



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 always wanted to be a lawyer from the time I was a young child. From the time I was young until I was sworn in as a lawyer, my actions were to further my goal of becoming a lawyer. This includes attending Wofford College and the University of South Carolina School of Law. Since becoming a lawyer, I have worked to be a respected professional who helps her clients achieve their goals and maneuver the maze that is Family Court. Becoming a judge is the next step in continuing to help people while growing professionally.

I have practiced in all areas of Family Court and enjoy helping my clients with their legal issues. As a child of divorced parents, I have lived through the experience many children in Family Court are now going through. As a foster to adopt parent and defense counsel for indigent clients, I have been involved in all aspects of the abuse and neglect system. I have served as Guardian ad Litem and represented Guardians ad Litem. I have helped parents adopt children, dealt with child support cases and juvenile cases. I am a certified Family Court Mediator. While every case is different, I enjoy helping someone and having an impact on their life.

In Family Court the judge makes daily decisions that impact families and children. South Carolina citizens deserve a judiciary that is professional, knowledgeable and who can understand them when dealing with the messy real-life issues that arise in Family Court. It is important to have judges with life experience who can relate to litigants and to have judges who want to help families. While being a Family Court Judge would be a challenge, I would be honored to be able to help the families and children who are involved in the issues that being heard in Family Court.

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

Yes, I would serve my full term if elected.

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

After serving as a judge, I would likely return to private practice as a mediator. I am a certified Family Court Mediator and enjoy that practice. Being a mediator would allow me to continue to help people involved in Family Court. Mediation is an important tool that allows litigants to craft their own solutions to meet their personal circumstances in a way that a judge is not always able to do. One of the best parts of mediation is helping parties reach creative solutions that meet his or her specific challenges. I hope and plan to always be a part of the legal community in some fashion. I enjoy teaching others so I would enjoy providing continuing legal education in addition to mediation.

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

Yes, I meet the statutory requirements to be a Family Court Judge.

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

The Canons of Judicial Conduct, Canon 3 expressly outlines how a judge is to handle *ex parte* communication. It is important the *ex parte* communication be limited to those exceptional circumstances as outlined within the law. The judicial process has rules in order to ensure that all parties are treated fairly and impartially. My experience has been that *ex parte* communication may happen in a Family Court matter when the safety and well-being of a child requires immediate judicial action. It may be necessary to protect those who are unable to protect themselves in an emergency.

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 would err on the side of caution when dealing with the appearance of bias. If a party requested my recusal because of their perception of my position based on my prior practice, the appearance of bias or some other ethical issue, I would grant such a motion. When dealing with bias, it comes down to the party's perception. If the party has a reasonable perception or belief of bias, then it would be appropriate to recuse myself.

The issues being heard in Family Court are too important for a party to believe the judge hearing their case is biased.

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

The Canons of Judicial Conduct, Canon 3 outlines how a judge shall handle the financial or social involvement of a spouse or close relative. I have discussed this issue with my spouse and would continue to monitor these types of relationships of my spouse and minor children. Certainly, any financial or social involvement would be disclosed in a matter for all parties to be aware. If necessary, I would recuse myself. My spouse and I have discussed this potential concern prior to my decision to formally apply for consideration as a Family Court Judge. As a Certified Public Accountant my husband is familiar with ethical standards and disclosure requirements.

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

The Canons of Judicial Conduct, Canon 4 outlines the proper way address these issues. I would not accept any gift or social hospitality that would lead to a reasonable perception of partiality. I would disclose any close relationship in a matter to all parties. Again, the issues being heard in Family Court are too important for a party to perceive the presiding Judge has any bias.

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?

As a lawyer or a judge, our ethical rules require that certain misconduct and infirmities be reported (See The Canons of Judicial Conduct, Canon 3 parts E and G, Rule 8.3(c)). These are mandatory reports depending on the type of misconduct or action of the lawyer or judge. If I was to have personal knowledge of behavior that our rules required me to report, then I would follow the appropriate reporting requirements. Reporting misconduct is not something I take lightly, but every lawyer and judge has an ethical duty to report misconduct. As a profession that governs itself, it is imperative that participants adhere to the rules set forth for the profession.

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 am currently serving as the Chair of Administrative Council for my church, Northeast United Methodist Church, and I am a member of the Finance committee. As such, I am aware of the general financial status of the church and help assist in determining financial goals and work on stewardship campaigns.

I am member of the board of directors for Alala Cancer Society. As a board member, I have had general responsibilities for directing the organization and fund raisers held by the organization.

I currently serve on the initial board of directors for the Blythewood Soccer Club which is a newly formed entity to establish a local recreational soccer league. The Club is working with the local community to raise funds for space to practice and play matches. I have participated in those activities in a general manner only with no direct fund raising.

