

*Why I'm Running for Judge...*

For me, it's all about family. I grew up in a blended family, as my parents took in four of my aunt and uncle's children a year after they were married. They then had three of their own children shortly thereafter bringing the total to seven.

With my mother and father both being from large families in Manor, PA, I have over 40 first cousins, many of whom still live in Westmoreland County. When I grew up, my siblings and I rode our bikes all over the surrounding neighborhoods. We had one rule, just be home for dinner. I grew up playing baseball in the summer and basketball in the winter with plenty of "Great Cousin Sleepovers" at Baba's house in Irwin or in a tree house in my back yard. When snowstorms came, I remember listening to KDKA in the morning just praying to hear that Hempfield Schools were canceled so I could spend the day sled riding with my friends.

My existence, even in high school, was carefree, with sports, homework, and girls being the only stress in my life. I never had to worry about being safe, having a warm home, or having food to eat. I went on to college at Penn State, Law School at Pitt, and then an LL.M. at Georgetown. Throughout that time, I interned at the Department of Defense, worked on Wall Street at Bear Stearns, and worked at the Vanguard Group in Philadelphia. While I traveled the world and lived in several amazing cities, none of those places felt like home. I could feel Westmoreland County always calling me back.

In 2010, I made the decision to return to Greensburg and began working at Stewart, McArdle, Sorice, Farrell, Finoli & Cavanaugh, LLC as a general practice attorney and never looked back. For the last nine years, I've developed an expertise in family law, and helping clients through legal and personal troubles has brought me more satisfaction in my career than I ever imagined.

The feeling of helping someone in his or her time of need drove me to not just practice family law, but to excel. I was selected to serve as the co-chair of the Westmoreland Bar Association Family Law Committee for three consecutive years. I have participated in the Matrimonial Inns of Court in Allegheny County, as well as the Ned J. Nakles Inns of Court in Westmoreland County, and I have studied and researched hundreds of family law cases, statutes, and regulations relating to child custody, equitable distribution, child support, alimony, termination of parental rights issues, and grandparents' custodial rights. I have handled cases in Westmoreland, Fayette, Indiana, Blair, Washington, Armstrong, and Allegheny Counties, and I have handled appeals before the Pennsylvania Superior Court. I have personally tried and handled every type of case that would come before a judge serving the family court docket. As a family court judge, I would be able to hit the ground running and if asked, I would be able to reform the family law system to ensure that all parties are treated fairly and are awarded a fair, just, and equitable outcome.

However, having two children with my beautiful, caring, and loving wife Samantha has certainly made me reflect on our future as a family and this county's future. Through my practice, I have seen the effects that separation of family members has on children. Whether the cause of the family fracture is a contentious custody dispute, grandparents raising children due to the parent's absence or drug addiction, death of a parent, or any other reason, the result is the same; the children involved in those situations suffer lasting psychological harm.

I understand that my children's generation will not have the same type of childhood as I did. They will grow up in a more technological environment and will be exposed to social media, and the scrutiny that comes along with it at a much younger age. They will have to be vigilant of online predators. They will have to be aware of friends, classmates, and teammates who may not have a safe home to return to due to poverty, domestic violence, drugs, or alcohol.

Despite these concerns and fears, I am confident that residents and families of Westmoreland County will prosper. And to do my part, I am running for judge. I believe that with my skills, experience, and positive attitude, the family court bench is where I can create the most positive impact on our community. This county deserves a judge who not only knows the law and will apply it fairly, but one who will also be a community leader and set a positive example for children who come before him. I was raised to be a man of humility, respect, and honesty. As I judge, I will have one goal... to do what is right and just.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael J. Stewart II".

Michael J. Stewart II