

Troy Charbonneau  
805 22nd St. W.  
Billings, MT  
Email: troy.charbonneau@me.com

August 29, 2025

The Honorable Greg Gianforte  
Governor of the State of Montana  
Office of the Governor  
State Capitol, Room 204  
Helena, MT 59620

**Re: Recommendation for Mr. Edward Zink – Judicial Appointment, 13th Judicial District**

Dear Governor Gianforte,

It is my honor to submit this letter in strong support of Mr. Edward Zink's candidacy for appointment as Judge in the 13th Judicial District of Yellowstone County.

I have had the privilege of knowing Mr. Edward "Ed" Zink for more than 20 years, working closely with him throughout my career as a detective with the Yellowstone County Sheriff's Office. During this time, I partnered with him on numerous investigations and prosecutions, including homicide cases, child sexual assault and rape cases, assaults, and virtually every type of serious crime our office encountered.

Through all of these cases, Mr. Zink consistently exemplified the qualities that define an outstanding prosecutor and that will undoubtedly make him an exceptional judge:

- **Integrity and Honesty** – Mr. Zink has built a reputation as a man of great principle. His word is trusted, and his commitment to fairness is unwavering.

- **Fairness and Impartiality** – He has always taken the time to carefully weigh the evidence, listen to law enforcement perspectives, and ensure that the rights of all parties were respected.

- **Dedication and Diligence** – His preparation and punctuality were unmatched. When working with detectives and victims, he was always thorough, organized, and fully engaged.

- **Judicial Temperament** – He is thoughtful, measured, and calm under pressure. He approaches difficult cases with both compassion and sound judgment.

- **Reputation Among Peers** – Mr. Zink is highly respected not only by law enforcement but also by defense attorneys, fellow prosecutors, and members of the judiciary. His professionalism and integrity have earned him credibility across the legal community.

- **Mentorship and Leadership** – Beyond his work in the courtroom, Mr. Zink has been a mentor to young attorneys. He has taken the time to guide, teach, and develop the next generation of prosecutors, instilling in them the same values of fairness, preparation, and respect for the law.

In my experience, Mr. Zink is a rare combination of intellect, fairness, and humility. He has the legal expertise, the character, and the temperament that the people of Yellowstone County deserve in a judge. I am fully confident that he will serve with distinction, making fair and thoughtful decisions that reflect both the law and the values of our community.

On a personal note, Governor, when you served as a U.S. Congressman you honored me with the Spirit of Montana Award, and my name was read into the Congressional Record. I share this only to say that I deeply value public service and integrity, and it is from that same perspective that I can attest to Mr. Zink's character and qualifications for this appointment.

It is without hesitation that I recommend Mr. Edward Zink for appointment as Judge of the 13th Judicial District. He has my strongest endorsement, and I am certain he will uphold the honor of the bench with integrity and dedication.

Respectfully,

*Troy Charbonneau*

Retired Detective

Yellowstone County Sheriff's Office

**From:** [John Metcalfe](#)  
**To:** [NominateJudges](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Ed Zink  
**Date:** Wednesday, August 27, 2025 8:50:16 PM

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Governor and members of the panel,

Thank you for taking the time to read my email and recommendation for Mr. Ed Zink to fill a newly created Judge position in Billings.

I'm a law enforcement officer in the Billings area and have a working relationship Mr. Zink.

I know him to be a principled, fair, and knowledgeable legal professional. He is a fantastic resource for me as an officer when I have questions about legal procedure, criminal law, and use of force.

I know he is honest and cares deeply about securing constitutionally sound convictions as a prosecutor. He is not afraid to address law enforcement mistakes or misconduct. I believe these traits will serve him well on the bench.

The citizens of Montana and Yellowstone County would benefit from such a highly experienced and principled prosecutor on the bench. We need experienced prosecutors on the bench.

As a citizen I need a Judge to be ready day one to deal with complex felony cases, Mr. Zink is uniquely qualified to be that Judge day one.

His references from Judge Souza and Judge Knisely speak volumes about his character and work product as both of those Judges are well respected by members of law enforcement.

