2020 Judicial Retention Questionnaire

Joseph P. Hettel
Circuit Judge – 13th Circuit

1.   State the main reason why voters should return you to the bench.

My first day on the bench was December 15, 2006. I thought I was uniquely prepared for the task. I began my career as an Assistant State's Attorney (ASA), went on to general private practice, and was elected the LaSalle County State's Attorney in 2000. I had prosecuted and defended criminal matters, practiced family law, prepared contracts and litigated civil disputes. I tried important cases, made important decisions and was most certainly well-rounded. Besides, I was incorruptible, impartial, intelligent and certainly not irascible. Little did I know.

Fourteen years later, I've rendered decisions in areas of the law that I had not previously heard of, tried cases that lasted longer than all my trials combined and conducted jury trials involving millions of dollars. Despite these challenges, I've found that the skills I developed as a young lawyer, the difficult decisions I often made as State's Attorney, and the basic ethical principles taught to me by my parents, serve me well as a trial Judge. I love what I do, respect what it stands for and work hard every day to improve my skills as a Circuit Judge.

2.   What actions have you taken as a judge of which you are most proud?

I am most proud of the more than 30 Jury trials I have presided over. They have ranged from simple slip and falls and minor traffic accidents to complex construction cases and multiple defendant medical malpractice suits. Some have been tried in days, others lasting as long as five weeks. I speak to my jurors at the conclusion of every case. On almost every occasion, they have expressed genuine enjoyment in their participation and pride in their service. I like to think that in the short time I spend with them I can convey how important their service is to our civil justice system.

3.   Name and describe one change you would make in the Illinois court system.

I would eliminate the direct review of administrative decisions to the Trial Court. In these cases, we serve in the same capacity the Appellate Court does in reviewing our decisions. Trial Courts don't try administrative cases; they review them. While the exercise of applying legal standards to the administrative bodies decision is one that I enjoy, I find that I am much less efficient than an Appellate

Court Judge who has the benefit of two law clerks. As a practical matter, our decisions are almost always appealed to the Appellate Court who then applies the same standards to the same facts. Since the Appellate Court has to take all cases appealed from the trial court, the elimination of trial court review of administrative decisions would speed up this process immensely, bringing final determinations faster in important cases such as tenured teachers terminations and workers compensation cases.

4. One prominent Illinois judicial evaluation survey asks attorneys to evaluate candidates on Integrity, Impartiality, Legal Ability and Temperament. Critique yourself in these four areas as to how you personally approach your job as a judge?

<u>Integrity</u>: We have nothing if we have lost our integrity. I have learned that in the context of judicial ethics integrity is not simply about being honest or incorruptible. Your off-the-bench conduct is as important as how you conduct yourself on the bench. <u>Yes</u>.

<u>Impartiality</u>: I believe my 26 years of practice and 52 years of life experience help me recognize my own personal bias and remove them from my interactions and decision making process. <u>Yes</u>.

<u>Legal Ability</u>: Legal ability is limited more so by effort than intellect. I have the necessary legal experience, knowledge, ability and work ethic. <u>Yes</u>.

<u>Temperament</u>: I'm a pretty easy guy to get along with. Those times when my temperament has been tested have been on those occasions when lawyers or parties have not shown the appropriate respect toward the Court. I try my best to be fair but firm, courteous, considerate, patient and dignified. <u>Yes</u>.