

Burlew gets highest rating

Lawyer tops all judicial incumbents

BY DAN HORN
The Cincinnati Enquirer

First-time judicial candidate John Burlew won the highest rating Friday from the Cincinnati Bar Association, topping

not only his opponent but every other incumbent judge seeking re-election in Hamilton County.

Mr. Burlew, a candidate for juvenile court judge, was rated "excellent" by 74.5 percent of the attorneys who responded to the association's annual poll.

His Republican opponent, Thomas Lipps, received a 52.3 percent rating in the same category.

Mr. Burlew said the associ-



John Burlew to challenge Mr. Lipps.

"It's very important," said Mr. Burlew, a veteran trial

attorney's rating, as well as its endorsement, is a boost to a campaign that has been an uphill battle since he broke with the GOP earlier this year to challenge Mr. Lipps.

attorney who is running as the Democrats' endorsed candidate. "When you lay your career out there and you get this kind of support, it means a lot."

In other contested judicial races, the bar association's 15-member endorsement committee recommended:

► Both candidates for the Ohio First District Court of Appeals. The endorsement committee concluded that in-

cumbent Marianna Brown Bettman, with a 62.2 percent excellent rating, and challenger Ralph Winkler, with 57.2 percent, were equally qualified for the job.

► Neither candidate in the domestic relations court race between incumbent Deborah Gaines and Susan Tolbert. Mrs. Gaines received the lowest excellent rating among incumbent judges, with 30.9 percent, while Mrs. Tolbert

received 56.8 percent.

► Incumbent Domestic Relations Judge Ronald Panioto over first-time candidate Christine Jones. Mr. Panioto's excellent rating was 45.8 percent while Ms. Jones' was 15.8 percent.

Although five Common Pleas judges also are on the ballot this year, none is opposed. Judge Patrick Dinke-

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lacker received the highest rating among that group, with 66.7 percent.

Democratic Party officials said Mr. Burlew's performance in the poll is remarkable considering the number of experienced judges in the field this year. "It's a well-deserved endorsement," said Democratic Party Chairman Tim Burke. "This is an extremely qualified candidate."

Although Mr. Burlew is African American, Mr. Burke said the bar association missed a chance to make a strong statement for diversity when it failed to back Mrs. Gaines and decided to split the endorsement for Mrs. Bettman.

He said Mrs. Gaines, the only African American on the domestic relations bench, and Mrs. Bettman, the first and only woman on the appellate court, deserve the association's support.

"I'm sorry the bar didn't go a little further in recognizing the need for diversity on the courts," Mr. Burke said.

The chairman of the bar's endorsement committee, Terrence Donnellon, said the group does not evaluate candidates on the basis of race and gender. "We look at lawyers and judges," Mr. Donnellon said. "We never look at a candidate and say, 'Is this a woman candidate, or is this an African-American candidate?'"

GOP chairman Mike Allen said he was pleased with the ratings for most of the Republican-endorsed candidates. But he took issue with the bar's failure to recommend Mrs. Tolbert and Mr. Winkler.

He said Mrs. Tolbert's ratings were superior to her opponent's and Mr. Winkler's experience as a common pleas judge gives him the edge over Mrs. Bettman.

"The bar association is a prestigious endorsement," Mr. Allen said. "But it's a very subjective process."