Thank you for your time and I respectfully urge you to nominate Mr. Zink to the bench.

John Metcalfe

James E. Swanton  
590 Pinon Dr.  
Billings, MT 59105  
jeswanton@gmail.com  
406.690.9151

September 1, 2025

The Honorable Gregory R. Gianforte  
Office of the Governor  
P.O. Box 200801  
Helena, MT 59620-0801

**RE: Letter of Support for Edward Zink – 13<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Judgeship Application**

Dear Governor Gianforte,

I write this letter with sincere conviction and pride in support of Edward Zink's candidacy for appointment to the District Court with continued service to Yellowstone County. I have had the privilege of knowing Ed personally for nearly 25 years and I can attest without reservation to his unwavering integrity, sharp legal acumen, and deep-rooted commitment to justice and public service. In short, he has served our community well!

Ed is a remarkably talented and dedicated individual whose career reflects the highest standards of legal excellence. Throughout his years of practice, he has consistently demonstrated an ability to approach the law not only with clarity and intellect but with empathy, fairness, and deep respect for the people he serves. His devotion to the legal profession and to upholding the rule of law is evident in every aspect of his work.

What sets Ed apart is not only his formidable skill as an attorney, but also his character. He is honorable, measured, and principled. He listens carefully, considers all sides thoughtfully, and acts decisively with integrity. To say that my friend operates in a high capacity would be an understatement. His presence on the bench would be a tremendous asset to the judiciary and a lasting benefit to the citizens of Yellowstone County.

As a judge, I am confident that Ed Zink will continue to serve with the same passion, diligence, and fairness that have defined his career. I wholeheartedly support his application and respectfully urge you to give him your full consideration for this important role.

Thank you for your leadership and for your thoughtful evaluation of this highly qualified candidate.

Respectfully,

Jim Swanton

September 2, 2025

Governor Greg Gianforte  
Office of the Governor  
State of Montana  
P.O. Box 200801  
Helena, MT 59620-0801  
Sent via email: [nominatejudges@mt.gov](mailto:nominatejudges@mt.gov)

Re: Letter of Support for Edward Zink – 13th Judicial District Court Judge Application

Dear Governor Gianforte,

I am pleased to write in support of Edward Zink's application for appointment as a District Court Judge in the Thirteenth Judicial District. Mr. Zink is a highly respected member of the Yellowstone County Attorney's Office, where I also serve as Chief In-House Counsel. From that vantage point, I have observed his professionalism and commitment to public service, and I believe he would bring the experience, judgment, and integrity necessary to serve with distinction on the district court bench.

Mr. Zink demonstrates exceptional dedication to the practice of law and to serving the public. He currently serves as Chief of Criminal Litigation in Yellowstone County, supervising attorneys in the criminal division. His leadership is instrumental in guiding younger prosecutors as they develop their skills, and his willingness to share his knowledge speaks to his collaborative and service-oriented approach.

Mr. Zink handles some of the most complex and serious cases in our state, including numerous homicide prosecutions and officer-involved shooting reviews. These cases require meticulous attention to detail and strong analytical ability. They also demand the capacity to make decisions under significant pressure. His work has consistently reflected a careful, balanced approach that prioritizes fairness and accountability.

In addition to his professional accomplishments, Mr. Zink's personal qualities make him well-suited to judicial service. He approaches others with respect, treats people fairly, and demonstrates the kind of steady temperament that is essential for a judge. He is hardworking and disciplined, but also measured and thoughtful. These traits, combined with his courtroom experience, would allow a smooth transition into the role of a district court judge.

The Thirteenth Judicial District is among the busiest in the state, and the need for judges who can manage heavy caseloads while maintaining impartiality, efficiency, and public confidence is particularly acute. In my role within the County Attorney's Office, I see firsthand the demands placed on the courts, and I am confident that Mr. Zink's preparation and dedication uniquely qualify him to meet those challenges. He would serve with fairness, impartiality, and respect for the law, and would quickly become an asset to the bench and to the citizens of Montana.

