

CANDIDATE SURVEY

Two questions for the judicial race candidates on data and technology.



2026 JUDICIAL CANDIDATE SURVEY

Court Watch NOLA sent the candidates in the three contested judicial elections a short candidate survey on two issues that we had not yet seen addressed in other forums. We are publishing the full responses from each of the candidates that completed the survey. To be clear, Court Watch NOLA does not endorse any candidates in any electoral races. We are an objective, nonpartisan organization.



Question 1:

In 2024, Court Watch NOLA released a report detailing how the court’s cell phone ban poses a significant barrier to community members accessing the court and participating in the process. In the past two years, emerging technologies such as “smart glasses” have evolved to present new challenges. How do you plan to balance the need for security in the courthouse against the public’s need for access?



Question 2:

During this year’s state legislative session, there was confusion about what set of statistics best described the court’s activity and caseloads. The public did not have access to relevant data to draw their own conclusions and evaluate narratives. What ways do you think that the court can be more transparent with data so that the public can make a better-educated assessment of the court’s performance and make more informed choices?

MAGISTRATE COURT

Question 1:

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Chanel Robinson Debose

I plan to balance the need for security in the courthouse against the public's need for access by following the lead of the existing criminal bench. The Louisiana constitution provides that most proceedings are open to the public. There are specific statutory exceptions to this constitutional right. As a judge, it will be incumbent upon me to follow the law and local rules of the court. The need for security in the court is a compelling interest, and it should be given great weight.

Judge Juana Lombard

Keeping our courtrooms safe and secure for everyone that enters is of the utmost importance. Where I can exert control over what happens in the Magistrate Court, I want to always ensure that every stakeholder has access to everything they need, and nothing they don't. Sometimes that means defendants and plaintiffs need access to cell phones. While emerging technologies like smart glasses become more widespread, I remain committed to balancing protecting privacy and keeping court transparent and accessible.

MAGISTRATE COURT

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Chanel Robinson Debose

The court can be more transparent with data so that the public can make a better educated assessment of the court's performance and make more informed choices by building and creating a user friendly case data portal that is easily accessible to the public on the court's website. The portal should be reasonably affordable for those who wish to access the information.

Judge Juana Lombard

Given the proper resources to do so, I propose that each court across the state release regular reports on the costs, efficiency, and performance of each judge and court. For fair and accurate reporting, there should be statewide standards for how cases are counted to ensure consistency and to allow for an accurate comparison of courts.

CDC SECTION D

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Judge Kimya Holmes

As far as the control I have as it relates to the policies present in my courtroom, I recognize the tight-rope walked between access, preparedness, and security. As a result, I'm looking into the use of pouches or lockers to store devices during court proceedings. Many court participants count on cell phones for phone numbers and court documents, while advances like smart glasses pose a threat as hidden recording devices. In cases where recording is unacceptable, I would ask court security staff to ensure the privacy of all parties in the face of smart glasses.

Judge Simone Levine

The Court Watch NOLA report got it right, and I agree with their concerns. Banning cell phones from the courthouse creates real problems for the people who need to be there. Victims, witnesses, defendants. If someone can't check their calendar, they miss court. That leads to warrants, more delays, more congestion. It's counterproductive, and I don't support the ban.

Security still matters, and I take it seriously. But I think we can get there through better screening rather than a blanket prohibition. That's a conversation I want to have with courthouse administration and security staff.

On smart glasses specifically, I won't allow them. The privacy and surveillance risks are in a different category than a cell phone, and I'm comfortable being firm on that.

CDC SECTION D

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Judge Kimya Holmes

Transparency is essential to maintaining public trust in our judicial system. The people we serve deserve access to accurate, reliable information about how their courts operate, how cases are being handled, and how effectively our judicial system is serving the community. As a sitting judge, I understand that statistics can tell very different stories depending on how they are collected, presented, and interpreted. That is why I believe the court should work toward making consistent, regularly updated data publicly available, including case filings, depositions, pending caseloads, case processing times, and other meaningful measures of court operations. Monthly reports from the Clerk of Court on what's being accepted or refused have been helpful. If all members of the criminal justice system have a seat at the table before the numbers are submitted, we can ensure Orleans Parish is represented correctly.

