



2025 GENERAL ELECTION VOTER GUIDE

WE CAN DO BETTER

**It is in our power to shape the future
of Greater Cleveland. Vote.**

The Need for Us Now

We are living in a moment that demands courage, clarity, and faith. The choices made in this election will shape not just policies, but people's lives – the lives of our neighbors, our children, and generations yet to come. Scripture reminds us: "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; defend the rights of the poor and needy" (Proverbs 31:8-9). Our votes, our voices, and our public witness are tools God has placed in our hands for such a time as this. There is a need for every election and this election our need is clear. An urgent call in the Cleveland Municipal Court races. Too many of our brothers and sisters sit in jail for days without seeing a judge. Too many are arrested and later released without charges – losing jobs, housing, even their children in the process. Judges hold enormous power to prolong suffering or to open the door to fairness and restoration. Their choices shape whether our communities are weakened by despair or strengthened by justice. As people of



faith, we will not be silent. We want safe communities, and we stand with victims of crime. But we also know delayed justice destroys lives. This election, let us show up – not only to choose leaders, but to proclaim God's justice for every person, in every neighborhood, every day. And may we press

forward until justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream (Amos 5:24). We NEED to, we HAVE to and we CAN do better! — **REV. JAMES CREWS, COLUMBIA BAPTIST CHURCH, GCC STRATEGY TEAM**

BATTLE FOR DEMOCRACY

Elections should be free and fair – but in Ohio, many eligible voters feel their voices don't matter. GCC's ongoing Battle for Democracy campaign is changing that by building lasting relationships with depressed and suppressed voters, turning hopelessness into power.

WHAT'S DIFFERENT IN THIS ELECTION

There have been, and will be changes to where and how we vote. What **is** the same is GCC will keep you up to date. Over 73,000 voters will be impacted – that likely means you, your family, or your neighbor. Voting matters more than ever – and being prepared is power.

WHAT'S INSIDE

This guide is our commitment to keeping you informed. Read on for important issues like pre-trial justice, what's on the ballot, seats up for election and more.

WHAT'S ON THE BALLOT

The following offices may be on the November 4, 2025 General Election ballot, depending upon which municipality and/or precinct you live in.

boe.cuyahogacounty.gov/voters/Get-a-Sample-Ballot

Partisan City Offices

- Mayor
- President of Council
- Auditor
- Treasurer
- Director of Law
- Member of Council at Large
- Member of Council - Ward

Partisan Village Offices

- Mayor
- Clerk-Treasurer
- Clerk
- Treasurer
- Member of Council
- Member of Board of Trustees of Public Affairs

Nonpartisan Offices

- Judge of the Municipal Court (GCC Focus for November General Election)
- Clerk of the Municipal Court
- City Offices (order of offices same as above)
- Village Offices (order of offices same as above)
- Township Trustees
- Township Fiscal Officer
- Member of Governing Board of Educational Service Center
- Member of Board of Education (City, Local, and Exempted Village)

Greater Cleveland Congregations is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) and as such does not endorse, support or oppose any candidate for political office

Local Questions & Issues

It's more critical than ever to be informed around local elections. Take advantage of available resources to learn about local issues and get your questions answered.

Scan here to view electoral information



Cleveland Municipal Court (General Division)

3 Seats GCC Focus 2025

Full Term Commencing 1/1/2026 | 6 Year Term Candidates

In Son J. Loving
Heather McCollough

Full Term Commencing 1/3/2026 | 6 Year Term Candidates

TJ Dow
Khalilah Lawson

Unexpired Term Ending 1/1/2028 Candidates

Brett Earle Horton
Nikki McGowan
Joseph Russo
Ray Tarasuck
Christopher Woodworth

WHAT'S AT STAKE

GCC'S FOCUS IN THE 2025 GENERAL ELECTION

Judges hold the keys.

In Cuyahoga County, municipal judges decide if you're sitting in a cell or sleeping in your own bed while you wait for trial. They decide if bail is fair or crushing, if people get a second chance or get trapped in the system. Their calls can break families apart, cost people jobs and homes and keep our jails overflowing.

Or, they can choose fairness, balance and justice that lifts up our whole community. When we vote for judges, we're voting for the kind of system we want: one that punishes poverty, or one that gives people a fair shot.

WE CAN DO BETTER.



GCC TAKES ACTION

| Our candidates forum

On October 9th GCC brought forth Cleveland Municipal Court Candidates to hear how they see this issue, the goals for their candidacy and what can be done to ensure justice for all!

WHY THIS ACTION MATTERS

The Cleveland Municipal Court handles more than just city matters—it shapes the futures of real people across our region. This forum is your chance to meet the candidates running to become judges in this powerful court, and to raise a collective voice for justice, fairness and accountability.

Whether you live in Cleveland or not, your presence matters.