For these reasons, I strongly support Mr. Zink's appointment to the District Court. I appreciate your consideration of his application and your commitment to selecting judges who uphold the highest standards of justice.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Steve Williams', written over a horizontal line.

Steve Williams

**From:** [sburt23](#)  
**To:** [NominateJudges](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Comments on Edward Zink  
**Date:** Wednesday, September 3, 2025 11:11:08 AM

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Steve Burt  
680 Sapphire Ave  
Billings, MT 59105  
406-697-1442

The Honorable Governor of the State of Montana  
Greg Gianforte  
P.O. Box 200801  
Helena, MT 59620

09/03/2025

Dear Mr. Gianforte,

I am writing to recommend Ed Zink for the position of District Court Judge in Montana. I have known Ed for a decade, during which we served together on the Harvest Church Security team for most of that time. Throughout our service, Ed consistently demonstrated intelligence, fairness, and a strong work ethic. His leadership qualities and mentorship have been evident to all who have worked with him.

Ed has impressed me with his ability to effectively solve problems and create practical solutions, especially in the fast-paced environment of security. Under his guidance, our team has achieved a high level of competency. Any situations that have arisen during church services have been managed gracefully, ensuring minimal disruption to the congregation. Ed has a unique ability to inspire others to work collectively towards common objectives. Beyond our professional relationship, I consider Ed a valued friend and have cherished the time spent together outside of church.

I am confident that Ed possesses the necessary work ethic, legal background, and skills required for the role of District Court Judge.

Sincerely,  
Steve Burt

**John M. Ryan**

Heenan & Cook, PLLC  
1631 Zimmerman Trail  
Billings, MT 59102

August 28, 2025

**VIA EMAIL TO:**

*nominatejudges@mt.gov*

**Gov. Greg Gianforte**

C/O Boards and Appointments Advisor  
Governor's Office  
PO Box 200801  
Helena, MT 59620  
Office: (406) 444-5665  
*nominatejudges@mt.gov*  
Fax: (406) 444-5529

**Re: Letter of Support — Edward E. Zink for Judge, Montana 13th Judicial District**

Dear Governor Gianforte and Members of the Judicial Selection Committee:

My name is John Ryan. For the past five-and-a-half years, I served as a prosecutor for the Yellowstone County Attorney's Office. Prior to that service I clerked for one year for the Hon. Donald L. Harris of the Montana 13<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court. In my time as a Senior Deputy County Attorney, I prosecuted about 25 cases to trial, primarily sexual and violent crimes. I served in the County's Special Victims Unit, a volunteer designation that focuses on crimes that not everyone has the stomach for—crimes of sexual and physical violence against children. During that time, it was my honor to call Ed Zink a supervisor and mentor. Today, it is my privilege to tell you about this good man who has become a great friend. I enthusiastically support Ed Zink's application to become our next district court judge. Mr. Zink brings an unparalleled depth of trial experience—to my knowledge he is the most-prolific homicide prosecutor in Montana this century. But more impressive than that, Mr. Zink is a man of unquestionable character and integrity, and he brings a frontline understanding of the needs and challenges of Montana's busiest courthouse.

The 13th Judicial District is a unique challenge for aspiring judges. The caseload is massive, often complex, and the stakes are often high. The people of Yellowstone County need judges who can fairly, efficiently, and effectively move cases. A lawsuit or a criminal proceeding generally represents the worst-case scenario for all parties involved. Whether someone is the

victim of a crime, a criminal defendant, civil defendant, or plaintiff—that person deserves timely attention to their case. Yellowstone County needs a judge who can step into the role on Day 1 and get to work moving the docket. Mr. Zink is undoubtedly the man for that task. I have seen him, at times on cases we worked together, throw himself into long hours, nights and weekends, pouring through evidence, police reports, and witness interviews to ensure his absolute best preparedness. The man will not allow himself to be outworked.

