

JUDICIAL MERIT SELECTION COMMISSION
Sworn Statement to be included in Transcript of Public Hearings

Family Court
(New Candidate)

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1. Why do you want to serve as a Family Court Judge?
I began my legal career in November 1993 and my private practice has been exclusively in the family court. I have always been a solo family court practitioner; however, was fortunate in my early years to be guided and mentored by fellow attorneys as I developed my practice. I was taught to be a zealous advocate in my representation of my clients, but as a lawyer, to practice with candor and civility to litigants, fellow lawyers, and the judiciary. This is the way I have practiced and would continue these principles if elected as a Family Court judge.

I believe my family court experience has prepared me to take this step. In my private practice, I have litigated every type of family court case, from custody, financial issues, termination of parental rights, adoption, abuse and neglect, and juvenile defense.

In addition to my private practice, I have had the opportunity to serve as the attorney for the Dorchester County Department of Social Services from 1995 through 1997 in prosecuting abuse and neglect cases, as well as the attorney for the Dorchester County Guardian ad Litem program through the South Carolina Governor's Office from 2006 through 2008, representing the volunteer Guardian ad Litem appointed as the children's advocates in all abuse and neglect cases.

In March 1999, I became a certified family court mediator and have continued as such to date. Over the last eight years, I made a conscious decision to build my mediation practice and now mediate between 100 and 150 cases for Lowcountry attorneys and litigants. I believe my mediation practice will tremendously aid me if elected as a Family Court judge as I am working not only with attorneys, but family court litigants, during a time which is typically one of the most stressful periods of their life, wherein they are involved in high areas of conflict, and serving as an impartial neutral to resolve their conflict.

My one enduring role beyond my private practice is for 27 of my 30 years of practice, I have represented juveniles in Family Court through the Public Defender's office in

Dorchester County. In 2010, I was awarded the South Carolina Juvenile Defender of the Year by the South Carolina Public Defender Association. Without hesitation, this has been my most rewarding role during my career. I know my advocacy can and has made a difference in a child's life. Children are more than the charge that has brought them to Family Court.

My career has prepared me to serve as a Family Court judge. I would consider it an honor to serve the families, and most importantly the children, who would come before me if elected.

2. Do you plan to serve your full term if elected? Yes I would serve the full term if elected.
3. Do you have any plans to return to private practice one day? I would not return to private practice if I were elected as a Family Court judge.
4. Have you met the statutory requirements for this position regarding age, residence, and years of practice? Yes I have.
5. What is your philosophy regarding *ex parte* communications? Are there circumstances under which you could envision *ex parte* communications being tolerated?

I believe that it is improper to entertain or engage in *ex parte* communications in a pending proceeding without all parties included. I believe fundamental fairness requires all parties the opportunity to be heard.

I may consult with court personnel to aid in carrying out my responsibilities or confer separately with the parties, and their lawyers, in an effort to mediate or settle matters, if requested, pursuant to the *ex parte* exceptions set forth in Rule 3(B)(7) CJC Rule 501 SCACR. Barring an emergency to protect the safety of a child, where thereafter is the opportunity for all litigants to promptly respond and be heard, I would not entertain *ex parte* communications.

6. If you disclosed something that had the appearance of bias, but you believed it would not actually prejudice your impartiality, what deference would you give a party that requested your recusal? Would you grant such a motion?

I believe parties need confidence in the impartiality of the judiciary. Family Court proceedings, in my opinion, deal with the most emotional and sensitive issues.

Ultimately, I believe it would be a disservice to the parties, not to grant the recusal in this situation.

7. How would you handle the appearance of impropriety because of the financial or social involvement of your spouse or a close relative?

I would certainly talk to my spouse or close relative regarding the particular financial or social activity and make clear that my position and their relationship to me must not be used for their personal advancement in any manner. I believe if it were my spouse or close relative, they would recognize the importance of the public's continued confidence in my integrity and impartiality while in the judiciary.

