

By Heather Yakin
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Experienced field in Orange Family Court race

GOSHEN – On Nov. 3, Orange County voters will choose among four candidates to fill two openings on the Family Court bench.

Family Court Judge Lori Currier-Woods is up for re-election, and another seat opens up with the retirement of Judge Debra Kiedasch at the end of the year.

Family Court judges handle child abuse, custody, visitation and support; juvenile delinquency; adoptions and foster care; and family violence. They serve 10-year terms, with an annual salary of \$125,600.

All four candidates have a wealth of experience.

Victoria Campbell, who sat for 18 years as City Judge in Port Jervis, has also handled a Family Court caseload in her private practice.

Lori Currier-Woods has been on the Family Court bench for a decade.

Maria Patrizio has been a Family Court lawyer for the Legal Aid Society of Orange County for 17 years.

Christine Stage is a veteran lawyer with more than 30 years of experience specializing in Family Court matters.

The Orange County Bar Association rated all four candidates as “well qualified.” The Women’s Bar Association of Orange and Sullivan Counties rated Stage, Patrizio and Campbell as “approved” and recommended, and Currier Woods as “approved as highly qualified” (a designation reserved for judges seeking re-election) and recommended.

The state’s Independent Judicial Election Qualifications Commission rated Currier Woods as “highly qualified” and Campbell as “qualified” in 2015. Stage was rated in 2014 as “qualified.” Those ratings are good for three years. The ratings are not a requirement to run for judicial office.

Because of ethical restrictions on what judicial candidates can say during campaigns, we posed two basic questions to the candidates. Their responses have been edited for brevity.

Why do you believe you are suited to the job of Family Court Judge, and what is your take on the duties and goals of the job?

Campbell:

As City Court Judge in Port Jervis, she handled a docket of over 5,000 cases a year. In private practice, she focused on matrimonial and family law, but also worked in civil and criminal litigation, real estate, bankruptcy, zoning, estates and personal injury.

“I’ve represented mothers and fathers and even grandparents in Family Court for 27 years, and I understand the stress and anxiety people face when they are in Family Court: They are there because their family is in crisis, and central to that is their children. I believe parents in Family Court want a judge that won’t rubber stamp an order; they want someone who will listen to both sides of the story, someone who will be fair and impartial that they can trust with their children’s future. I firmly believe that that someone is me.”

Currier-Woods:

“I am knowledgeable of the law and am compassionate, firm and fair. I am the only candidate with actual hands-on experience as a Family Court Judge and have spent the last 10 years serving the families of Orange County on a daily basis.”

“As a Family Court Judge it is my duty to serve the families that come before me within the boundaries of the law in order to provide for the best interest of the children. It is my responsibility to make determinations in the lives of the people that appear before me and to handle each case with compassion, integrity and objectivity.”

Patrizio:

She cites her experience as a Legal Aid lawyer, working for the past 17 years full-time in Family Court, “very much in the trenches.” She believes the core collective job of Family Court is to solve problems.

“I would like to make Family Court a little less horrible. It’s emotional, it’s difficult. I understand what my clients are going through. I’m the one standing next to my client when mascara is running down her face.”

Stage:



Victoria Campbell

She cites years of experience as an assistant county attorney handling all types of cases, including child abuse and neglect, custody, visitation, orders of protection, juvenile delinquency, persons in need of supervision and termination of parental rights.

“I am the only candidate with over 30 years of experience almost exclusively spent in Family Court.”

How will your professional background help you perform the duties of Family Court Judge?

Campbell:

“I know how to handle a court calendar efficiently after having done it for 18 years ... When the safety and welfare of our children are at stake, parents want their case adjudicated without unnecessary delay. I know the law, I know the proceedings, and I know enough about human nature that I feel everyone that comes before me, lawyers included, will come away with the opinion that I am a knowledgeable, fair and impartial jurist - as has been my reputation in city court.”

Currier-Woods:

Before becoming family court judge, she worked as an attorney for the child, advocating for children, which provided valuable knowledge of the law and prepared her for her role as a family court judge.

“Experience counts and I have proven that I can successfully perform the duties of a Family Court Judge.”

Patrizio:

“I think I am in a unique position to understand what the family in Family Court is going through. I’m also consistently punctual. I’ve learned what makes a good judge, and what doesn’t make a good judge. A good judge is compassionate above all, knowledgeable, efficient and practical. I know how to get the case resolved in a way that makes sense for the people involved.”

Stage:

“My background has provided me with tools necessary to deal with the highly emotionally charged cases which I will hear. But more importantly I have strived to ensure that the best interests of the most important people before the Court are met - the children. I have as the supervising attorney of the child abuse/neglect unit endeavored that children are safe. I hope to continue that emphasis on putting children first.”

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Victoria CampbellBallot lines: R, C, ReformAge: 54Family: married; three sons, two daughtersResides in: Port JervisCampaign slogan: It’s all about families; like your family, like my familyWebsite: www.campbellfororangecounty.com Lori Currier-WoodsBallot lines: R, C, IAge: 57Family: husband; raised three childrenResides in: MonroeCampaign slogan: Compassionate. Competent. Fair.Website: www.facebook.com/judgecurrier Maria PatrizioBallot lines: D, G, WFAge: 48Family: Two childrenResides in: Town of WalkillCampaign slogan: Helping families through difficult timesWebsite: www.facebook.com/Maria-Patrizio-for-Family-Court-835915749812324 Christine StageBallot lines: D, I, WF, GAge: 59Family: husband; two adult children; two grandchildrenResides in: WarwickCampaign slogan: Putting children firstWebsite: www.christinestageforfamilycourtjudge.com/