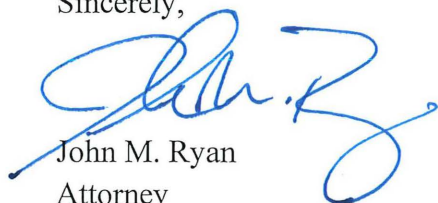
The formula for a great judge goes beyond work ethic, however. A great judge is predictable—not because of their personal ideology, their partisan political leaning, or their affinity for a particular interest group. A great judge is predictable because they follow the law as it is written. A great judge is predictable because they don't try to moonlight as legislators, or as activists. Mr. Zink understands and respects the principle of separation of powers and will impartially adhere to the law as it is written. He will follow the evidence to the truth of the thing.

Beyond work ethic, and faithfulness to the law, a great judge must be fair, be thoughtful, and have appropriate temperament. The public does not often get to see this side of Mr. Zink, due to the nature of his job. But I have personally seen the care and comfort he's afforded grieving victims and families as he prepares and counsels them through reliving true horrors. I have seen Mr. Zink pull in prosecutors of all backgrounds and experience levels to mull their input on responses to complex legal issues. I have seen him lecture prosecutors and coach up law enforcement on the rare occasion where a mistake has been made, it has unfairly impacted the rights of an accused, and the offense must be remedied. Mr. Zink is a man who is compelled: 1) to do the right thing, and; 2) to do right by his neighbors.

To that end, Mr. Zink is thoroughly a product of Eastern Montana, and its values. This is in part why he has been so successful in front of so many Yellowstone County juries. He understands our community. He understands that this is still a place of plain-speaking folks who value character, courage, and conviction. If a person has the character to know what the right thing to do is, they have the courage to choose the right thing (even when the wrong thing is often more convenient), and they have the conviction to stand by their decision—what more could be said to that person's credit?

Surely, I can think of none. Which is why, putting it plainly, Ed Zink is the best pick to be our next district court judge. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



John M. Ryan

Attorney

Heenan & Cook, PLLC

September 2, 2025

Jeanne M. Walker  
P.O. Box 2157  
Billings, MT 59103  
[jwalker@fredlawfirm.com](mailto:jwalker@fredlawfirm.com)

To whom it may concern:

It is with great pleasure that I write this letter of recommendation on behalf of Edward ("Ed") Eric Zink for District Court Judge of the 13<sup>th</sup> Judicial District. I have known Ed for more than 20 years in both his professional career as a prosecutor and on a personal level. My first encounter with Ed was when I had the privilege of clerking for the Honorable Gregory R. Todd, District Court Judge of the 13<sup>th</sup> Judicial District (retired) from 2003 to 2004. As a judicial clerk, I was afforded the unique opportunity to observe highly skilled litigators in the courtroom on a near daily basis. Ed was one of those attorneys. His demeanor was impeccable. His arguments were persuasive, and his knowledge of the case was unmatched.

At the time, Ed was a newly minted attorney in the Yellowstone County Attorney's Office and his skills only refined with age and experience. Ed proved himself as highly skilled litigator climbing the ranks from Deputy County Attorney to Senior Deputy County Attorney and eventually Chief of Criminal Litigation, a position he holds currently. Ed is highly regarded as one of the most experienced trial attorneys in the State with a focus on complex homicides and other violent crimes. Ed's aspirations as a prosecutor led him to pursue additional endeavors during his time with the Yellowstone County Attorney's Office. He also served as a Special Assistant United States Attorney for 12 years. In addition to handling a grueling caseload, he has trained law enforcement officers on a variety of subjects, testified before the legislature on impactful legal issues, presented at national conferences and participated on the Montana Medical Legal Malpractice panel. His servitude spans over 25 years of dedicated commitment to the citizens of this community.

As a Justice of the Peace in Yellowstone County, I have had numerous interactions with Ed in the judicial setting. Ed embodies all of the attributes that a judge would expect from a litigator. He is cordial, professional, well prepared, on time, and knowledgeable about the law and the facts of the case. Ed's experience in the courtroom and his understanding of the judicial system sets him apart from other candidates. For the last 25 years, Ed has put forth the hard work, dedication and

perseverance it takes to work and succeed in the busiest county attorney's office in this State. These are the attributes that will make Ed a successful District Court Judge.

