

SUPREME COURT

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July 24, 2024

The Honorable Eric J. Holcomb
Governor of Indiana
200 W. Washington Street
Room 206, State House
Indianapolis, IN 46204

Dear Governor Holcomb:

The Indiana Judicial Nominating Commission met on Monday, July 22, 2024, and selected its nominees for the upcoming vacancy on the Court of Appeals of Indiana due to the retirement of Judge Patricia A. Riley. On behalf of the Commission, and pursuant to Article 7, Section 10 of the Indiana Constitution, I submit to you the three candidates the Commission found to be the most highly qualified: Judge Mary A. DeBoer of Porter Circuit Court; Judge Stephen E. Scheele of Lake Superior Court; and Judge Stephanie E. Steele of St. Joseph Superior Court.

In selecting these candidates, the Commission considered all information pertinent to the non-exclusive statutory factors: legal education and honors; legal writings; reputation in the practice of law; physical condition and health; financial interests; and public service activities, including writings, speeches, and contributions to the improvement of the administration of justice.

With this letter, we are forwarding to your office the nominees' complete applications and letters of recommendation. As required by statute and on the Commission's behalf, I offer the following evaluation of each candidate's qualifications.

Porter Circuit Court Judge Mary A. DeBoer

Possessing an infectious spirit, Mary DeBoer has brought an indefatigable energy to her professional and community pursuits. Whether implementing a new problem-solving court amid the pandemic, collaborating with stakeholders on new solutions to help at-risk youth, or organizing the retirement ceremony for a beloved colleague, she combines a tireless work ethic with humor and patience to improve any situation. One colleague remarked that he "cannot count the number of families that have stated that her transparency, fairness and support have changed their lives for the better."

Graduating *cum laude*, Mary DeBoer earned a Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice and Political Science from Western Michigan University in 1989. Assuming sole responsibility for college expenses not covered by scholarships, she had various jobs throughout college, including working as an undergraduate assistant in the sociology department. She also spent a summer as an intern for the Honorable Richard A. Enslin, United States District Court Judge for the Western District of Michigan. In 1993, Mary DeBoer obtained her Juris Doctorate from Valparaiso University School of Law. During law school, she was a legal writing teaching assistant, served as an extern and volunteer intern at the Porter County Prosecutor's Office, and worked as a law clerk at Blachly, Tabor, Bozik & Hartman, LLC in Valparaiso, Indiana.

While studying for the bar exam, Mary DeBoer joined the Starke County Prosecutor's Office as an investigator, and then took on the role of deputy prosecuting attorney after she became a licensed attorney. As an investigator and deputy prosecutor, she worked on a variety of high-level felony cases, from murders and sex offenses to financial crimes in which victims suffered large monetary losses. In 1994, Mary DeBoer joined the Porter County Prosecutor's Office as a deputy prosecutor, working on juvenile delinquency matters. She returned to the Starke County Prosecutor's Office in 1997 as a deputy prosecuting attorney. She also aided her husband on an as-needed basis at Stutsman, Mulvaney & DeBoer (Elkhart) with personal injury, products liability, and medical malpractice cases.

In January 2005, she accepted the position of chief probation officer for Starke Circuit Court and served in that capacity until selected to be a magistrate in April 2005. As Magistrate of Starke Circuit Court, she presided over a civil and felony caseload. In 2007 and again in 2010, Mary DeBoer worked in private practice with her husband, handling family law, personal injury, and medical malpractice cases. And during those years, she also accepted appointments for extended service as a temporary judge and as a probate commissioner in Porter Superior Court 1. She returned to the Starke County Prosecutor's Office in 2007 to specialize in the prosecution of domestic and family cases. From 2011 to 2019, she served as Magistrate for Porter Superior Court and was assigned over half of the domestic relations and probate cases filed in Porter County as well as hundreds of protective order matters. On November 15, 2019, Governor Eric J. Holcomb appointed Mary DeBoer to the Porter Circuit Court bench, and she successfully retained her judicial seat in the 2020 election. As a Circuit Court Judge, she oversees the Porter County juvenile justice system and maintains a caseload of one third the county's complex civil cases, one third of all criminal cases, and post-conviction cases designated at a Level 6 felony or higher.

As a lawyer, Mary DeBoer has participated in dozens of jury trials and numerous juvenile hearings and bench trials. As a judge, she has presided over a dozen civil and criminal jury trials, spanning medical malpractice claims to murder and sex crimes. One of her favorite aspects of the job is presiding over Porter County's three juvenile problem-

solving courts: the Juvenile and Family Drug Court, the Transformation (mental health) Court, and the Truancy Court.

