

Washington State Supreme Court 2026

Potential Candidates for Two Opening Seats

*Moses Lake Schools Transparency Project
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Background Context

Two Washington State Supreme Court seats will open in 2026 due to mandatory retirement and voluntary departure. This report profiles potential candidates currently in the judicial pipeline who may seek these positions, based on deep biographical research that examines educational background, career patterns, professional associations, family networks, and life choices—the real indicators of judicial philosophy beyond campaign statements.

Seats Opening:

- **Position 4:** Justice Charles Johnson (mandatory retirement at age 75)
- **Position 3:** Justice Raquel Montoya-Lewis (choosing not to seek reelection)

Research Methodology Note

Campaign statements are boilerplate and nearly worthless. This analysis examines who raised them, who mentored them, their actual life choices, who they married, where they live, where they send their children to school, their deeper biographical patterns, and their professional associations. These reveal far more than any judicial philosophy statement ever could.

Position 4: Candidates for Justice Charles Johnson's Seat

Judge Sean P. O'Donnell - King County Superior Court

Educational Background

- **Georgetown University** (undergraduate) - Elite Jesuit university, moderate-to-liberal orientation
- **Seattle University School of Law** (J.D., 2001) - Catholic Jesuit law school, generally liberal orientation

Professional Background

- **Boeing** - Corporate speechwriter (early career)
- **King County Prosecutor's Office** - Senior Deputy Prosecutor for 12 years
 - Prosecuted state's first human trafficking case
 - Prosecuted state's first commercial sexual abuse of a minor case
 - Member of Green River Task Force (Gary Ridgway prosecution)
- **King County Superior Court Judge** (elected 2013, Department 29)
 - Chief Criminal Judge for King County Superior Court
 - President, Superior Court Judges' Association
 - Justice pro tem, Washington State Supreme Court

The Smoking Gun: Lakeside School Board Chair

This is the defining biographical fact. O'Donnell serves as Board Chair of Lakeside School, the most elite progressive private institution in the Pacific Northwest:

- **\$44,000+ annual tuition** (among highest in nation)
- **\$260 million endowment**
 - Alumni include Bill Gates, Paul Allen, and Seattle tech billionaire class
- **Mission statement:** "Diversity, inclusion, and global citizenship" (adopted 2003)
- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation donated \$40 million for "global service learning"
- Students engage in service projects in China, India, Peru

You don't become **Board Chair** of this institution by accident. This reveals his actual social network, values, and where his family likely sends their children to school.

Family and Social Networks

- **Father:** Richard O'Donnell - Investment advisor at Ragen McKenzie (Bellevue), upper-middle class
- **Mother:** Mary McDonald O'Donnell - Country club golfer, Bellevue resident, leisure class
- **Wife:** Shelley O'Donnell - Operates autism clinic in Seattle, educated professional
- **Children:** Two teenagers (Logan and Maria)

- **Residence:** Seattle (city proper, not suburbs)

Political Assessment: Progressive Establishment Liberal

Profile: Classic progressive establishment liberal. Catholic upbringing but secular progressive in practice. Wealthy, well-connected, socially liberal. The Lakeside Board Chair position places him squarely in Seattle's progressive elite circles—the network of tech billionaires, corporate executives, and progressive philanthropists.

Likely Judicial Philosophy: Center-left to left. Would maintain or slightly increase liberal orientation of Justice Johnson's seat (Johnson's campaign finance score: -1.16, more liberal than WA average -0.91). On constitutional questions, would likely vote with progressive majority 85-95% of the time.

On Conservative Policy Issues:

- **Educational freedom/school choice:** Likely opposes vouchers and charter expansion
- **Parental rights:** Would favor state/school authority over parental objections
- **Gun rights:** Would uphold restrictions (assault weapon bans, capacity limits)
- **Abortion:** Strong pro-choice, would strike down restrictions
- **Immigration:** Pro-immigrant rights

Position 3: Candidates for Justice Raquel Montoya-Lewis's Seat

Judge J. Michael "Mike" Diaz - Washington Court of Appeals Division I

Educational Background

- **University of Notre Dame** (B.A. Philosophy, magna cum laude, 1996)
 - 1990s Notre Dame: 85% Republican student body
 - **BUT**: Philosophy department represents liberal wing of Catholic thought
 - Liberation theology tradition, not pro-life conservatism
- **Princeton University** (Graduate studies in classical philosophy, 2 years)
 - VERY liberal graduate environment
- **Cornell Law School** (J.D., 2002)
 - Ivy League, liberal orientation
 - Member, Cornell International Law Journal
 - Met wife at Cornell Law

