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## For Civil Court in Brooklyn

Of the 18 Civil Court judgeships up for election in New York City this November, only six are being contested in next week's Democratic primary. As a practical matter, that means the remaining dozen seats will be filled by men and women deeply beholden to the party pols who gave them a berth on the Democratic line and a virtually uncontested ride into office. It also means further reinforcement of the cozy courthouse-clubhouse ties that have invited serious abuses in the awarding of lucrative courthouse patronage by State Supreme Court justices, just one level above Civil Court.

As for this year's handful of low-visibility judicial primaries, voters are likely to know little about the candidates apart from their race, ethnicity and gender. This exacerbates the risk of better candidates being rejected in favor of real clunkers. Without abandoning the long-term goal of replacing phony judicial elections with a more rational system of merit selection, bar association leaders and other would-be court reformers need to explore feasible ways to improve quality control within the current electoral framework. In the meantime, these are our Brooklyn Civil Court recommendations for Tuesday's election.

**Countywide:** To punish her refusal to hire law clerks referred by clubhouse leaders and other so-called acts of "disloyalty," Margarita Lopez Torres, an able sitting Civil Court judge, was denied the backing of the Democratic Party organization for a second 10-year term. Her demonstrated independence only bolsters the case for her re-election and the enthusiasm of our endorsement. For voters

looking for a way to register their disgust with the crude patronage politics that prevail in judicial endorsements, this is it.

For the second countywide seat in contention Tuesday, we favor Delores Thomas, a widely admired Housing Court judge running without party support, over two organization-backed candidates. They are Marcia Sikowitz, a Housing Court judge sitting in Brooklyn, and Karen Yellen, a Civil Court judge with experience and incumbency in her favor but lacking Ms. Thomas's bright promise.

**First District (Brooklyn Heights, Cobble Hill, Boerum Hill, Carroll Gardens, Red Hook and Fort Greene):** Two of the candidates in this three-way race, Ira Cure and Barbara Odwak, have mediation and arbitration experience that could be useful for brokering settlements from the bench. But our endorsement goes to Ellen Spodek, a private attorney specializing in negligence and employment law. Her judicious manner and obvious passion for fairness and public service make her the best bet for this position.

**Second District (Ocean Hill, Bedford-Stuyvesant, Clinton Hill and Crown Heights):** Wavny Tous-saint, a hard-working principal law clerk to a State Supreme Court justice in Brooklyn, has the determination and know-how to become a fine judge. We favor her over three competitors: Johnny Lee Baynes, a Housing Court judge in Brooklyn; Desmond Green, a solo practitioner and former assistant district attorney in the borough; and Geraldine Pickett, a private lawyer and political activist with notably thin credentials for the bench.