Her passion for improving juvenile justice is demonstrated through her various innovation efforts. In 2020, she and her team developed Indiana's first certified Truancy Court, a feat they accomplished despite the obstacles presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. This team-oriented program pulls in truant youth and adults charged with educational neglect as participants, allowing the team to better understand children's truancy issues and confront family dynamics to improve school attendance and performance. In 2023, Judge DeBoer actively worked toward the creation of Transformation Court, Indiana's first certified juvenile mental health court. This court seeks to redirect youth in a positive way by helping participants and families find services while employing intensive supervision to stabilize mental health issues.

Judge DeBoer's efforts in her local community also demonstrate her commitment to improving the lives of juveniles. Serving on the Valparaiso Noon Kiwanis Scholarship and Backpacks and Snacks Committees, she helped distribute scholarships to young adults entering colleges and instituted the "Backpacks and Snacks Program" to provide meals for children in need. With her truancy court team, she works with school superintendents to create more uniform countywide attendance policies. With her Juvenile Justices Services team, she has begun discussions with the Chancellor at Ivy Tech Community College to create opportunities for juveniles on probation to engage in educational programs. The team has also partnered with Chicago Street Theatre and Nana Clare's Kitchen in Valparaiso to form an "Immersion in the Arts" program. Mary DeBoer also presents educational programs to Porter County's youth and volunteers for the United Way of Porter County.

Besides juvenile justice, Judge DeBoer has actively worked to improve the administration of justice in family law matters. After instituting a *pro bono* mediation/facilitation clinic for pro se litigants in dissolution matters in 2019, she saw a success rate of approximately 75% in resolving those disputes. Judge DeBoer also oversees the Alternative Dispute Resolution Program in Porter County, which provides free mediation and facilitation for paternity and dissolution matters. Providing services to about thirty families per year, this *pro bono* program has a 74% success rate. Every month, she leads a group of community stakeholders regarding issues related to domestic and family violence. She also is a member of the Indiana Judicial Conference's Community Relations Committee, the Domestic Violence Committee, and chairs the Criminal Benchbook Committee.

Judge DeBoer is a member of the Porter County and Lake County Bar Associations, the Indiana State Bar Association, the National Association of Women Judges, and the Porter County Community Corrections Advisory Board. She is President of both the Drug Court & Juvenile Services Foundation and the Porter County Juvenile Justice Advisory Board. She also serves on the Board of Managers for the Indiana Judges Association and

leads the Justice Partners Addiction Response Team. She has presented various continuing legal education courses.

In her free time, Mary DeBoer enjoys exercising at a local “boot camp” and cooking meals with her husband. She is a theater aficionado and has been involved in community theater for over twenty years.

Lake Superior Court Judge Stephen E. Scheele

As a role model, lawyer, and judge, Stephen (“Sam”) Scheele has earned a reputation as an intelligent, thoughtful, and empathetic listener who has never lost sight that he is dealing with “real people with real problems [and] real lives.” As one practitioner observed, “Judge Scheele truly sees himself as a humble public servant of the people working for the public good, yet his unwavering quest for justice elevates him as a giant above his peers.”

Stephen Scheele graduated *magna cum laude* from the University of Denver in 1993 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science, International Studies, and German. As an undergraduate, he distinguished himself with various honors and achievements, including receiving a scholarship to study at the Herder Institute at the University of Leipzig, Germany, serving as his graduating class’s president, and completing an honors thesis assessing mandatory sentencing guidelines. He also served as an intern for the Tenth Circuit Federal Clerk of Court and held the positions of treasurer and president of his fraternity, Beta Theta Pi.

Earning his Juris Doctorate in 1996 from the Indiana University Maurer School of Law, Stephen Scheele received various scholastic honors during law school, served as an American Bar Association student representative, and participated in an inmate legal assistance clinic. He also was the managing editor of the *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* and wrote a synopsis of immigration trends that was included in the publication. After obtaining his law degree, Stephen Scheele returned to Germany to complete a post-JD Legal Fellowship through the German Academic Exchange Service, Young Lawyer Program.

Returning to the United States, Stephen Scheele became a licensed Indiana attorney in 1997 and joined Goodman, Ball, Van Bokkelen & Leonard, P.C. in Highland, Indiana as an associate attorney. His practice focused mostly on serving clients in insurance defense litigation. After he formed the legal association of Goodman, Katz & Scheele with attorneys Samuel J. Goodman and J. Michael Katz in 2001, Stephen Scheele’s legal practice evolved to general civil litigation and criminal defense work. In 2005, he began working as a part-time deputy public defender in Lake County while maintaining his private law practice. As a private practitioner, his clients included insurance companies, governmental entities, a regional bank, and occasional plaintiffs in personal injury matters. He later expanded his practice to include commercial and residential planning/development

with client representation before local school boards, local planning commissions, and state professional licensing boards.

