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Page 1: Questionnaire

Q1 Candidate Information

Candidate Name: **Syda Cogliati**
Email:
Phone:
Website: **www.syda4judge.org**
Do you identify as LGBTIQ? **no**
Are you a GLBT Alliance member? **yes**
Office you seek to be elected to: **Superior Court Judge**

Q2 Please choose the option best describing your candidacy: **Open Seat**

Q3 Please describe your qualifications for the elected position you seek. Include your main issues, priorities if elected, key endorsements, plus anything else that you'd like our members to know about you and your candidacy.

I have worked as an attorney for 23 years, with experience in criminal, civil, family, and juvenile law. In addition to litigation experience, I have experience working in the courts, doing the job of a judge. As an appellate court attorney, I am responsible for performing an in-depth review of trial court cases and determining whether the trial judge made proper rulings and findings. I have also been working as a judge pro tem for the past three years. In running my own courtroom, I have developed the critical skills of listening to litigants, making carefully considered decisions, clearly explaining the law and my decision, and ensuring that everyone is treated with respect. My priorities include improving public trust and confidence in the judicial system, in three main areas: (1) public safety; (2) communication; and (3) increasing diversity. People all want to feel safe and trust that the judicial system is addressing criminal issues effectively. I will work with justice partners to continue the work of finding and improving alternatives to incarceration that make the public feel there is not a revolving door crime problem. I want to improve the court's communication systems so that the public can understand what happens in cases and feel that the process has more transparency. And I really want to have a voice in working toward a more diverse bench and bar, so that the public feels that the legal system reflects who we are as a community. My key endorsements include State Senator Bill Monning; Assemblymember Mark Stone; Supervisors Friend, Coonerty, and Caput; the mayors of Santa Cruz, Watsonville, and Scotts Valley; members of all the city councils, and the UCSC College Democrats. My website contains a full list of my endorsements thus far. I am proud to have been endorsed by leaders in the LGBTIQ community and to feature a testimonial on my website by one of the transgender students I coach in high school mock trial. I am also proud to have members of the LGBTIQ community on my campaign team.

Q4 Why are you seeking the endorsement of Santa Cruz County's grassroots LGBTIQ political organization, the GLBT Alliance?

The GLBT Alliance is an incredibly important organization in this community. The GLBT Alliance gives voices and power to people who have been traditionally quiet and powerless. Providing equal rights and power is an underlying purpose of the legal/judicial system, too. I believe it is vitally important that the court be a place for everyone to seek access to solutions, equal treatment, and fairness. The goals of the GLBT Alliance and my goals as a judge thus are parallel in many ways.

Q5 Please tell us about any past or current experiences or involvement you've had addressing LGBTIQ issues or work you've done to support the LGBTIQ community.

I have served as a board member of Women Lawyers of Santa Cruz County (WLSCC) for many years. In that capacity, I have done a number of things to help promote LGBTIQ rights. In 2009, the WLSCC board cosigned an amicus brief in the case seeking to overturn Proposition 8. In 2012, when I was President of WLSCC, I helped organize and moderated a panel on marriage equality (co-sponsored by the Santa Cruz County Bar Association) that featured speakers Kate Kendell of the National Center for Lesbian Rights and Santa Cruz County Counsel Dana McRae. Also during my presidency in 2012, I ensured that WLSCC recognized LGBT Awareness month with a legal seminar on registered domestic partnerships and taxation (co-sponsored by the Family Law Bar). I was responsible for arranging WLSCC's co-sponsorship of two other great LGBTIQ programs in partnership with UCSC, and I attended those programs as the WLSCC representative: (1) the 2013 program "Love is a Dangerous Promise," in which speaker Karen Thompson detailed her struggle to have medical rights with respect to her partner, who had been in a devastating car accident; and (2) the 2014 program "A Conversation with Kris Perry," in which one of the parties in the Proposition 8 litigation told her amazing story. Since 2016, I have worked with several LGBTIQ students as a high school mock trial coach. I am extremely proud to have helped those students find their voices and learn how to advocate. In 2016, I attended the GLBT Alliance's Beyond Marriage Equality program, where I met the amazing Lisa Cisneros, and then in 2017, I attended the GLBT Alliance's What's At Stake program with one of my mock trial students – where I was thrilled to be able to introduce her to Lisa. As a litigator, one of my top victories was on behalf of a lesbian client. At age 22, the client had been dating a 15-year-old girl, and they had engaged in consensual oral copulation. My client was convicted of oral copulation with a minor, which meant my client had to register as a sex offender for the rest of her life. I came into the case during the appeal. I argued that the sex offender registration requirement violated my client's equal protection rights, since a person who had engaged in unlawful sexual intercourse with a minor (i.e., heterosexual conduct) would not be required to register as a sex offender. I am proud to have won an order striking the sex offender registration order for my client. As an appellate attorney at the Sixth District Court of Appeal, I worked on a significant case involving a sexual assault of a transgender woman. The People's brief insisted on referring to the victim as a male, which I found disrespectful. I took it upon myself to explain to the justice I worked for why it was important that we refer to the victim as a female. The justice agreed and our written decision in the case made it clear that our court has respect for transgender individuals.