The Defining Life Pattern: Working-Class Immigrant to Civil Rights Champion

Classic progressive trajectory:

1. **Immigrant origins**: Born Lima, Peru; immigrated as infant
2. **Working-class upbringing**: Ballard → White Center/Burien (progressively lower-income neighborhoods)
3. **Spanish-only household**: First lawyer in large Latino family
4. **Elite education as vehicle**: Notre Dame → Princeton → Cornell
5. **Dedication to civil rights over wealth**: Left corporate law to prosecute civil rights violations

Professional Background - The Tell

- **Fulbright & Jaworski LLP** (Houston, 2002-2006) - Elite corporate firm, **QUIT** to do public interest
- **U.S. Attorney's Office, Western District of Washington** (2008-2018)
 - **Founded the Civil Rights Program (2011)** - his life's work
 - Prosecuted: housing, employment, education discrimination, **police misconduct**, disability rights
 - DOJ National Advocacy Center faculty - training prosecutors nationwide
- **Obama Federal Nomination (2016)**
 - Nominated to U.S. District Court for Western District of Washington
 - **Republican Senate refused to act** - recognized as too liberal
- **King County Superior Court Judge** (Inslee appointment, 2018-2022)
- **Washington Court of Appeals Division I** (Inslee appointment, 2022-present)

■ **Two Inslee appointments** total

Political Assessment: Solid Progressive/Liberal

Profile: Clear progressive. Classic story: immigrant kid → elite education → dedicates entire career to civil rights enforcement. Obama nominee. Civil rights prosecutor. Two Inslee appointments. This is not a moderate—this represents the Bernie Sanders wing of the Democratic Party on the bench.

Obama Nomination Significance: In 2016, Obama nominated Diaz for federal bench. Republican Senate refused even a hearing. This was not accidental—they recognized his progressive credentials and blocked him accordingly.

Likely Judicial Philosophy: Would be among MOST liberal justices on Washington Supreme Court. Would likely be MORE progressive than Montoya-Lewis. On constitutional questions, would vote with progressive wing 95%+ of the time.

On Conservative Policy Issues:

- **Educational freedom/school choice:** Strongly opposes—views as undermining public education
- **Parental rights:** Strongly favors individual child rights over parental authority
- **Gun rights:** Supports strong restrictions, would uphold virtually any gun control measure
- **Abortion:** Extremely pro-choice, would strike down any restrictions
- **Immigration:** MOST pro-immigrant voice on court (immigrant background, Spanish clinic work)
- **Police accountability:** Pro-reform (prosecuted police misconduct)

Summary: Impact on Washington Supreme Court

Neither Seat Will Move Conservative

Position 4 (Johnson's seat):

- Charles Johnson departing: Liberal (-1.16 campaign finance score)
- Sean O'Donnell likely: Progressive establishment liberal
- **Result:** Maintains liberal orientation, possibly slightly more progressive

Position 3 (Montoya-Lewis's seat):

- Raquel Montoya-Lewis departing: Liberal/progressive (social justice focus)
- J. Michael Diaz likely: Solid progressive, possibly MOST liberal on court
- **Result:** Maintains or INCREASES progressive orientation

Overall Court Direction: Washington Supreme Court will maintain or strengthen its liberal majority. A 2012 study ranked it as 5th most liberal state supreme court nationwide—these 2026 changes will not alter that positioning.

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Research Methodology

This analysis relies on biographical research examining educational background, career trajectory, professional associations, family networks, philanthropic involvement, board memberships, personal life choices, and public records. Campaign statements and judicial philosophy essays are deliberately excluded as unreliable indicators. The analysis follows the principle that life choices reveal values more accurately than stated positions.

Disclaimer

This document profiles potential candidates based on publicly available information and biographical analysis. Inclusion in this report does not indicate confirmed candidacy. The Moses Lake Schools Transparency Project provides factual information for educational purposes and does not endorse candidates.

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