

Want to Improve New Mexico's Judges? Participate in Our Survey Process

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Next year, we may set a record in the number of district court judges standing for retention. Judges who are standing for retention are those judges who have won at least one partisan election and served on the bench for a minimum of two years. They must then receive 57% voter approval the next time around to remain on the bench.

In 2008, we may see as many as 84 district court judges standing for retention throughout New Mexico, compared to 62 district judges in 2002. Voters will also decide whether to retain four appellate court judges (those justices and judges who serve on the New Mexico Supreme Court and the Court of Appeals).

The New Mexico Judicial Performance Evaluation Commission (JPEC) will make recommendations to voters on whether to retain judges based on an objective evaluation of their performance in four main areas: legal ability; fairness; communication skills; and preparation, attentiveness, temperament and control over proceedings. These evaluations will be based, in part, on feedback we receive from individuals who have appeared before or who have had professional contacts with the judge(s) throughout the state between April and September 2007.

In April 2007, confidential surveys will be mailed by an independent research firm to individuals who have had direct experience with district judges residing in the 3rd, 5th, 6th, 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th Judicial Districts. These districts encompass Chaves, Curry, De Baca, Doña Ana, Eddy, Grant, Harding, Hidalgo, Lea, Lincoln, Luna, Otero, McKinley, Quay, Roosevelt and San Juan counties.

Individuals who will receive these surveys include:

- Attorneys with direct experience
- Citizen Review Board Volunteers
- CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates)
- Court Staff
- Interpreters
- Jurors
- Law enforcement officers
- Law professors
- Probation officers (adult and juvenile)
- Psychologists
- Social workers

The surveys have from 12-20 questions, including both closed-ended and open-ended questions in which you have the opportunity to provide additional information. If you have served on more than one jury or have appeared or testified before more than one district judge, you may be asked to fill out more than one survey.

Your responses to these surveys are very important. They assist us in helping a judge improve his or her performance on the bench. They can also give us the information we need to provide fair and accurate evaluations to the voting public next year – before they go to the polls. This year we hope to improve the rate of response from every group surveyed. The JPEC will release its narratives (a summary of a judge's performance) with a recommendation on whether to retain that judge to the public at least 45 days before the 2008 general election.

If you receive a survey or surveys, please take a few moments to fill it/them out and return it/them within two weeks. Your responses will be confidential. Your comments will not be provided to the judges. All individual responses will be destroyed. The JPEC will receive only the aggregate results from an independent research firm. Most importantly, you will be doing us all a service. The more responses we receive from you -- the more accurate we can make our evaluations.

Help us improve our courts by filling out a survey if you receive one!