

**Judy Benckart, Republican Candidate for Monroe County Circuit Court Division 8**  
**Responses to questions from the Greater Bloomington Chamber of Commerce**  
**For the Nov. 3, 2020 General Election**

**1. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected the way that the court system is handling its work. In some ways, the period offers an opportunity to reset. Are there any changes to the circuit court system that you'd support post-pandemic? How would you advocate to implement those changes?**

The entire court system has been in a trial and error phase since March. I have been in on the ground floor in addressing the issues the court faces. Circuit Court VII is a civil law court, so I will address the changes I support to the post-pandemic civil court system.

First, I support a continuation of video conference hearings for individuals who are unable to come to hearings in-person. For example, if an individual lives out of state or is physically incapacitated. I support providing parties a choice of a hearing where all witnesses appear either in person, by video conference or hybrid hearings where individuals could opt to appear either in person or by video

Second, I continue to support the Housing Eviction Prevention Program (HEPP). I was a part of the group of individuals from various organizations that created a partnership to establish a resource for landlords and tenants to help prevent/reduce evictions in Monroe County. HEPP, with grant funding, attends hearings to offer free legal services, free mediation services, and to inform of resources available in the community should a tenant need assistance locating new housing. The goal is to help parties to either completely avoid eviction or, should an eviction be inevitable, to obtain an agreement where the tenant avoids an eviction on his/her/their record.

Finally, I support all efforts to reduce the incarceration of those with mental illness. I would advocate implementing changes by joining in with those already working on this issue and lending my experience to assist with resolutions.

**2. Monroe County government has undertaken a criminal justice study. What changes to the current system do you support, and why?**

If the criminal justice study report ordered by the County to determine the level of efficiency of the criminal justice system has been completed, the Courts have not been provided a copy. It is my understanding that the report may not be completed or needs to be supplemented to address the issues that have arisen due to the pandemic. Therefore, I cannot answer this question at this time.

**3. What are the top challenges facing Monroe County Circuit Court, and how do you propose addressing those challenges?**

One challenge facing the Courts is balancing the due process rights of the parties while at the same time providing an efficient court. Not only are parties entitled to a fair and impartial hearing, but they are also entitled to receive decisions quickly. I make it a priority to treat all people who enter my courtroom with respect, integrity, and compassion and to render a decision as quickly as possible so that folks can move on with their lives.

Another challenge is educating the public about the process of the justice system. It is not quick. It must be thorough. As a consequence, there will always be a delay in presenting facts to the public. Unfortunately, incomplete information is available immediately, which can mislead. To convince the public to be patient with the process, that the delay is not an attempt to hide facts from the public, but to be sure that what is issued is the complete story. I would advocate for now and would continue to look for ways to improve communication between the public and the court system.

Another challenge is educating the public that judges are ethically obligated to be politically impartial. We cannot lend our support to one side or the other of political issues regardless of our personal beliefs. When we take the bench, we promise to put our personal beliefs aside and look only to the evidence presented. This can make judges appear uninterested or aloof, which could not be further from the truth. Rest assured we do all we can to keep the community calm and safe.