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

I am the sole owner of Cahoon Properties, LLC which owns the building where my law practice operates. If elected, I would either rent out the building or sell it. If it is a rental, then Cahoon Properties, LLC would continue to operate as the owner of the property.

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

In cases where an attorney or attorneys appear, I would direct one of the attorneys to draft the order for review. There are certain matters, such as bench orders or form orders for issues that include, but are not limited to issues related to child support or drug screening, that can be done quickly from the bench. The pro se divorce package includes the order to be completed. Based on my practice in Family court, I would not anticipate the need to draft orders on a regular basis as a Judge. However, I have drafted multiple types of Family Court Orders as a lawyer and would be able to draft an Order if needed. I would organize my notes from each hearing in such a way that I could quickly review them when the proposed order was received. I believe it to be more likely that I would be preparing

a memorandum of findings and decisions in a contested matter that I had taken under advisement to send out as instruction to the attorneys for the order to be drafted.

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

I would set up an internal calendar system that would ensure I received proposed orders in a timely fashion to review based on the current court administration requirements. I would organize my hearing notes so that I would be able to quickly review the pertinent information for timely review and execution of the proposed orders. Court administration deadlines would be incorporated into my office practice to ensure I was able to complete the necessary reports within the deadline time period. My staff would have a protocol in place to contact the parties regarding the status of the order if it was not received by a certain date. I would be clear in my ruling regarding the time frame for the proposed order to be drafted, reviewed by opposing counsel and provided to my office. This would include how to handle pro se parties to avoid *ex parte* communications.

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?

In cases where a Guardian ad Litem was necessary, I would review the orders appointing the Guardian. There are specific time frames for reports to be filed by Guardians that would require checking the file before a hearing. Having served as a Guardian ad Litem, I am familiar with the current statutes. I would keep up with any changes to the statutes to ensure compliance.

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

The role of the judge is to carry out the law as established by the Legislature and prior court rulings. It would be incumbent on me to continue to study the legal issues that arise in Family Court to ensure I understood the current statute(s) and case law that should be applied to cases heard before me. I do not believe that judges should set public policy. Our government is separated into the legislative, executive and judicial branches to ensure the individual rights granted to our citizens are protected.

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?

Before beginning any activities to improve the legal system, I would take time as a new judge to thoroughly learn my role. If issues arose that concerned me in carrying out my judicial duties, I would consider how I could ethically work to address them within the existing system. I would continue to educate myself and others within the Family Court system. I would like to help young lawyers improve their practice while encouraging professionalism with all participants. I would continue to work with the Law Related Education Committee of the SC Bar to help educate students and others about our legal system. I would also be willing to speak at continuing legal education seminars. It is important to listen to and share ideas with others so I would serve as needed on committees established by the Chief Justice to improve the legal system.

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 would be honored to serve as Judge of the Family Court. My spouse and I have discussed how we would address any strain on our family. Having been a solo practitioner for over eight years, I have established a group of family and friends to help with picking up my children if I am in a late hearing or required to be at court. I have plans in place to help with childcare that would continue. My family has become accustomed to my full-time work schedule that includes at times evenings and weekends.

Serving as a judge would affect the personal relationships I have with other lawyers. I believe that lawyers understand how that dynamic changes the relationship and respect each other. I would address any issue as needed.

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

Pro se litigants are entitled to the same respect, courtesy and fairness as any party in Family Court. Self-represented litigants would need to be questioned under oath to ensure that they understand their duties and responsibilities prior to a hearing. I would ensure that pro se litigants were treated respectfully, but they are required to understand the rules when undertaking their self-representation.

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 only hear such a matter if all parties understood the disclosure of the *de minimis* financial interest and consented. I do not anticipate this to be an issue with me personally.

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 should act in a professional and courteous manner and be aware that the role of judge transcends the bench. While in the courtroom, the judge should be in control of what is happening in the courtroom. The judge should be respectful, attentive and courteous. Any issues related to impartiality or bias should be addressed with all parties prior to beginning a hearing. The judge should show by facial expressions and responses to questions or objections that the judge is actively engaged in the matter being heard before them. The Canons of Judicial Conduct, Canon 2 specifically states “a judge shall respect and comply with the law and shall act at all times in a manner that promotes public confidence in the integrity and impartiality of the judiciary.”

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 not appropriate in any courtroom. A judge cannot become so personally involved in a matter to an extent that they become angry. Judges are required to carry out their responsibilities with integrity, impartiality and legal knowledge – anger is the opposite of those characteristics. A judge should have the ability to control the courtroom to ensure that anger from anyone is not an issue. Family Court issues are often personal ones, but these issues must be dealt with in a professional and courteous manner. A judge must be cognizant of what is happening overall in their courtroom, not just on the witness stand. If attorneys or

parties are becoming angry, then the Judge should recognize the issue and take appropriate steps to ensure the safety of all involved.

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: _____