In Son J. Loving

**Cleveland Municipal
Court Judge**

Q: Will you commit to supporting a process that allows a person to appear before a judge for the purpose of establishing bond within 24 hours of arrest?

Yes, I support efforts to ensure that individuals held in custody appear before a judge as soon as possible without unnecessary delay. A timely hearing prevents people, especially those charged with non-violent offenses, from sitting in jail for days simply because they cannot access the court promptly.

Q: Will you commit to supporting the establishment of a bond schedule for non-violent misdemeanor offenses so that persons have the option of immediately posting bond and be released from jail?

Yes, I support the establishment of a fair and consistent bond schedule for non-violent misdemeanors to help reduce unnecessary pretrial detention. It is important that judges still retain discretion to consider individual circumstances along with public safety concerns when making pretrial decisions.

Q: Will you meet with GCC 90 days after you take office?

Yes, I welcome the opportunity to meet with GCC after I take office. I believe that open communication and collaboration are essential for building trust and accountability, as well as strengthening relationships between the court, local organizations, and the community.

Q: Why are you running for Cleveland Municipal Court?

I'm running to restore trust in our courts and bring a fair, compassionate approach to justice. Courts can be places not just of judgment, but of opportunity for positive change. As a longtime Cleveland resident and experienced litigator, I know our challenges - and how to help. I live here, serve here, and have done the work - as a judicial staff attorney, senior assistant attorney general, mentor, and volunteer. I bring people-focused solutions rooted in experience and compassion, and I believe in justice that is smart on outcomes and fair to all.



**Heather
McCollough**

**Cleveland Municipal
Court Judge**

Q: Will you commit to supporting a process that allows a person to appear before a judge for the purpose of establishing bond within 24 hours of arrest?

Yes. However there may be some more complicated cases that take a little more time but with most misdemeanors and lower level felonies, the paperwork should be completed in time for arraignment 24 hours after arrest.

Q: Will you commit to supporting the establishment of a bond schedule for non-violent misdemeanor offenses so that persons have the option of immediately posting bond and be released from jail?

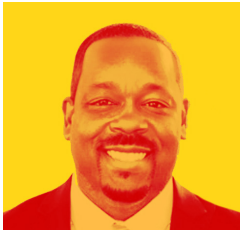
Of course. Unless someone has a history of failing to appear in court, they should always be allowed bond for non-violent offenses

Q: Will you meet with GCC 90 days after you take office?

Absolutely. Judges can be oblivious to what is said in the street. GCC is a way to keep informed about what is really happening and what the concerns of the people are.

Q: Why are you running for Cleveland Municipal Court?

After 22 years of service in the municipal courts of Cleveland and surrounding suburbs, I have learned what is important to the people and their lives. As a defense attorney and prosecutor, I have seen first hand how charges and programs affect the people coming into the court and I want to use that knowledge to better assist people from the other side of the bench. I believe that I can help people even more from that level.



TJ Dow
Cleveland Municipal
Court Judge

Q: Will you commit to supporting a process that allows a person to appear before a judge for the purpose of establishing bond within 24 hours of arrest?

I support the concept of allowing a person to appear before a judge to establish bond within 24 hours of arrest. However, as a judge, I would first assess the current system to ensure any changes promote fairness, efficiency, and public safety before making a commitment.

Q: Will you commit to supporting the establishment of a bond schedule for non-violent misdemeanor offenses so that persons have the option of immediately posting bond and be released from jail?

I believe a bond schedule for non-violent misdemeanors is a great concept. Before deciding, I would want to carefully review the current system to understand what changes are needed to ensure fairness, efficiency, and public safety.

Q: Will you meet with GCC 90 days after you take office?

Yes, I am committed to meeting with GCC within 90 days of taking office. Open communication and collaboration are vital to serving our community effectively, and I look forward to working together to address shared concerns.

Q: Why are you running for Cleveland Municipal Court?

I am running for Cleveland Municipal Court to serve my community with fairness, integrity, and dedication. As Magistrate TJ Dow, I aim to ensure justice is accessible and equitable for all, relying on my experience to make a positive impact in our city's legal system.



**Khalilah
Lawson**
Cleveland Municipal
Court Judge

Q: Will you commit to supporting a process that allows a person to appear before a judge for the purpose of establishing bond within 24 hours of arrest?

Yes. I support efforts to ensure that individuals appear before a judge to establish bond as quickly as possible ideally within 24 hours of arrest. The Cleveland Municipal Court already works diligently toward this goal, holding court six days a week, including Saturdays, to minimize the time individuals spend in custody. This approach balances public safety with fairness and helps reduce the unnecessary detention of individuals awaiting their initial hearings.

Q: Will you commit to supporting the establishment of a bond schedule for non-violent misdemeanor offenses so that persons have the option of immediately posting bond and be released from jail?

