Please summarize your qualifications and experience for the office you are seeking. Have you ever had any experience with management?

My 21 years of experience in almost every area of the Superior Court makes me singularly qualified to not only become a judicial officer, but moreover to be able to take on practically any assignment in the court with ease. I have been assigned to misdemeanor and felony court. I have practiced in both juvenile and adult. I have tried over 100 cases both juries and bench to verdict. I have worked in trials and in collaborative courts as well as the entire mental health side of the office. I have worked on grants and policy.

For the last 3 ½ years I have been a Managing Attorney. I managed the Domestic Violence Unit, as well as my current assignment as Managing Attorney of Collaborative Courts and Mental Health Unit. In that role I manage 9 distinct courts.

I have a staff of 8 attorneys, 4 support staff and we have a caseload of over 1200 cases. We deal with everything from misdemeanor theft to homicide. In addition to my managerial duties I staff all administration meetings with the courts. I help create and draft policies and procedures. I work on case processing and flow and I pre-try and settle many of the high risk cases I myself carry a court and caseload of 100+ in the Young Adult Court. It has become a national and international model that is being replicated It is a full service alternative court for high risk high needs participants from ages 18-24.

3) Have you ever had to support a legal position that was contrary to your personal moral beliefs? Please describe.

When I was a brand new prosecutor in San Mateo for one year I had a case in which a person violated the technical statute that was prescribed in the charges. The case went to trial and the elements were there, but because of my sympathy for the man charged I really felt that the case could have been resolved short of trial. To remedy the verdict I asked the judge to stay the statutory time prescribed. So even though I was able to stay the custody time for the client, it was at that point I knew I wanted to work back home in San Francisco where I would have the discretion that I would need to contribute I have since for the last 20 years been very fortunate in my practice at the San Francisco District Attorney that I have broad discretion to work on social justice issues and have full discretion to evaluate cases and dismiss or divert, or resolve cases as I see fit.

4) What do you perceive are the primary causes of the high rates of incarceration among communities of color? Do you believe the Court has a role to play in criminal justice reform?

My entire career has dealt with analyzing the root causes of crime. Trauma in the community, lack of resources, socio economic disparity and implicit bias are among a few of the factors that cause the disproportionate incarceration rates for people of color. I absolutely believe the Court has the ability to play a critical role in criminal justice reform. I have worked my entire career in this area of the law and my path has been like no other DA in my office. I am the only practicing trial lawyer and manager with a subject matter

expertise in the area of juvenile and adult alternative courts. I am the only DA who has ever created alternative courts in both the juvenile and adult system. I have written policies, implemented courts from the ground up, secured grant funding and partnered with multiple agencies around the city, state, and nationally to transform the way we look at criminal justice. I am the only district attorney on a statewide Judicial Council Advisory Committee that works side by side with judges from all over the state. Judges that are trailblazers in the area of criminal justice reform partner with the other members of the Board to work on strategies, legislation and policy to expand, nurture and support the work of the alternative court model.

5) What is your perspective on the current bail schedule? How did you arrive at that understanding? How can the system be reformed?

Traditional bail was based on a schedule prescribed by law that would take factors like, violence, type of crime, weight of narcotics, strike vs. non strike offense, and other areas of aggravation or mitigation. However the bail schedule never took into account the ability to pay, or other non “charged” offense factors. It also did not necessarily alleviate the public safety risk. If you analyze the model used in the juvenile justice system that in fact does not prescribe bail. You would see factors applied to determine if a child is able to be released. If proper parameters are put in place then there is an ability to safely release someone and monitor them on a version of supervised release. The juvenile model is also very helpful because it looks at what individual conditions are warranted in a particular case. In many ways can be ineffective and very “cookie cutter”. With a deep dive analysis you can start to look at the criminogenic factors that go into how a person struggles with staying arrest free. With that sort of determination you can maintain public safety while applying equity to release.

6) San Francisco is facing a car break-in epidemic that is perceived to be organized by crime networks. What do you believe are the factors leading to this problem? What is the court’s role in preventing offenders returning to crime?

Car break ins happen at two levels normally in three categories. It is often times a result of substance abuse, and so the theft is to support a habit. There are a large number of juvenile auto burglaries and in many ways there is a delinquency aspect to the crime that lends itself to an analysis of the group dynamics of juvenile offenses. Often times young kids engage in more pack activity for acceptance and rebellion. The ring type thefts are more systematic, often targeted on tourist areas where valuables can be easily stolen and sold on the open underground market. I think a court needs to analyze which category a theft falls within. I think to truly engage in justice reform and stop recidivism you truly have to peel the layers of the “why?” Once you start to look at the factors then you address them one by one. Is it

lack of job resources, is it substance abuse, is it lack of educational resources. And once you begin to analyze those factors you can craft a plan to execute conditions that create successful pro social behaviors.

7) How does your background and experience prepare you for legal cases pertaining to the rights of women, people of color, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ?

Most of my work in restorative justice does not only center on the work of criminal justice reform, it centers on groups that are marginalized within the criminal justice system. In mental health court we deal with the most vulnerable of populations that often cannot even understand the basic premise of the court process. In the collaborative courts we deal with vets that have long-standing PTSD. We have LGBTQ clients that have been marginalized in society and in the military. In my young adult court almost my entire population of participants are young people of color, many are undocumented, and most of the female clients have been victims of horrific abuse. I have had the amazing privilege and the heartbreaking privilege of seeing the most diverse population of criminal justice involved populations.

8) Do you believe there should be implicit bias training for judges? Why or why not?

I think there should be implicit bias training for everyone. The city requires us to take implicit bias training every year. However, our former District Attorney, George Gascon implemented an entire implicit bias program in our office. It also included a contest in which we had to display what implicit bias means to us, or how we overcome it on a daily basis using mindfulness techniques. Our team, the Alternatives Courts created a digital photo album of our unit doing our best work in court and in chambers. Working together with the clients and the justice partners, breaking barriers, defying stereotypes, and doing the job of working towards collective success. We have to challenge our implicit bias each and every day.

9) Does the court have a role in determining the outcomes of those with mental illness or the homeless who are caught up in our criminal justice system? If so, what is that role?

Absolutely. With the role of collaborative courts and Mental Health Diversion and programs like LEAD and CJC, we are able to give judges the power and broad discretion to place cases where they should be, and that is often not in the criminal justice courts. The courts can

start conservatorship proceedings, they can grant dismissals, they can deem diversion and provide orders for treatment and they can order COT (community outpatient treatment) People often do not know how broad the discretion of judicial officers are in those court settings.

10) Should the court ensure a fair hearing in the case of pro per or unrepresented litigants in family court or housing court? If yes, how can the court improve the process to ensure fairness in these types of proceedings?

It is so important to ensure that the rights of clients with or without counsel are preserved. As a DA I am very mindful of pro per clients and that they need extra support to ensure their rights to sue process. The court has the ability to assign staff, provide investigation costs and allow experts to be hired for various reasons in litigation. If we are not able to do that for pro per clients then we need to consider extending lawyer services across the board in all civil and criminal cases.

11) What do you perceive are the biggest obstacles the court faces in civil litigation? How can this be improved to best serve the general public?

I think the biggest barriers in civil litigation are the resources and the time those cases take. I think that we need to be more mindful of time and resources being spent on lengthy mediation and discovery.