



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?

Becoming a Family Court Judge has been a goal of mine since 2009. As many young lawyers, when I originally started practicing law, I was wildly interested in criminal court. It seemed exciting and where the real trial lawyers lived. As a junior partner, I ended up spending a majority of my time handling the family court litigation. I soon grew to love this area of the law and the family court courtrooms became more welcoming. My interest in all areas of family law grew, but the connection with children's lives had the largest impact on me. With my work as a private guardian ad litem and with the Volunteer Guardian ad Litem Programs, I had a front seat view of the effects even the "smallest" hearings had on a child. My passion for family court really blossomed to the point that by approximately 2012 I was spending almost my entire practice in family court. I have been involved with almost every area of family court and have litigated cases from almost every seat in the courtroom. My work at the Department of Social Services has only increased my understanding of how important the family courts are. From my perspective, Family Court is the place where the issues effecting most vulnerable members of our community are litigated and I cannot think of a more important role than that of a Family 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?

I hope to serve as a South Carolina Family Court Judge until retirement; however, if not, I do plan on continuing my practice as an attorney, either for the State or a private firm.

4. Have you met the statutory 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 appropriately limited to a very small number of circumstances. As a general rule, they shall be strictly prohibited. Judicial Canon 2 outlines circumstances when ex parte communications will be allowed. However, even in those circumstances, the Court shall quickly make attempts to notify all other parties of the substance of the communications and allow all parties a chance to reply to the communications. The law expressly authorizes certain circumstances when ex parte communications are allowed; however, these are limited and should be closely monitored and only granted when absolutely necessary. Additionally, when scheduling or administrative reasons necessitate such communications, and the judge can reasonably believe no party be given an advantage, these communications can be helpful in maintaining judicial economy. If there is a question as to the appropriateness of such communications, it is safest to err on the side of not allowing them.

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?

Given the importance that must be placed on a fair and impartial judiciary, I believe it is necessary that great deference be given to a party requesting a recusal. All efforts must be made to keep the integrity of the judiciary intact, while maintaining judicial economy.

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

Pursuant to Canon 2, B I would not allow a spouse or close relative to use the prestige of the office to gain any advantage. Additionally, I would not do so myself. Should there be an appearance of same I would recuse myself from hearing a matter and/or step away from a situation that could possibly lead to the appearance of impropriety. I would make every effort to not allow myself or my family to place ourselves in such situations, even if no violation of the canon actually existed. The promotion of public

confidence in the integrity and impartiality of the judiciary is of utmost importance.

8. What standards would you set for yourself regarding the acceptance of gifts or social hospitality? It is best not to accept any gifts or social hospitality related to the position of family court judge.

Gifts for special occasions, such as birthdays, would need to be balanced with the occasion. I do not have a significant other, but in the instance that I do in the future, I would understand that they could be granted gifts or awards as long as it was very clear that it was not being provided to influence me. Additionally, social hospitality is acceptable when in the ordinary course of life; however, I would have to be alert and aware of all situations so as not to allow any inappropriate gifts or favor to be given.

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?

Depending on the situation, I would immediately report the conduct to the appropriate agency/authority. Different situations would require different responses and would engage the many authorities involved. It is possible a Lawyers Helping Lawyers referral would provide the necessary answers. Should there be a question on what I should do, I would reach out to the appropriate authority regarding guidance.

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 given tithes and offerings to Welcome Baptist Church in Anderson, South Carolina. Additionally, I have assisted in their fundraising for certain mission groups in the past year.

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?

Should the hearing be held with counsel in attendance, I would request they draft the order and circulate it appropriately. Additionally, I would have my staff maintain the matters under advisement (MUA) list to be sure these orders were submitted to me within thirty (30) days for signature. However, should the parties be pro se, I would draft these orders myself as necessary. I would try to utilize form order when appropriate for efficiency and effectiveness. This also allows uniformity in orders which can assist a judge in the future when reviewing a file.