As a lawyer, Stephen Scheele tried sixteen jury trials, both criminal and civil, in state and federal courts, and he argued eleven appeals before the Court of Appeals of Indiana and the Indiana Supreme Court. One case of note occurred in 2014 when Stephen Scheele was appointed to represent a parolee, a skilled welder by trade, who had become homeless, hopeless, and saw prison as his only option. With this goal in mind, the client committed an unarmed bank robbery and then sat nearby, waiting for the police to arrest him in the hope that he would be returned to prison. After his client's plight unexpectedly received regional and national media attention, Stephen Scheele, with the assistance of other community stakeholders, helped his client navigate through the criminal justice system into a well-paying job, a place to live, and contact with long-lost family members.

While in private practice, Stephen Scheele regularly served as a judge *pro tempore* in the Lake Superior Court, County Division, and municipal courts in Lake County. From December 2016 to June 2019, he served as Lake Circuit Court's Domestic Relations Magistrate. On June 26, 2019, Governor Eric J. Holcomb appointed him as Judge of the Lake Superior Court, Civil Division, and Stephen Scheele was subsequently retained for a six-year term in November 2022. His docket includes torts, contractual issues, real estate, family law, and estate-related matters. During his tenure on the bench, he has heard numerous bench trials, presided over eleven civil jury trials, and reduced the court's pending caseload by nearly 60%.

Stephen Scheele's commitment to improving the administration of justice is also demonstrated through his committee work and rulemaking efforts. While he was Chair of the Indiana Supreme Court's Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Committee, the Committee supported the Indiana General Assembly in amending the Indiana Code in 2023 to allow ADR Plan Funds to be used for Guardian ad Litem services. Since 2023, Judge Scheele has served on the Indiana Supreme Court's Innovation Committee and was recently appointed to the Court's Strategic Planning Committee. And this year, Judge Scheele was appointed to the Education and Outreach Subcommittee of the Indiana Supreme Court Commission on Race and Gender Fairness, which is charged with addressing attorney shortages throughout the state. He previously served on the Pathways to the Bench and Bar Working Group for the Commission on Equity and Access in the Court System and is a former member of the Local Rules Advisory Committee for the United States District Court of the Northern District of Indiana.

Dedicated to his community, Stephen Scheele actively participates in efforts to improve the lives of local youth. A self-described "labor of love," Stephen Scheele's service with his local troop of the Boy Scouts of America as an Assistant Scout Master, Outdoor Excursions Coordinator, and Executive Committee Secretary include weekly meetings, monthly campouts, and various philanthropic and community events. Judge

Scheele has also engaged in youth outreach by teaching elementary students about government and civics through the Indiana Bar Foundation's "We the People" program and by hosting K-12 students in the courtroom so that they can observe court proceedings or conduct mock trials. He also previously served as a volunteer firefighter with the Lake Hills Fire Department and is a current member of the Indiana Chapter of the Walnut Council, a nonprofit that promotes sustainable forest management and utilization of American hardwoods.

Stephen Scheele is a member of the Calumet American Inns of Court (President in 2021), the Indiana State Bar Association, the Indiana Judges Association, and the Lake County Bar Association (Board of Managers from 2000 to 2011). He currently is in the Graduate Program for Indiana Judges. Throughout the years, Stephen Scheele has served as a panelist or speaker on assorted topics involving the law and legal system, including a recent session on climate science and the law at the 2023 Spring Judicial College.

In his free time, Judge Scheele is an avid hiker and camper. He also enjoys spending time with family on the 140-acre family farm.

St. Joseph Superior Court Judge Stephanie E. Steele

A trailblazer and impressive servant-leader in her local community, Stephanie Steele possesses a keen intellect, conscientious work ethic, and ability to manage challenging tasks with grace and precision. As one knowledgeable observer noted, "Her ability to create a humane environment in the courtroom stems from her experience as a teacher and her deep understanding of the diverse needs and perspectives of those she serves."

Stephanie Steele earned Bachelor of Arts degrees in Psychology and Political Science from the University of Michigan in 2002. Upon graduation, she worked in the Baltimore City Public Schools while obtaining her teaching certificate through studies at John Hopkins University and Coppin State University. In 2005, Stephanie Steele joined Teach for America (an organization aimed at addressing educational inequity), working in Los Angeles, California, and later New York City.

Earning a scholarship from her AmeriCorps participation, Stephanie Steele attended the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law at Arizona State University, graduating with Pro Bono Distinction in 2009. During law school, she served as a legal writing assistant and as a tutor for the legal theory class. In these roles, she reviewed other students' completed exams and writings and provided the students with feedback for improving their writing and essay responses.

