

5 running to replace Judge Oliver on Fresno County bench

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Five people are running for the only vacant judge's seat in the central San Joaquin Valley.

The list came into focus Wednesday, the last day to file for a judge's race. Only one Valley judge, Jeffrey Hamilton in Fresno County, faces a challenger.

But four are running to replace Fresno County Superior Court Judge Robert H. Oliver, who announced last week that he's retiring at the end of the year after nearly 20 years on the bench.

The four who have filed to run for Oliver's seat are defense attorney Charles Magill; Fresno County Deputy District Attorney Jarrett Cline; Steven Smith, an administrative law judge for the state's Unemployment Insurance Appeals Board; Rachel Hill, a former Fresno County deputy district attorney; and Lisa Gamoian, a current Fresno County prosecutor.

Magill's announcement comes shortly after the death of his wife and law practice partner, Laura Guzman Magill, who died Dec. 27 after a long battle with breast cancer.

Because the seat is open, state law gives hopefuls an extra five days past the filing deadline to put in papers.

Hamilton faces a challenge from Micheal Collins Webb, an administrative law judge for the state's Unemployment Insurance Appeals Board. Hamilton, a former Fresno County prosecutor, was appointed to the bench in 2005 and retained his seat unopposed in 2008.

Nineteen other Fresno County judges are unopposed. A total of eight judges in Kings, Madera and Tulare counties will keep their seats after the Wednesday deadline passed with no challengers.

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