



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

Circuit Court
(New Candidate)

Full Name: Jane Hawthorne Merrill
Business Address: 410 Main St., Greenwood, SC 29646
Business Telephone: 864-229-1010

1. Why do you want to serve as a Circuit Court judge?
My brother, older than me by only six months thanks to the gift of adoption, and I started kindergarten and graduated high school together. Our single mother working for DSS and our father, who by that time was totally disabled, simply did not have the means to fund our college educations. So, I earned my college education through hard work and determination.

In high school, I worked as a clerk at the local library, and saved my minimum wage earnings. The summer before starting college, I kept my library job and added another waiting tables. Throughout college, I always worked at least one job, and most summers, I worked three. My jobs ran the gamut. I waited tables at three different restaurants, ran errands for two law firms, babysat, tutored student athletes, interned at an advertising agency, did clerical work for a professor, and worked third shift at a radio station. When I walked across the stage at graduation, I had no student loan debt and a 3.95 GPA.

The same self-motivation that got me through college is always with me. It constantly propels my professional life. I have tried cases to juries as a criminal prosecutor, a criminal defense attorney, and a civil litigator representing both plaintiffs and defendants. I clerked for a Circuit Court Judge. The depth, breadth, and variety of my experience in the courtroom provides a strong foundation for the role of Circuit Court Judge. My professional experience, combined with life lessons from my family make me uniquely qualified to be a Circuit Court Judge.

Though none of them worked in law, my family supported my dream of becoming a lawyer. They encouraged me, prayed for me, and kept my infant child while I commuted daily between Greenwood and Columbia during my last year of law school. Even though my family did not expose me to the legal field, there were events along the way that sparked my interest in the law.

A junior high school field trip to the Greenwood County Courthouse

fascinated me. Writing a paper in high school about Sandra Day O'Connor and her ascension to the United States Supreme Court inspired me. Working for lawyers in college opened my eyes to the variety of areas in which a lawyer could practice. Helping my father, who had Multiple Sclerosis and was wheelchair bound the last ten years of his life, navigate legal, long term care, and medical decisions taught me patience and further ingrained in me that all people, no matter their circumstances, deserve to be treated with respect and dignity.

Though I can never repay my family for all they have given me, I can pay it forward to the next generation. I give back to our community and the legal profession in various ways. For six years, I have served as a volunteer coach for Greenwood High School's mock trial team. I serve on the boards of our local community theater and community foundation. I was honored to serve as a mentor to Daenayia Hudson through the South Carolina Bar's mentoring program, and then humbled to be recognized as a 2019 Mentor of the Year. There to share the moment with me was my mother, sitting beside the Chief Justice of the South Carolina Supreme Court.

By example, my family taught me to be conscientious, courteous, compassionate, and committed. Just like an excellent judge, they paid attention and took time to listen to me. They were patient, kept an open mind when I shared my ideas and dreams, and were committed to seeing me succeed. They knew that work worth doing was worth doing right. The life lessons I learned from them guided me through childhood, college, law school, and my career. I am grateful for them, and know all I've learned from them will serve me well as a Circuit Court Judge.

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

Yes.

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

If elected, I plan to serve in a judicial capacity until retirement.

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

Yes.

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

Ex parte communication is improper except when the law expressly permits such contact. For example, the law allows *ex parte* proceedings to determine if investigative, expert, and other services are reasonable and necessary for the representation of an indigent defendant. S.C. Code Ann. § 17-3-50(B) (2007). I would follow the law and the guidelines set forth in

the Judicial Canons regarding *ex parte* communications. Canon 3B(7), CJC, Rule 501, SCACR. I would also ensure my staff knew about the rules regarding *ex parte* communications so they properly screen calls and direct any writings to be filed with the clerk's office.

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?

Each situation presents different facts and circumstances, so I would listen to the party requesting my recusal, and give careful consideration and deference to the request simply to avoid the appearance of impropriety. Even if I thought I could rule fairly, I would strongly consider recusing myself so that the moving party does not doubt the integrity of the judicial system.

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 consider my spouse's financial or social involvement to be akin to my own, and if my own involvement would require recusal, then I would recuse myself. If am aware of a close relative's involvement, I would disclose that and strongly consider recusing myself, keeping in mind my obligation to uphold the integrity and independence of the judiciary and to avoid even the appearance of impropriety.

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

It is inappropriate to accept gifts from anyone except family and close personal friends. However, an exception may be appropriate for nominal tokens when celebrating holidays or special events. Social hospitality may be accepted so long as it is not offered with the intention of influencing the judge, or appearing to influence the judge. If it appears one is offering a gift with the intention of influencing the judge, then such a gift must be declined. Canon 4D(5), CJC, Rule 501, SCACR.

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?

Judicial Canon 3D provides guidance to the judiciary about disciplinary responsibilities. Canon 3D, CJC, Rule 501, SCACR. If I had actual knowledge that a lawyer or fellow judge had committed a violation that raises a question about the lawyer's honesty, trustworthiness, or fitness as a lawyer, I would discuss such conduct with the lawyer or judge and encourage the person to self-report, and the rule would require that I also report such conduct. If I merely suspected misconduct, I would speak with the lawyer or judge about my concerns. If the conversation alleviated my concerns, there would be nothing else to do. If however, such conversation

confirmed my concerns, the specific facts would determine the appropriate action. For example, assisting the lawyer in reaching out to Lawyers Helping Lawyers, or providing information about available professional counseling may be appropriate actions.

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 serve on the Board of the Greenwood Community Theatre and the Greenwood County Community Foundation. I have attended and assisted at fundraising events for both of these non-profit entities.

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

No.

