

## MSBA Questionnaire for Judicial Candidates in Statewide Contested Races

1. *What is your full name?*

Paul Charles Thissen

2. *Does your campaign have a website or Facebook page? If so, please list it.*

[www.paulthissen.com](http://www.paulthissen.com)

[www.facebook.com/justicepaulthissen](https://www.facebook.com/justicepaulthissen)

3. *List the colleges and law schools you have attended, including your dates of attendance and degrees awarded.*

University of Chicago Law School (J.D. with honors 1992)

Harvard University (A.B. with high honors 1989)

4. *List where you have been employed since graduation from law school, including dates employed, your position and the nature of your employment responsibilities.*

Prior to my appointment to the Minnesota Supreme Court in April 2018:

Ballard Spahr Law Firm

2010-2018

(formerly Lindquist & Vennum)

- Senior Counsel in Health Law Group with a focus on assisting clients with regulatory and transactional matters. Advised hospitals, clinics, health plans, and long-term care and group home facilities.

University of Minnesota Duluth

Fall 2006

- Instructor in the Masters of Advocacy and Political Leadership Program

Minnesota State House of Representatives

2003-2018

- Speaker of the Minnesota House 2013-2015
- Caucus Leader 2011-2017
- Chair of the Health and Human Service Committee 2007-2010
- Service on numerous other committees including committees on education, government operations, jobs and economic development, energy, telecommunications,

transportation, and the Legislative Commission on Pensions and Retirement.

- Worked with the Minnesota Bar Association on changes to Minnesota's corporate and non-profit statutes, as well as real property laws and guardianship and conservatorship laws.

Briggs and Morgan Law Firm

1993-2010

- Shareholder in Business Litigation Section with focus on complex commercial and business litigation. Chair of Pro Bono Committee, doubling firm participation in serving pro bono clients.

Minnesota State Public Defenders Office,  
Appellate Division

1998-1999

- Represented criminal defendants in appeals before the Minnesota Supreme Court and the Minnesota Court of Appeals.

United States Court of Appeals for the Eighth  
Circuit

1992-1993

- Law Clerk for the Honorable James B. Loken.

5. *Have you ever been convicted of a crime or publicly disciplined by a lawyer or judicial standards board? If so, feel free to provide an explanation.*

No.

6. *What is/was the general nature of your practice? Indicate any areas of practice in which you concentrate or concentrated.*

At Briggs and Morgan, I handled complex business litigation including securities fraud, environmental litigation, labor and employment matters, utility and railroad disputes, and insurance coverage work.

On a pro bono basis, I handled criminal appeals for the State Public Defender, represented individuals seeking Orders for Protection in domestic abuse cases, represented individuals seeking asylum in the U.S., and helped reverse the sentence of a death row inmate. I developed and organized Access for Persons with Disabilities, a program that trained lawyers on the unique needs and

obstacles to justice for persons with disabilities and paired them with pro bono clients.

At the State Public Defender's Office, I handled a wide variety of appeals ranging from juvenile matters to criminal sexual conduct cases to first degree murder convictions.

At Lindquist & Vennum/Ballard Spahr, my practice shifted to health care and long-term care transactional and regulatory matters.

7. *What percentage of your practice is/was litigation?*

During my time at Briggs and Morgan and at the Minnesota State Public Defenders Office, 100% of my practice was litigation. During my time at Lindquist & Vennum/Ballard Spahr, I did transactional and regulatory work.

8. *Why do you want to be an appellate judge?*

Serving on the Minnesota Supreme Court is an incredible honor. I care deeply about Minnesota's future. I have a deep commitment to public service. Minnesotans value fairness, accountability, individual dignity, and the chance to have their voices heard. The court is the venue where those values are tested and upheld with long-standing consequences for Minnesotans. I'm inspired each day to meet the challenges of the role.

I also love the law and the challenge of puzzling through conflicting claims, digging into the rationale behind a provision, and getting to the simplicity that lies on the other side of complexity. I'm inspired by the potential to make our obligations to each other under the law clearer.

Access to justice is a bedrock value for me. Serving on the court gives me the opportunity to help move us toward a justice system where everyone's voice is heard and everyone's rights are protected.

9. *What qualities do you believe are most important in an appellate judge? Explain how you have demonstrated that you possess those qualities:*

The most important qualities in an appellate judge are the same qualities that Minnesotans value: a strong work ethic, fairness and compassion, respect for others and their viewpoints, intellectual curiosity, and a breadth of professional and personal experience.

Making sure that people get a fair shake in life has been a grounding value to me throughout my career and in my non-professional life. It is demonstrated in

extensive pro bono work and a legislative career focused on expanding individual rights and the dignity of everyday Minnesotans; supporting businesses and entrepreneurs; leading fights for children's health care, greater choice for persons with disabilities, and the right to a decent retirement; and championing workplace equity for women.

And as discussed above, my life experience is broad and varied. I worked as a practicing lawyer for 25 years as a litigator, a transactional lawyer, and a regulatory lawyer; I worked on civil and criminal matters. My legislative career afforded me the opportunity to travel tens of thousands of miles to all corners of the state, visiting homes, businesses, prisons, hospitals, churches, homeless shelters, colleges, and courthouses. I've worked with people in their neighborhoods and communities as they tackle local challenges. Most important, I have listened closely to Minnesotans' stories, aspirations, and concerns. I carry those conversations with me as I do my work as a Justice. I firmly believe that there is no better grounding for sustaining and renewing a justice system that is responsive and truly sees the people behind the lawsuits.

10. *Why do you believe you are the best candidate for the appellate judge seat?*

I have done the work of a Supreme Court Justice. I am honored to be part of a Supreme Court that truly listens to litigants and decides more than 80% of its cases unanimously. That experience, combined with the breadth of my previous 25 years of professional experience as a litigator, public defender, advocate, and legislator give me unique insights that make me well-suited to the breadth of issues that the Supreme Court faces each year.

My intellectual curiosity—a focus on understanding the “why” and not just the “what” of the legal principles at issue in a case—helps me to clarify, harmonize, and properly balance the competing values (and sometime inconsistencies) in the Minnesota Supreme Court's jurisprudence. I value the stability in our law but always try to bring a fresh eye to the litigants' arguments.

My practical experience as a former legislator means I have a deep respect for that institution as the branch of government entrusted to make policy and a unique perspective on making sure the Supreme Court is truly and properly understanding and implementing the Legislature's intent.

I am committed to ensuring equal access to justice and have spent my first two years on the court working on proposals to make sure everyone is competently represented in Minnesota.

Finally, I am committed to compassionate justice—to looking at issues from all perspectives and closely listening to every litigant. That is my promise to the bar and to all Minnesotans.