



Indiana Supreme Court

Chambers of Justice Christopher M. Goff • 317-232-2546 • courts.in.gov

October 3, 2024

The Honorable Eric J. Holcomb
Governor of Indiana
c/o Sharon Jackson, Deputy General Counsel
200 W. Washington Street, Statehouse Room 206
Indianapolis, IN 46204

Dear Governor Holcomb:

As chair of the Allen County Judicial Nominating Commission, I am pleased to offer the names of the three candidates the commission found to be the most qualified among those who applied for the current vacancy on the Allen Superior Court. This position became available when the Honorable David Avery announced he would retire on December 13, 2024. The commission met in person on September 25, 2024, to interview the six applicants and unanimously selected the following three nominees:

Magistrate Brian D. Cook
Magistrate Jason C. Custer
Magistrate Michael T. Douglass

In selecting these candidates, the commission considered the nonexclusive list of statutory factors in Indiana Code section 33-33-2-40, including legal education, activities in public service, efforts and achievements in improving the administration of justice, diversity, legal experience and reputation as a trial lawyer or judge, and probable judicial temperament.

On behalf of the commission, I offer summaries of each candidate's qualifications in the order listed above.

Magistrate Brian D. Cook

Born and raised in Fort Wayne, Magistrate Brian D. Cook has extensive service with the Allen County courts. He has served as a magistrate for 25 years, and in that time has presided over approximately 12,000 bench trials. He attributes his friendly and patient demeanor—with empathy for others—as having come from learning to adapt as a child. He moved 32 times before turning 18.

He appeared on the Dean's List and Vice Chancellor's List and earned a degree from Indiana University-Fort Wayne with a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice before heading to law school. He earned his Juris Doctor degree from Ohio Northern University Pettit College of Law and returned to Indiana to begin his legal career.

He started in Allen Superior Court's Family Division as part of electronic monitoring and then youth services. In addition to working at the Boys and Girls Club, he served as a Prosecutor, Public Defender, and in a general practice nine-person law firm early in his career.

As he gained valuable experience, his work took him beyond the borders of Allen County. Cook served extensively as a Guardian Ad Litem in CHINS matters appearing in 56 counties before being appointed to the bench.

Once he began service as a judicial officer, Magistrate Cook took part in continuing education programs, including the Indiana Graduate Judge's Program. His work on the Judicial Conference Education and the Special Court's committees allowed him to serve in statewide leadership positions. Some of his work has also included revisions to the Allen Small Claims Court Local Rules.

When not working or spending time with family, Magistrate Cook enjoys the outdoors. If he was not in the legal field, he would be a park ranger. He is a member of the National Parks Conservation Association and other groups dedicated to environmental preservation. He enjoys coaching youth sports—teaching fundamentals and sportsmanship.

Magistrate Jason C. Custer

Magistrate Jason C. Custer has spent 27 years in the legal community of Fort Wayne in both the public and private sectors. He is a graduate of Indiana University, earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science while participating in the University's Honors Program and a semester abroad at the University of Leiden, Netherlands.

After graduating, he enrolled at Valparaiso University School of Law. During law school, Custer participated in an international comparative law program at Trinity College, University of Cambridge, and held two legal internships: one with the Allen County Prosecuting Attorney's Office and another at a LaPorte law firm.

After law school, Custer returned to the Allen County Prosecuting Attorney's Office, this time as a deputy prosecutor. Over the next three years, he gained experience in the Juvenile, Misdemeanor and Traffic, D Felony, and Narcotics Divisions (which he eventually led). He tried major drug cases while working as liaison with Allen County narcotic and arson units.

He eventually moved into private practice as an associate attorney for a Fort Wayne firm. He worked on insurance defense litigation, contract law, medical malpractice, corporate law, collections practice, and estate work, trying numerous small claims trials and participating in two civil jury trials. He also served as judge *pro tempore* in both the Small Claims and Misdemeanor and Traffic Divisions before returning to the Allen County Prosecutor's Office as Deputy

Prosecutor. He tried over 60 major felony cases, before being appointed Magistrate for Misdemeanor and Traffic Court in the Criminal Division of the Allen Superior Court. As a judicial officer, he has presided over 10 misdemeanor jury trials.

Custer has volunteered for the We the People competition and is a board member of the Shepherd's House, which is dedicated to helping homeless veterans. He is a member of the Sons of the American Legion, and enjoys travel, sports, movies, and outdoor activities with his family.

Magistrate Michael T. Douglass

Born and raised in Fort Wayne, Magistrate Michael T. Douglass has served in the Allen Superior Court since 2016, first with the Family Division and then with the Small Claims Division. He graduated from Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne where he obtained his Bachelor of Science in Public Affairs with a concentration in Health Care Administration. After college, he worked as a sales executive for a news station in Fort Wayne. He obtained his Juris Doctor degree from the Thomas M. Cooley Law School where he was a member of the Mock Trial National Team.

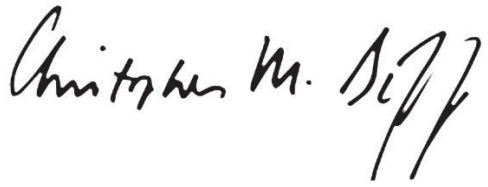
Douglass began his legal career with the Allen County Prosecuting Attorney's Office before entering private practice. He then started his solo practice handling criminal law, family law, CHINS, juvenile delinquency, and immigration cases. During his time in private practice he also worked as a part-time deputy public defender in Allen, Adams, and DeKalb counties. He represented people facing felony charges, involuntary commitment hearings, and CHINS proceedings. During this time, he participated in multiple jury and bench trials. He also worked with the volunteer lawyer program through his local bar association.

His judicial career began in Allen County as a judge *pro tempore* before becoming a Magistrate with a busy docket, handling civil matters, evictions, and protective order cases. During this time, he helped develop Covid-19 policies and approved litigant forms for the Small Claims Court. His statewide judicial service includes membership on the Judicial Conference Protection Order, Special Courts, and Language Access committees. He has also been a volunteer for the Judges and Lawyers Assistance Program.

Magistrate Douglass volunteers with We the People and has taught classes as an adjunct professor at Indiana Tech University and Purdue University-Fort Wayne. He serves with numerous community volunteer organizations. In his free time he is an avid runner, currently training for a 100-mile ultra-endurance race.

I would be pleased to discuss any of these nominees with you in greater detail. Based on their interviews, the commission's assessment, and history of service as judicial officers, each nominee is well-suited for the open judicial position and has the legal ability and professional experience to serve with distinction. Our commission members are confident that each nominee is of high caliber and would be an outstanding addition to the Allen Superior Court.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christopher M. Goff". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Christopher M. Goff
*Justice, Indiana Supreme Court
and ACJNC Chairperson*