13. If elected, how would you handle the drafting of orders?

I enjoy writing, and would like drafting my own orders, but the reality of available judicial resources and caseloads likely means that attorneys would draft proposed orders for my review on at least some cases. I would require the attorney drafting the order to provide all attorneys with a copy of the proposed order, and give those attorneys time to respond to the proposed order. I would request the orders be sent to me electronically so that I could review and edit them. I would not sign anything that I hadn't carefully reviewed, and probably edited, to ensure the order accurately reflects my ruling.

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

In my office now, I maintain calendar and case management systems that ensure we satisfy deadlines and statutes of limitations. If elected, I would implement a similar system. I would also actively manage staff to ensure the system is operating as intended. Likely, I would assign the monthly matters under advisement reports to be drafted by a dedicated staffer, such as the administrative assistant, so there is consistency in getting those reports timely completed.

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

Judges are charged with administering the law, regulations, statutes,

and case law, as written. Precedent is important and a circuit court judge is tasked with applying the law, not creating it. There may be times a particular law is difficult to apply in practice. In that instance, a judge should not publicly comment on such. However, a judge may speak privately to a member of the legislature about the practical problem with the application of a law.

16. Canon 4 allows a judge to engage in activities to improve the law, legal system, and administration of justice. If elected, what activities do you plan to undertake to further this improvement of the legal system?

Educating others about the law and judicial system is one of my passions. I've been the volunteer mock trial coach for Greenwood High School since 2013. I am also an adjunct professor at Lander University and enjoy teaching students in my Judicial Process and Civil Rights and Civil Liberties classes. While being a judge may limit my capacity to continue with these endeavors, it would not lessen my enthusiasm for sharing my knowledge and being involved in activities to improve the law, legal system, and administration of justice.

17. 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 address this?

Throughout my legal career, my husband, children, and family have continuously supported and encouraged me. That would not change if I became a judge.

18. The following list contains five categories of offenders that would perhaps regularly appear in your court. Discuss your philosophy on sentencing for these classes of offenders.

As a judicial candidate, the only pledge or promise I can make is that I will perform my duties faithfully and impartially. Canon 5A(3)(d)(i), CJC, Rule 501, SCACR. As a judicial candidate, I cannot make statements that commit or appear to commit myself with respect to cases, controversies, or issues that are likely to come before the court. Canon 5A(3)(d)(ii), CJC, Rule 501, SCACR. I can and will provide my general thoughts and overall philosophies.

- a. Repeat offenders:

Repeat offenders are familiar with and have already been through the judicial system. They know the consequences of failing to conform their conduct to comply with the law. As such, repeat offenders are generally more deserving of a harsher sentence than a first time offender, but each sentencing must consider more than the single factor of one's prior criminal history. In sentencing repeat offenders, the Court must follow any enhanced or mandatory sentencing statutes that apply.

b. Juveniles (that have been waived to the Circuit Court):

Like adults, juveniles must answer for their crimes. If there is a mandatory sentence for the crime, then I must follow the law. If I have discretion, then the defendant's age would be taken into consideration with all other factors. Even though a family court judge determined the statutory factors warranted a waiver to general sessions, if there is any chance of rehabilitation, I would aim to craft a sentence that is just for the victim while providing a chance for rehabilitation for the defendant.

c. White collar criminals:

Some believe that white collar crimes are "victimless" crimes, but that is rarely true. If one's illegal conduct has caused another to lose their life savings, such a loss is difficult, if not impossible, to recover. White collar criminals should not be treated differently than other criminal defendants. Depending on the facts of the case, a white collar crime may even warrant a more severe sentence.

d. Defendants with a socially and/or economically disadvantaged background:

That a defendant may have a socially and/or economically disadvantaged background does not excuse the criminal conduct in which the defendant engaged. This is one of many factors I would consider in sentencing. This factor alone would not be a reason for a more strict or more lenient sentence.

e. Elderly defendants or those with some infirmity:

That one is elderly or one has an infirmity does not excuse the criminal conduct of the defendant. I would consider this a factor, along with all the other factors, in crafting an appropriate sentence. Practically speaking a twelve year sentence for someone who is in their late sixties may be a life a sentence and is different than a twelve year sentence for someone in their early twenties. However, no single factor is determinative in sentencing. As with sentencing in any case, I would consider the defendant's criminal history, severity of crime, the victim's input, prior incarcerations, and mitigating factors.

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

Most of my investments are in publicly traded companies or mutual funds. It is unlikely the value of the investments would be affected in any substantial way. However, if I had concerns about the appearance of impropriety, I would disclose such information to all counsel involved with

the case.

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

A *de minimis* financial interest is generally not grounds for disqualification so long as my impartiality could not be questioned. If I or my family member held a *de minimis* financial interest in a party involved, I would disclose the facts on the record, reassure the parties of my impartiality, and provide counsel time to discuss the matter with their client. I would move forward with the hearing only if all parties consented on the record.

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

Yes.

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

A judge must be respectful, patient, courteous, fair, thoughtful, and an active listener. A judge must maintain this demeanor at all times and with all people with whom the judge interacts. A judge must always be, and must always appear to be, impartial.

23. Do you feel that it is ever appropriate to be angry with a member of the public, especially with a criminal defendant? Is anger ever appropriate in dealing with attorneys or pro se litigants?

Anger is an emotion that all people feel at times. However, it is imperative that a judge not show anger or take it out on anyone in the courtroom. A judge must be able to maintain a calm, fair, and patient demeanor and maintain decorum in the courtroom. This is true regardless of the person with whom the judge is interacting.

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 _____ day of _____, 2019.

(Signature)

(Print Name)
Notary Public for South Carolina
My Commission Expires: _____