A native Hoosier, Stephanie Steele returned to Indiana after law school and joined the St. Joseph County Prosecutor's Office in 2011 as a deputy prosecuting attorney. She

first handled a high-volume misdemeanor caseload but later was promoted to felony deputy in the Special Victims Unit, handling violent and sex crimes cases. She also represented the office on the St. Joseph County Child Protection Team, at CASIE Center Case Review Sessions, and at community outreach and awareness events. As a lawyer, Stephanie Steele tried approximately 25-30 jury trials and numerous bench trials on criminal cases.

In 2015, Stephanie Steele left the prosecutor's office to work as an assistant city attorney for the City of South Bend. Her duties included representing multiple city agencies, updating city agencies' policy manuals, and amending/drafting resolutions, ordinances, and executive orders. She also acted as the City's chief negotiator in union negotiations with the police and fire departments and helped secure the City of South Bend's first concurrent four-year agreements between the City and unions. Elevated to Corporation Counsel in 2017, Stephanie Steele was responsible for managing all the City's legal affairs. During her tenure, she reduced the City's litigation expenses by 50% and led a proactive litigation strategy to secure \$1,000,000 to aid the City in its environmental remediation efforts. As she continued to hone her professional skills, she also received a scholarship to attend the Senior Executives in State and Local Government Program in 2018 at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government.

Appointed as Judge of St. Joseph Superior Court in April 2021 by Governor Eric J. Holcomb, Judge Steele originally presided over a high-volume felony criminal docket and currently presides over a general civil docket. She has presided over thirty-five jury trials and five bench trials on various criminal cases. Judge Steele also presides over the St. Joseph County Drug Court and the St. Joseph County Commercial Court. To help reduce the anxiety Drug Court participants experience in court, Judge Steele trained and utilized the county's first Drug Court dog.

Dedicated to improving access and equity within the legal system, Stephanie Steele began working in 2020 with the Coalition for Court Access. She is the current Chair of the Coalition's Self-Help and Court Access Working Group, which is designed to ensure that easy-to-use resources are available for the self-represented. And she participates in the Coalition's Rural Legal Services Working Group, which strives to ensure judges, attorneys, and litigants in rural areas have access to materials and services they need. Judge Steele also helped amend the local rule on the St. Joseph County court system's case allocation plan to create an even distribution of cases among felony courts. And, in 2022, Judge Steele co-authored an article for the *American Bankruptcy Institute Journal* (ABI) reminding judges and attorneys about the important intersections between bankruptcy and criminal law, the Fifth Amendment, and the notification of rights. The article was later included in the American Bankruptcy Institute's Best of ABI 2022: The Year in Consumer Bankruptcy.

Judge Steele currently serves on the Board of Directors of the Judicial Conference of Indiana and is a member of the Judicial Conference's Community Relations Committee. Recently, Judge Steele was added to the Technology Application Committee of the Indiana

Supreme Court's Commission on Indiana's Legal Future. The Technology Application Committee's mission is to identify ways that technology can aid rural practitioners and fill gaps in legal representation. Judge Steele has also been active on the Commission for Continuing Legal Education and volunteers with the Judges and Lawyers Assistance Program.

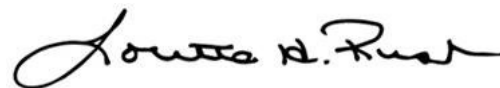
A frequent speaker for civic organizations and schools in her community, Judge Steele has presented on various topics, including a nonpartisan explanation of the history and relevance of voting in the United States, conversations on ethics and race, and discussions about the value of public service. Continuing with her passion for education, Judge Steele participates annually in Constitution Day, which allows her to teach elementary students about how the three branches of government work together.

Since 2019, Judge Steele has been a board member of the Salvation Army Kroc Center, which operates a South Bend food pantry and focuses on providing opportunities, activities, and utility assistance to those in the South Bend community. She is a board member of the Indiana University South Bend Arts Foundation, is a past board member and officer of the Memorial Hospital Board of Directors, is a past board member of the Youth Service Bureau of St. Joseph County, and previously served on the Homes for Hope Taskforce (a collaboration of volunteers working to provide stable housing for victims of domestic violence). She is a current member of the Robert A. Grant Inn of Court and has served numerous leadership roles for the St. Joseph County Bar Association, including member of the Board of Governors (2013-2020), Vice President (2017), President-elect (2018), President (2019), and Representative to the St. Joseph County Bar Foundation (2017-2021). She is also a graduate of the Indiana State Bar Association Leadership Development Academy.

In her spare time, Judge Steele enjoys traveling, ballroom dancing, and watching movies with her family.

I would be pleased to discuss any of these candidates with you in greater detail. And I am confident that you will similarly conclude that all three nominees are of a high caliber and any of them would be a lasting credit to the Court of Appeals of Indiana.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Loretta H. Rush". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, flowing initial "L".

Loretta H. Rush
Chief Justice of Indiana