Q6 What historic political or civil rights struggles are you familiar with that impact LGBTIQ equality?

I came of age during the AIDS crisis in the late 1980's. The struggle to come out of the shadows and get medical research efforts and funding was one of the civil rights issues I was most interested in during my early adulthood. Now, as the mother of a child with a chronic/uncurable illness who depends heavily on medical research and access to care, I have an even deeper appreciation for the advocacy efforts that went in to achieving the treatments we now have for HIV/AIDS. Marriage equality also has been a huge civil rights issue in my lifetime. As noted in my response to the question above, I have helped promote marriage equality through my leadership in WLSCC. The significance of legitimizing same-sex marriages cannot be overstated as an important step towards LGBTIQ equality. We need to continue to work to support LGBTIQ families in areas where they still face discrimination, in areas such as adoption and of course laws designed to permit discrimination on the basis of religious belief (i.e., the Masterpiece Cake Shop case).

Q7 What is your philosophy about working with minority communities of which you are not a member, and how will this manifest in your future work with the LGBTIQ community?

My philosophy is to treat everyone with respect. I strive to have an acute awareness of any implicit bias and to overcome it so that I treat everyone equally. I am deeply committed to increasing diversity in the legal community. I will bring this philosophy, awareness, and commitment to the bench as a judge. From 2014 to 2017, I served on the Diversity Committee at Pacific Collegiate School (PCS). In that capacity, I had to learn about the barriers faced by certain minority communities and find solutions to help overcome those barriers. I will bring that same curiosity and eagerness to learn to the bench in cases and aim to help provide opportunities for new lawyers from diverse communities to gain skills and experience.

Q8 Please describe any programs you know of that impact the LGBTIQ community and that are governed by or funded through the elected office you are running for? Include any suggestions you may have for improving these programs.

I am unaware of any LGBTIQ-specific programs provided by the Santa Cruz County Superior Court. However, I am aware that on the state level, there are efforts to ensure judges and other court personnel are trained in addressing the LGBTIQ issues that frequently arise in juvenile court. There is a growing awareness that LGBTIQ youth face major hurdles in the dependency system, often leading to delinquency problems. Judges and court staff should continue to receive training to ensure the safety of LGBTIQ youth and to be supportive of LGBTIQ youth.

Q9 If elected, how would you use your position to help further issues of importance to the LGBTIQ community?

I would encourage other judges and lawyers to take advantage of the training in LGBTIQ issues provided at the state level, and I would work to bring some of those programs here. I also very strongly believe that our local bench needs representation from the LGBTIQ community. We have a number of great LGBTIQ lawyers in Santa Cruz, and some of them have applied for the bench. If I am elected, I will very likely have a voice in the next round of judicial appointments, and you can count on me to advocate for appointment of someone from the LGBTIQ community.

Q10 If you receive the GLBT Alliance's endorsement, will you display it in your campaign literature?

Yes, please send me the GLBT Alliance's logo (jpg file) so I can proudly announce the endorsement on my campaign literature, social media and website!
