



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

**Family Court**  
**(New Candidate)**

Full Name: Julianne M. Stokes

Business Address: 11 State Street, Charleston SC 29401

Business Telephone: (843) 720-7416

1. Why do you want to serve as a Family Court Judge?

Family Court judges have the tremendous responsibility of making life-altering decisions on a daily basis. If granted the privilege of serving as a judge, it is my desire to uphold the law and make positive impacts on our citizens, whether through divorce, custody disputes, adoptions, juvenile proceedings, or DSS actions. I would faithfully execute the duties of this position in a fair and impartial manner. Moreover, the Family Court is where I can best utilize my years of experience in service to the State of South Carolina.

2. Do you plan to serve your full term if elected?

If elected, I would be honored to serve a full term on the Family Court bench.

3. Do you have any plans to return to private practice one day?

Several retired Family Court judges have returned to private practice and used their vast experience to successfully mediate or arbitrate private domestic disputes. If I returned to private practice, I would anticipate doing so in a neutral fashion through Alternative Dispute Resolution.

4. Have you met the statutory requirements for this position regarding age, residence, and years of practice?

I do meet the statutory requirements and have practiced exclusively in the family courts of South Carolina for thirteen years.

5. What is your philosophy regarding *ex parte* communications? Are there circumstances under which you could envision *ex parte* communications being tolerated?

While there are times in family court that an *ex parte* communication will occur (such as a motion for emergency *ex parte* relief together with a showing of

potential for irreparable harm), it is critical that parties not gain a procedural or tactical advantage as the result of an *ex parte* communication. *Ex parte* communications should be discouraged and allowed only in the absence of other alternatives and when there is a necessity for emergency action (coupled with consideration of all facts and circumstances provided to the judge through sworn statements). It is incumbent on the judge or his staff to notify all parties of the substance of any *ex parte* communication and provide an opportunity for a response.

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?

Judges have an affirmative duty to adjudicate matters before them except in the case of a potential disqualification. The prohibition against any appearance of impropriety must be balanced with the efficient administration of justice. Therefore, there are circumstances in which no potential conflict could be waived and such a motion would be granted. I would, in that case, attempt to ensure prompt rescheduling of the parties' matter.

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

As a judge, I would recuse myself in any matter in which my impartiality might be reasonably questioned. The appearance of impropriety as a result of a close relative or spouse would result in my voluntarily recusal. I would, however, make efforts to assist the parties in contacting the clerk's office for efficient rescheduling.

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

Any gift from a donor who is likely to appear before me would be declined. Gifts from relatives or close friends for special occasions, if reasonable and appropriate, would be acceptable but not encouraged.

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?

Misconduct by a lawyer or fellow judge would result in my reporting to the ODC. I have made two such reports in the last decade after advising the violating party he/she should self-report and they failed to do so. I allowed the process of the ODC to run its course, and ultimately the appropriate sanctions were issued. With regard to an appearance of infirmity, that is an issue I would address directly with the colleague, to better determine if there is a legitimate physical or

emotional issue. I would remain vigilant to a perceived problem and, if needed, I would contact the Bar Association.

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.

No.

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

I have actively participated with my sons through Boy Scouts of America to raise money through popcorn sales the last several years. I have also participated in outreach for James Island Presbyterian Church, where I am a Trustee. I organized a social media fundraiser on Giving Tuesday (November 27, 2018), on behalf of Remember Niger Coalition. I raised money for cancer survivors and paddled in Dragon Boat Charleston on May 4, 2019. I have not assisted with fundraising activities for political organizations.

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 take pride in drafting orders which are as unambiguous as possible – and, therefore, more easily enforceable. While I may delegate to an attorney the drafting of a proposed order, I would be an active participant in reviewing and revising any such order to ensure it is consistent with the evidence presented and my ruling.

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

I currently utilize a shared calendar with my staff which allows us to document due dates and outstanding jobs. We meet our deadlines well in advance.

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?

As moderator for the statewide guardian ad litem training and update for the last several years, I have working knowledge of the ongoing challenges facing both guardians and judges. Through programming, I made efforts to ensure the guardians being trained or re-trained were reminded not only of the statutory requirements set forth, but of the case law which may impact them in the year to come. Additionally, each year I invite a panel of family court judges to answer questions and give guidance to guardians statewide. Because I am so familiar with guardian statutes, I would proactively request compliance from guardians who appear before me. This would include, but not be limited to, an initial affidavit of compliance, appropriate orders of appointment, specific time-keeping and billing practices, and production of reports which are consistent with the Rules of Evidence.

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

Judicial activism could quickly become dangerous in family court. Judges are tasked with applying laws which are in effect, not creating law. Judicial restraint is critical to ensuring justice is applied consistently to all individuals.

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?

Through the feedback I’ve received after moderating and organizing the last few guardian ad litem trainings, I have learned that judicial insight is immensely helpful for practitioners. I would make efforts to participate in continuing legal education seminars to share insight from the bench. For example, I recently attended a luncheon for family court practitioners where a local family court judge presented on the increase of human trafficking.

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?

I do not believe the pressure of serving as a judge would create strain for my family. I feel blessed to have an incredible support system in place. My co-parent is also a family law attorney, so he understands better than anyone the stressors of handling domestic matters. My parents retired and moved to Charleston, and are active and healthy. They are always the first phone call if we need family support. We also have a close relationship with our church family, where we attend choir, Sunday School, and weekly services. This faith-based support system is instrumental in how well our family successfully functions.

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

I had the unique experience of litigating a six-day custody trial against a pro se defendant in October 2018. The presiding judge did a wonderful job of managing the administration of justice. He was courteous to the self-represented litigant, while at the same time insisting she be held accountable for following the rules of evidence and rules of civil procedure. I would anticipate handling the situation in a similar fashion. Certainly, pro se litigants come before family court judges on a frequent basis, and it is critical for those litigants to have the ability to present their case, while also ensuring legal procedure is followed by all parties before the Court.

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

No, I do not have any investments which would impair my impartiality.

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

Generally, a *de minimis* financial interest would, by definition, mean there is no reasonable question as to the judge's impartiality. However, a judge must maintain vigilance to ensure there is no appearance of impropriety.

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

I have met - and exceeded - the mandatory minimum hours requirement for continuing legal education courses for the past reporting period.

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

In over a decade of practicing exclusively family law, I have observed a number of differing judicial temperaments. My goal would be to make all litigants and their attorneys feel respected, regardless of whether I ultimately rule in favor of a position taken. Anger has no place behind the bench, nor does unnecessary criticism. A presiding judge can effectively administer justice while also remaining calm, courteous, and at all times appropriate. Additionally, qualities of courtesy, civility, patience, and impartiality should extend beyond the courthouse into the judge's private life. I endeavor to meet these standards in my own life already, and would continue to do so.

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?

It is not appropriate to outwardly appear angry with a member of the public who would appear before me, or in dealing with attorneys or a pro se litigant. While that emotion may be justifiable at times, judges should be held to a higher standard in dealing with third parties. Anger or annoyance must be transferred into a calm, matter-of-fact demeanor.

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

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Sworn to before me this \_\_\_\_\_ day of July, 2019.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature)  
Janet S. Hadaway  
Notary Public for South Carolina  
My commission expires: \_\_\_\_\_