Ed has firsthand knowledge of the case load the District Court Judges face in Yellowstone County. The volume is crushing, simply put. The need for a competent, hard-working, impartial and fair-minded judge is critical. Ed is the right person for the job. He brings extensive legal and practical experience to the bench. In conjunction with his trial experience, Ed has worked with hundreds of defendants, victims, witnesses, families and citizens of this community. He has made a difference in countless lives because of the decisions he makes every day. These decisions can be very difficult and are not always popular. Ed knows all too well the inequities that many defendants and their families face. A judge must have compassion and be guided by empathy. Ed has spent his career offering solutions and solving problems with the mindset that people deserve to be heard and not just seen for their misdeeds.

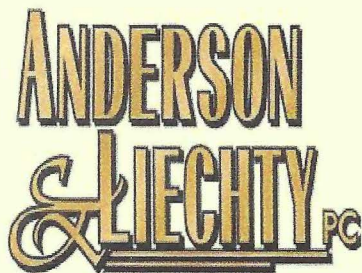
This brings me to my final and most important comment. I recommend Ed Zink for District Court Judge because he is a good human being who puts his faith and his family first. I have had the pleasure to know Ed and his family on a personal level. He has instilled the foundations for a successful family into his home life. He operates on respect, trust, and encouragement for the loved ones in his life. He supported his wife through a 20-year career as a federal probation officer while raising a son. He balanced his professional commitments along with his family commitments without sacrifice. Ed and his wife provided a home life that allowed his son to flourish post graduation and into the United States Naval Academy. Good moral values are the building blocks for a successful judge. Ed's family values and his ability to prioritize life's most important obligations are, in my opinion, the truest testament to his success as a District Court Judge.

It is without reservation that I recommend Edward Eric Zink for District Court Judge of the 13<sup>th</sup> Judicial District.

Sincerely,



Jeanne M. Walker  
Justice of the Peace



404 North 31st Street  
Transwestern One, Suite 130  
Billings, MT 59101

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Email: manderson@a-llaw.com

MICHAEL B. ANDERSON

Mailing Address:  
P.O. BOX 3253  
BILLINGS, MONTANA 59103-3253

September 5, 2025

Ms. Hannah Slusser  
Governor's Office  
P.O. Box 200801  
Helena, Montana 59620

Re: Montana 13<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court Applicants

Dear Ms. Slusser:

I write in support of Ed Zink and Seth Cunningham's applications for appointment as district court judges for the 13<sup>th</sup> Judicial District's new judgeships.

I've known both candidates for over 30 years, both personally and professionally.

Ed is a seasoned and level-headed prosecutor, which equips him exceedingly well for at least half of the expected caseload he'll encounter.

I've known Seth since he and my son were teenagers. Even then, I liked him. He's been a respected member of one of Billings' premier law firms.

As an aside, but a measure of their quality and commitment to service, - Ed's son is presently a cadet at the U.S. Naval Academy; Seth's a graduate of the Air Force Academy. The citizens of Yellowstone County would be well-served by their appointment.

Sincerely

MICHAEL B. ANDERSON



# Montana State Legislature

## MONTANA SENATE

Senator Tom McGillvray

Majority Leader

Senate District 26

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### DURING THE SESSION

State Capitol Building  
PO Box 200500  
Helena MT 59620-0500  
Phone: (406) 444-4800  
Web: legmt.gov

### COMMITTEES

Ethics  
Finance and Claims  
Fish and Game  
Public Health  
Rules

### HOME ADDRESS

5346 Dovetail Ave  
Billings MT 59106  
Phone: (406) 698-4428  
Tom.McGillvray@legmt.gov

September 8, 2025

Dear Governor Gianforte,

It is an honor for me to recommend Edward Zink for appointment as Judge in the 13<sup>th</sup> Judicial District.

I have served on the Select Committee on Judicial Reform and Oversight, and Finance and Claims Committee Section D, which oversees appropriations to the Judicial Branch of Montana State Government. I have also served on the Judiciary Committee both in the Senate and the House and am a Yellowstone County legislator. This gives me unique insight into the judicial branch and the specific needs of the 13<sup>th</sup> Judicial District.