If the financial or social involvement of my spouse or close relative involved an organization which discriminated on the basis of race, sex, religion, or national origin, out of my respect for me and my role in the judiciary, I would request they refrain from any involvement and feel confident my request would be honored.

8. What standards would you set for yourself regarding the acceptance of gifts or social hospitality?

As I do believe the appearance of impartiality and fairness is essential in our judicial system, I would not accept gifts nor invitations for social hospitality from lawyers or litigants but would attend a law or bar related function.

9. How would you handle a situation in which you became aware of misconduct or appearance of infirmity of a lawyer or of a fellow judge?

If I have knowledge that a judge has committed a violation of the Code of Judicial Conduct which raised a substantial question as to the judge's fitness for office, or knowledge of a lawyer who has committed a violation of the Rules of Professional Conduct that raises a substantial question as to the lawyer's honesty, trustworthiness, or fitness as a lawyer in other respects, I would report the conduct to the Office of Disciplinary Counsel.

If I received information indicating a substantial likelihood that a judge has committed a violation of the Code of Judicial Conduct, or a lawyer as to the Rules of Professional Conduct, I would speak directly with the judge or lawyer to address the alleged information of the violation, and thereafter take further action as warranted by our Rules.

If I had a reasonable belief that a lawyer's or a judge's ability to perform their job was impaired due to drugs or alcohol, or a mental, emotional, or physical condition, I would speak directly to that individual in hopes of that individual taking the appropriate steps voluntarily, such as a treatment program or Lawyers

Helping Lawyers, to treat their condition in order that they could perform their job as required.

If the individual was resistant to treatment or denied the impairment, and I did have a reasonable belief that their impairment affected their ability to perform in the judicial system, I would report that person to the Office of Disciplinary Counsel.

10. Are you a member of any organization or association that, by policy or practice, prohibits or limits its membership on the basis of race, sex, religion, or national origin? If so, please identify the entity and explain if this organization practices invidious discrimination on any basis.

None.

11. Have you engaged in any fund-raising activities with any political, social, community, or religious organizations? Please describe.

No.

12. Do you have any business activities that you would envision remaining involved with if elected to the bench?

No.

13. Since Family Court judges do not have law clerks, how would you handle the drafting of orders?

I was informed in June that 16 new law clerks will be hired to assist family court judges in each circuit; however in cases not involving state agencies, I believe I would carryover the practice of our family court bench issuing detailed instructions for the drafting of an order, and having one of the lawyers draft the proposed order, subject to my review and corrections, if necessary.

In cases with the Department of Social Services, juvenile hearings, or DSS child support hearings, I would again carryover the practice of having the attorney for the Department of Social Services, the Solicitor, or public defender/attorney for the juvenile draft the orders, subject to my review and corrections, if necessary.

If I believed due to the complexity of a hearing, or perhaps in a ruling in a contested trial, it would be best for me to prepare the Order, I would do so. I would also prepare any orders needed to be signed immediately, such as Orders of Protection or Bench Warrants.

14. If elected, what method would you use to ensure that you and your staff meet deadlines?

I have always kept a written calendar for myself to track and notate due dates for orders, discovery, responses on approvals of qualified domestic relations orders, filing answers or a reply, return of pleadings from courts, receipt of juvenile evaluations, timelines for juvenile detention hearings, and any other information relevant to my files. My paralegal also maintains a tickler system on our electronic calendar, which is shared.

I would continue these systems if I were on the bench, as they have served me well during my practice. I am conscious of deadlines and understand the importance of meeting deadlines to promote resolution for litigants and judicial efficiency in our court.

15. If elected, what specific actions or steps would you take to ensure that the guidelines of the guardian ad litem statutes are followed during the pendency of a case?

