

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM. I'm Jim Burke, with local news for Jefferson and Clallam counties for Tuesday, December 13, 2022.

Last week Governor Jay Inslee's Office of General Counsel interviewed four candidates to replace retiring Jefferson County Superior Court Judge Keith Harper. The choice of a replacement should be announced in the coming days, according to the governor's office. Harper, 69, announced his intention to retire in October after ten years on the bench. He is midway into his third term. The new judge will need to run in a special election in 2023 to fill the unexpired term, and run again in 2024. Inslee is looking for someone who possesses legal acumen, relevant professional experience, and has demonstrated strong community connections. The successful candidate will have earned the respect of others and will potentially serve the community for years to come.

The four candidates are:

- Jefferson County District Judge Mindy Walker, 46
 - Whidbey Island attorney Andrew Scott, 53
 - Clallam County Court Commissioner Brandon Mack, 46 and
 - Jefferson County Deputy Prosecutor Anna Phillips, 56
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- Judge Mindy Walker told KPTZ that she has trained for a Superior Court judgeship since college, and she believes she has the temperament, attitude, and ability to thrive in this position.
 - Andrew Scott said his experience as a prosecutor and in private practice along with a knowledge of business law prepares him for the judgeship. A resident of Whidbey Island, he would relocate to Port Townsend if he is selected.
 - Brandon Mack said he looked forward to working collaboratively with the community while recognizing the court's role as a co-equal branch of government, according to his application, which he shared with KPTZ.
 - Mack has also received an endorsement from the retiring judge Keith Harper.
 - Anna Phillips did not offer any insight about her candidacy, saying that it was not appropriate to comment prior to the governor's announcement.

Judge Walker defeated Port Townsend attorney Noah Harrison in the 2018 District Court Judge election. Harrison told KPTZ that he would again seek that position should Walker be named to the higher bench.

Yesterday, KPTZ aired a special health report to the Jefferson County Board of Commissioners from Dr. Allison Berry, chief health officer for Jefferson and Clallam Counties. The board requested the special report because of a surge in cases of Influenza, RSV, and Covid-19. In Jefferson County, the two-week COVID-19 case rate last week was 383, but is now 451 per 100,000 people. One person is currently hospitalized. 69 new cases were added this week for a total of 6,463 cases. Dr. Berry said there are rising cases of all three viruses nationwide, and in Washington State, all of the children's hospitals in the Puget Sound are beyond capacity.

[Dr. Berry]: "Partly due to the inability to transfer children for care we actually lost a child in Clallam County. We had a death of an infant in the last couple of weeks due to RSV. We tried to transfer this child to Children's but they couldn't get them there. There wasn't any beds and there wasn't enough transfer capability to get that child there, and so that's just the kind of tragedy that we want to prevent."

She emphasized that although rural hospitals like ours have dedicated staff, they don't have staff that specialize in pediatric care of severely ill children. Dr. Berry said some children are being treated in closets. She then said the simplest and most effective thing we can all do, is wear a mask. A high-quality, well fitting mask can prevent the spread of all three viruses.

[Dr. Berry]: "...and I think it's important for the community to know that all these viruses can be prevented by masking. So, Flu, RSV, COVID all don't transmit when we wear masks in indoor areas...."

Vaccines can help protect all of us from a severe case of influenza or COVID-19, and in the latter case, the bi-valent booster is proving effective against the current variants. In Jefferson County there is low incidence of the latest new variant, BQ 1.1 here. In addition, she stressed that if you are sick, stay home! If your child is sick, keep them home from school. She said there are probably not going to be mask mandates, but if the community as a whole starts wearing masks in public settings, it might relieve the pressure on our healthcare system.

[Dr. Berry]: "We anticipate that this surge will last through probably January and so it won't be forever, but if we all wear masks indoors December and January, it will make all the difference to reduce transmission of these viruses."

Submit your Public Health questions to Dr. Allison Berry and Willie Bence by emailing contactus@kptz.org by this Friday, December 16 at noon, to be answered next Monday, December 19. You can still order Home Covid tests from: <https://www.sayyescovidhometest.org> at least until the end of the month.

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon and five Monday through Friday and at noon on Saturday. You can contact us through news@kptz.org. This is Jim Burke. Thanks for listening!