Judge Simone Levine

The fight over statistics during the legislative session was a mess, and it exposed something real. When the court isn't publishing its own data, other people get to shape the narrative. The public deserves better than that.

We're working with a statistician right now to get our court data online, including recidivism data. That's the foundation. But I also want it to actually be readable by regular people, not just researchers. Transparency isn't much use if you need a PhD to make sense of it.

CDC SECTION H

Question 1:

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Judge Camille Buras

At the outset, I should state that I have no issue with credentialed members of the Press or Courtwatch being allowed to bring cell phones into court, however, the rule of the en banc must be followed until modified. The issue of the emerging technologies, including "smart glasses," certainly creates scenarios where unauthorized recordings can occur without anyone being aware of the person using/wearing the technology. I believe that meetings with Sheriff Command personnel and our court would be most helpful in formulating procedures and written policies for how to detect the devices and how to secure the privacy rights of victims, witnesses and defendants. Also educating all criminal justice partners on the new apparatuses would be great. I am a firm believer in no need to have absolute prohibitions on things if there is a way to insure adherence to rules.

Judge Leon Roche

I believe that full transparency should be paramount. I pledged to the voters when they elected me 3 years ago that I would increase transparency and I have delivered on that promise. I am the only judge in Criminal Court to stream the courtroom to see full proceedings the entire time I'm on the bench. The public should always be able to monitor what is taking place in government buildings and proceedings. The only exceptions granted should be when there are legitimate safety concerns.

CDC SECTION H

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Judge Camille Buras

The Court has a standing cooperative data sharing agreement with our criminal justice partners. I am a long time advocate and proponent of transparency and access to court data. I am the Chair of the Technology Committee for many many years and now share co-chair responsibilities with another Judge. The Court for decades worked in the AS400 system and this system allowed for seamless input of data into one central repository- the Sheriff, the Clerk and the Court entered all booking, bond, case dispositions, court activity etc into the AS400 where the public could view "docket masters" on cases. The AS400 data was converted into the Clerk's new i3 Clerk Connect system and the conversion has taken an extraordinary amount of time as new processes and new screens to capture the information into easily read and fully transmitted methods are developed.

I have expressed my concerns about the "workload formula" utilized by the Louisiana Supreme Court for years. I wrote a position booklet on the issue as far back as 2013 when there was an attempt to downsize our court based on this formula. We successfully fought back that attempt. In Orleans Parish "One case filing" may contain multiple defendants with multiple charges. That only counts as ONE credit case under the formula. Other jurisdictions do NOT count filings the same way and may count each defendant and each charge as separate filings.

This was confirmed by me personally this 2026 session when I called other Clerks of Courts offices around the State to see how they were reporting their data to the Louisiana Supreme Court. This is what we were trying to state to the Louisiana

CDC SECTION H CONT'D

Judge Camille Buras cont'd:

Legislature this session. Any workload assessment of any jurisdiction must be based on an equal and weighted analysis of filings.

Also the workload formula does not take into account the difference between first, second, third and fourth class cases. The Orleans dockets are mainly comprised of felony cases- and quite serious felonies that are at hard labor crimes. The seriousness and complexity of caseload should also be factored into workload. I am in full support of data being available to the public.

Judge Leon Roche

I have ranked as one of the top performing judges at Criminal Court every year I have been on the bench. I prioritize moving cases fairly and fast, and currently have the second lowest caseload of any judge in the court because I understand the impact of delayed justice. The work that Court Watch and other organizations do is admirable, but government should be regularly and proactively sharing performance data to the public. We receive reports regularly, that information should be made available on a quarterly basis at least. Unless explicitly prohibited by law, the information on judicial performance should be made available. This will require a shared commitment, new investments in staff and technology capacity, and/or new partnerships.

Contact

Court Watch NOLA

PO Box 750633

New Orleans, LA 70175

504-356-3577

www.courtwatchnola.org

jmanley@courtwatchnola.org

[@courtwatchnola](#)

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