Yes. As a Judge, I would be committed to ensuring that the bail process is fair, timely, and focused on justice, not punishment for poverty. I support facilitating prompt releases of individuals for non-violent misdemeanors before their first court appearance. I support the use of personal recognizance bonds for non-violent misdemeanors and am committed to strengthening the court's practice of holding proceedings 6 days a week. My goal is to create a bail process that treats people with dignity, protects public safety, and ensures that no one is kept in jail simply because they cannot afford to pay.

Q: Will you meet with GCC 90 days after you take office?

Yes!

Q: Why are you running for Cleveland Municipal Court?

Too many people in our city face barriers to justice and I want to break them. I'm from Cleveland, and I come from a working-class family that taught me the importance of character and speaking out against injustice. My career has been dedicated to public service. I've experienced the fear and frustration that litigants feel when the system doesn't work as it should. I bring the discernment and experience needed to ensure that those who come before the court are treated fairly. I'm not running to advance a political agenda; I'm running because I care about how judicial decisions impact lives. Justice should be accessible and equitable for everyone in Cleveland.



Brett Earle Horton

**Cleveland Municipal
Court Judge**

Q: Will you commit to supporting a process that allows a person to appear before a judge for the purpose of establishing bond within 24 hours of arrest?

Yes. I support ensuring every person appears before a judge within 24 hours of arrest. Timely hearings promotes fairness, reduces unnecessary detention, keeps people connected to their jobs and families, and ensures that pretrial decisions are based on facts and risk, not on income or circumstance.

Q: Will you commit to supporting the establishment of a bond schedule for non-violent misdemeanor offenses so that persons have the option of immediately posting bond and be released from jail?

Yes. I support creating a fair bond schedule for non-violent misdemeanor offenses so people can post bond and be released without delay. A clear, standardized bond schedule allows for immediate release when appropriate, ensuring that people can return to work, care for their families, and prepare for their court appearances responsibly.

Q: Will you meet with GCC 90 days after you take office?

If elected as Cleveland Municipal Court Judge, I would absolutely meet with GCC within 90 days of taking office to collaborate on advancing justice reform and fairness in pretrial practices, and to ensure our court reflects the values of equity and accountability.

Q: Why are you running for Cleveland Municipal Court?

For 30 years, I've represented Cleveland's residents and institutions, from the City of Cleveland and the Cleveland Metropolitan School District to individuals who couldn't afford a lawyer. I've seen how one fair decision can change a life. If elected, I'll use that experience to strengthen justice by expanding diversion programs and linking people to resources. My goal is a court that's efficient, fair, and connected to the community it serves. I've mentored Cleveland youth for nearly three decades because I believe what they see is what they'll be. I'm running because I will uphold the law and help people move forward.



Nikki McGowan

**Cleveland Municipal
Court Judge**

Q: Will you commit to supporting a process that allows a person to appear before a judge for the purpose of establishing bond within 24 hours of arrest?

Yes. Individuals should see a judge as soon as possible after an arrest. As a Public Defender I know that even a brief period in jail can turn someone's life upside down. I would support changes that would allow a person to see a judge within 12 hours of arrest.

Q: Will you commit to supporting the establishment of a bond schedule for non-violent misdemeanor offenses so that persons have the option of immediately posting bond and be released from jail?

Whenever possible, people charged with non-violent misdemeanors should be ticketed and released immediately on their own recognizance, and I will support any changes needed to make that happen.

Q: Will you meet with GCC 90 days after you take office?

Yes. While I would not be able to discuss specific cases, I absolutely would listen to the ideas and concerns of GCC on issues impacting the community.

Q: Why are you running for Cleveland Municipal Court?

I have spent my career as a Public Defender in Cleveland, primarily in Cleveland Municipal Court. I understand the fears and concerns of people walking into a courtroom, because I stand with them and advocate for them every day. I understand the court, I know the challenges facing those appearing before it, and I have seen how the court can have a positive impact on individuals and the community. If elected I would treat people with the dignity and respect they deserve, and use every resource to assist those who need it.

OTHER CANDIDATES



Joseph Russo

Unexpired Term

Ending 1/1/2028

Declined to participate



Christopher Woodworth

Unexpired Term

Ending 1/1/2028

Declined to participate

*Ray Tarauck withdrew from race in August 2025



WE CAN DO BETTER



WHO IS GREATER CLEVELAND CONGREGATIONS?



Greater Cleveland Congregations (GCC) is a nonpartisan, multi-racial, multi-faith group of people working together to build power for social justice.

We unite people from across Cuyahoga County to build power, tackle critical issues and take actions to strengthen our communities. We aim to be a catalyst for systemic change, promoting public, private and civic sector actions to strengthen and improve the quality of life in our neighborhoods.

We have years of experience fighting tough battles across Greater Cleveland.

Contact

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