First and foremost, the Guardian ad Litem appointed must meet the statutory qualifications. During the pendency of a case, I would not consider any reports which included a recommendation for custody as contrary to our statute. Finally, if I were assigned as the judge on the merits hearing for a custody trial and a Guardian ad Litem was appointed to represent the child(ren), I would review the file to ensure the Guardian had complied with the statutory requirement to file their final written report with the court and the parties twenty (20) days prior to trial (unless modified by the court) as I believe it is important for attorneys and litigants to have ample opportunity to review the written recommendations of the Guardian and allow litigants time to prepare and address the Guardian findings at the merits hearing.

16. What is your philosophy on "judicial activism," and what effect should judges have in setting or promoting public policy?

It is not the role of a judge to use his or her position to set or promote public policy.

17. Canon 4 allows a judge to engage in activities to improve the law, legal system, and administration of justice. What activities would you plan to undertake to further this improvement of the legal system?

I believe and would like to develop an alternative intensive mentoring program similar to a drug court created to address other nonviolent juvenile charges, specifically including juveniles charged with a first offence of Unlawful Carrying of a Weapon, not on school grounds nor in connection with a separate concurrent

offense where the weapon was used. I believe a program with a sustained personal connection to a mentor, who is invested in the juvenile and provides access to alternative opportunities for their future, with the combined oversight, accountability and encouragement from the program is essential for the juvenile justice system.

I have experienced a dramatic uptick in representation of juveniles charged with Unlawful Carrying of a Weapon. Unless there is early intervention to create a different path for these juveniles (particularly males), I believe we will also continue to see an increase in violent crimes with juveniles because they continue to have a weapon in their possession and have a limited recognition or naivety of the potential consequences in displaying or using the weapon.

18. Do you feel that the pressure of serving as a judge would strain personal relationships (i.e. spouse, children, friends, or relatives)? How would you plan to address this?

No I do not. As a solo practitioner I have managed my law practice for thirty (30) years and although there have been stressful days or weeks, I have always set boundaries regarding work time versus family time. I engage in organized sports for stress relief as well. We made a choice when our son was 2 years of age, my husband would be a stay-at-home parent to provide a quality family life. We are now recent "empty nesters".

19. Would you give any special considerations to a pro se litigant in family court?

I believe if a party chooses to be self-represented, they should be given the same deference and held to the same standards as a lawyer in the courtroom. They would be treated no differently as to fairness, procedure and temperament.

20. Are you involved in any active investments from which you derive additional income that might impair your appearance of impartiality?

No.

21. Would you hear a case where you or a member of your family held a *de minimis* financial interest in a party involved?

No. I believe it is imperative the litigants before me have confidence in my impartiality and my decisions affecting their personal issues.

22. Have you met the mandatory minimum hours requirement for continuing legal education courses for the past reporting period?

Yes.

23. What do you feel is the appropriate demeanor for a judge and when do these rules apply?

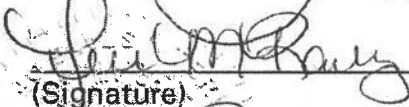
I think a judge must demonstrate they are engaged in the matter before them and allow litigants to present their case while maintaining the rules and decorum of the courtroom. I believe in the adage "firm but fair."

24. Do you feel that it is ever appropriate to be angry with a member of the public who would appear before you, especially with a criminal defendant? Is anger ever appropriate in dealing with attorneys or a pro se litigant?

I believe anger accomplishes nothing in the courtroom and is not appropriate. A judge should and can communicate with decisiveness their rulings, directives, and instructions without anger, yelling or demeaning parties. If a party is disrespectful to the court, a judge must not respond in kind, but maintain order in the courtroom with clear, firm instructions and consequences if rules are not followed.

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THE ANSWERS TO THE ABOVE QUESTIONS ARE TRUE AND COMPLETE TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE.

Sworn to before me this 3rd day of July, 2023.



(Signature)

Teri M. Ranky

(Print name)

Notary Public for South Carolina

My commission expires: 4/20/25