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

Organization and attention to detail are important to many daily tasks. However, the deadlines a family court judge must meet require extreme diligence in maintaining that organization and attention to detail. Both in my private practice, as well as my work at DSS I have developed plans to keep track of things such as providing orders to the court. In my time at DSS, I have had upwards of thirty-five/forty orders due to judges from scheduled hearings that month. I developed an excel spreadsheet system, that is now being utilized for all attorneys in my office (to include contract attorneys) that keeps track of when these orders should be drafted, circulated and subsequently submitted to the Court for signature and filing. This is a system that I believe would translate well to the family court bench. I have had a number of family court administrative assistants check with me to verify if orders had been drafted/submitted, because they understand our system is in place and effective.

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?

A guardian ad litem can be an invaluable resource to a family court judge in making decisions related to minor children and/or vulnerable adults. However, the statutes governing their conduct must be upheld to ensure the effectiveness remains. I would make sure to review the statutes on a regular basis and develop a checklist for each file I reviewed to make sure the necessary guidelines were being adhered to.

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

Judicial activism is the antonym of judicial restraint. A judge, more so than any other person in the judicial system, must uphold the highest standards

of conduct, integrity and independence. This includes from their own personal biases and opinions. This does not mean a judge cannot, or should not, utilize their life experiences. On the contrary, life experiences can provide the judge with compassion, empathy, and patience, all of which are necessary for a judge to employ. But, the judge shall always follow the law, and necessary equitable maxims, when making rulings.

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?

Currently, our Anderson County Solicitor's Office has a facility dog utilized in many situations in general sessions court to sit with victims. When we reach out to the Solicitor's office to request the presence of Roma for one of our young victims having to testify, or a vulnerable adult needing some reassurance, they make every effort to accommodate our request. But, given the nature of what takes place every single day in family court, I can say with absolute certainty, that a facility dog dedicated to family court would be very beneficial. There are many ways this dog could be utilized and I would like to look further into the possibility of obtaining such an amazing animal.

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?

It is possible that the pressures placed on a judge could have an impact on personal relationships. Unfortunately, with the nature of the judicial system, most jobs involved can suffer from the same. I have not been immune to this in my personal life. However, as with any profession, a higher purpose is being served and one should strive daily to appropriately balance their personal and work life. Maintaining this balance is not easy, but if one makes it a priority, it can create benefits for both sides. With a small child, I know there will be necessary balance with being her mother and, if granted the opportunity, being a family court judge. This is something I do not take lightly, but look forward to having a chance to show my daughter the importance of the judiciary and the compassion, patience and integrity associated therewith.

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

A certain amount of consideration and understanding is necessary for all those that are before a family court judge. A pro se litigant is required to be held to the same standard as a practicing attorney; however, in the interest of judicial economy and providing access to the legal system to

pro se litigants, there are times when an explanation of a rule is appropriate.

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?

I would not immediately recuse myself; however, I would disclose the potential *de minimis* interest to all parties and afford them the opportunity to request a recusal. As it is not an immediate cause for disqualification from hearing the matter, it is always imperative to avoid any appearance of impropriety. Providing the information to all parties and documenting any involvement will only help to affirm the integrity and unbiased nature of the judiciary.

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?

A Judge must always be patient. The courtroom, and especially the family court courtroom, is a place of high anxiety and emotion. It is imperative to the entire judicial process that a judge maintain his or her composure at all times. Being considerate is beneficial and necessary to all emotionally charged situations, but a family court judge must maintain this decorum between and among all parties appearing before him or her. Being able to keep oneself calm and collected in highly charged situations is difficult, but a family court judge must not only keep themselves this way, they must require everyone appearing before them (to include staff) does the same. This can be one of the more difficult jobs a family court judge faces.

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?

Anger is never the appropriate response in the courtroom. It is sometimes necessary to be more direct when handling certain situations. The courtroom is place that must be respected and the Judge is the person

with that control. Allowing oneself to become angry deteriorates the authority and integrity of the courtroom

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: _____