I believe Mr. Zink will be an excellent addition to the District Court for the following reasons:

**Values:** Mr. Zink's is, and his reputation and work confirms, that he is a values centered lawyer and individual. A judge should first have his own house in order before he enters into the profession of being a judge.

**Respect for the Montana Constitution and the law:** A judge must be able to set bias aside (which we all have) and follow the law and the constitution. MCA 1-2-101 describes the role of a judge as follows: "In the construction of a statute, the office of the judge is simply to ascertain and declare what is in terms or in substance contained therein, not to insert what has been omitted or to omit what has been inserted". We have had too many Montana judges insert their own bias and political opinions into judgments and not follow the law. This must change and Mr. Zink will be an addition to the Court that will follow the law.

This is critical for stability and predictability in both law and equity. Criminals must know that crime does not pay, and the business community, where equity is concerned, must know that justice will be served and the law followed so that the business climate of the state will be stable and attractive to business development.

**Temperament:** A judge must treat every individual that comes into the courtroom with respect. Arrogance, impatience, or condescending attitudes from a Judge has no place in a courtroom. All I know about Mr. Zink, and his long standing reputation in Yellowstone County indicate this is the demeanor that he will display in the courtroom.

**Hard work:** The 13<sup>th</sup> District is the busiest district in the state of Montana. In 2024 there were 11,287 cases filed in the 13<sup>th</sup> District, nearly double the next busiest district. Mr. Zink is a dedicated public servant and a hard worker in every task he takes on. Judges need to come to a trial prepared; they need to make timely

decisions. They must work hard to write clearly and articulate decisions, and they must do the work to ensure the court is running efficiently. This all takes hard work, something I am confident Mr. Zink will bring to the table.

**Experience:** Mr. Zink's extensive career as a prosecutor and trial experience are critical for "hitting the ground running." Not only will Mr. Zink be prepared on day one, but he will also bring critical expertise in criminal law that will be an asset to the entire 13<sup>th</sup> District.

For these reasons and more, I highly recommend Mr. Zink as one of the next judges in the 13<sup>th</sup> Judicial District of Montana.

Respectfully submitted,



Tom McGillvray

Robert L. Lester  
Yellowstone County Sheriff's Office  
2323 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave N  
Billings, MT 59101

September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Gov. Greg Gianforte  
C/O Boards and Appointments Advisor  
Governor's Office  
PO Box 200801  
Helena, MT 59620

**RE: Letter of Support – Edward Zink for Judge, Montana 13<sup>th</sup> Judicial District**

Dear Governor Gianforte and Members of the Judicial Selection Committee:

My name is Robert L Lester, and I am the current Undersheriff for the Yellowstone County Sheriff's Office in Billings, MT. I have worked for the Yellowstone County Sheriff's Office for eighteen years, and during my tenure I have performed the role of a Patrol Deputy, Patrol Sergeant; Training Lieutenant, Detention Facility Captain, and Undersheriff. During my 18 years, and through the progression of my career, I have had the privilege to work with Mr. Edward "Ed" Zink.

During my many years of working with Ed, I have seen nothing but a dedication and drive for the pursuit of justice. His professionalism is unquestionable, and his institutional knowledge of the justice system is far superior to anyone else I have ever worked with. Ed has assisted the Sheriff's Office in providing legal updates, and training deputies on other related issues law enforcement has faced. He has also assisted our office in promotional interviews to ensure that the most qualified employee is selected for promotion or a specialized assignment. Mr. Zink has provided guidance and counselling to many individuals in the Sheriff's Office to guide them in making the right and legal decision, and he has flat out told me when I was wrong. All good qualities of a Judge.

Mr. Zink is a great choice for our new Judge, and he will do the citizens of Yellowstone County a great service. He is a plug and play guy that will get to work on day one and will not need time to adjust to his new role. I look forward to working with him in the future in his new role if he is selected.

Respectfully,

Robert L Lester – Undersheriff