

**Current Law of Importance  
to Judicial Candidates Who Are Screened by the  
Judicial Merit Selection Commission**

(Updated: July 1, 2025)

**S.C. Constitution, Article V: The Judicial Department**

**S.C. Constitution Article V, § 1. Judicial power vested in certain courts.**

The judicial power shall be vested in a unified judicial system, which shall include a Supreme Court, a Court of Appeals, a Circuit Court, and such other courts of uniform jurisdiction as may be provided for by general law.

**S.C. Constitution Article V, § 2. Supreme Court.**

The Supreme Court shall consist of a Chief Justice and four Associate Justices, any three of whom shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business. The Chief Justice shall preside, and in his absence the senior Associate Justice. In all cases decided by the Supreme Court, the concurrence of three of the Justices shall be necessary for a reversal of the judgment below.

**S.C. Constitution Article V, § 3: Election of members of Supreme Court.**

The members of the Supreme Court shall be elected by a joint public vote of the General Assembly for a term of ten years, and shall continue in office until their successors shall be elected and qualified, and shall be classified so that the term of one of them shall expire every two years. In any contested election, the vote of each member of the General Assembly present and voting shall be recorded.

**S.C. Constitution Article V, § 8: Election of members of Court of Appeals.**

The members of the Court of Appeals shall be elected by a joint public vote of the General Assembly for a term of six years and shall continue in office until their successors shall be elected and qualify. In any contested election, the vote of each member of the General Assembly present and voting shall be recorded. Provided, that for the first election of members of the Court of Appeals, the General Assembly shall by law provide for staggered terms.

**S.C. Constitution Article V, § 13: Judicial circuits.**

The General Assembly shall divide the State into judicial circuits of compact and contiguous territory. For each circuit a judge or judges shall be elected by a joint public vote of the General Assembly; provided, that in any contested election, the vote of each member of the General Assembly present and voting shall be recorded. He shall hold office for a term of six years, and at the time of his election he shall be an elector of a county of, and during his continuance in office he shall reside in, the circuit of which he is judge.

The General Assembly may by law provide for additional circuit judges, to be assigned by the Chief Justice. Such additional circuit judges shall be elected in the same manner and for the same term as provided in the preceding paragraph of this section for other circuit judges, except that residence in a particular county or circuit shall not be a qualification for office.

**S.C. Constitution Article V, § 15: Qualifications of justices and judges.**

No person shall be eligible to the office of Chief Justice, Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, judge of the court of appeals, or judge of the circuit court who is not at the time of his election a citizen of the United States and of this State, and has not attained the age of at least thirty two years, has not been a licensed attorney at law for at least eight years, and has not been a resident of this State for five years next preceding his election.

Any justice or judge serving in office on the effective date of the provisions of this section requiring a justice or judge to be at least thirty two years of age and to have at least eight years of service as a licensed attorney at law who is not of that age or who has not been licensed for this required period of time may continue to serve for the remainder of his current term and is considered to have the requisite age and years of service as a licensed attorney for purposes of future re elections to that judicial office.

**S.C. Constitution Article V, § 16: Compensation of Justices and judges; practice of law and dual office holding.**

The Justices of the Supreme Court and the judges of the Court of Appeals and Circuit Court shall each receive compensation for their services to be fixed by law, which shall not be diminished during the term. They shall not, while in office, engage in the practice of law, hold office in a political party, or hold any other office or position of profit under the United States, the State, or its political subdivisions except in the militia, nor shall they be allowed any fees or perquisites of office. Any such Justice or judge who shall become a candidate for a popularly elected office shall thereby forfeit his judicial office.

**S.C. Constitution Article V, § 17. Removal or retirement of judges.**

Within the unified court system, the Supreme Court shall have power, after hearing, to remove or retire any judge from office upon a finding of disability seriously interfering with the performance of his duties which is, or is likely to become, of a permanent character. A Justice shall not sit in any hearing involving his own removal or retirement. Implementation and enforcement of this section may be by rule or order of the Supreme Court.

**S.C. Constitution Article V, § 18: Vacancies.**

All vacancies in the Supreme Court, Court of Appeals, or Circuit Court shall be filled by elections as prescribed in Sections 3, 8, and 13 of this article; provided, that if the unexpired term does not exceed one year such vacancy may be filled by the Governor. When a vacancy is filled by either appointment or election, the incumbent shall hold office only for the unexpired term of his predecessor.

**S.C. Constitution Article V, § 19. Disqualification of Justices and judges; temporary appointments.**

The General Assembly shall specify the grounds for disqualification of Justices and judges to sit on certain cases. The General Assembly shall also provide for the temporary appointment of men learned in the law to sit as special Justices and judges when the necessity for such appointment shall arise.

**S.C. Constitution Article V, § 27: Judicial Merit Selection Commission.**

In addition to the qualifications for circuit court and court of appeals judges and Supreme Court justices contained in this article, the General Assembly by law shall establish a Judicial Merit Selection Commission to consider the qualifications and fitness of candidates for all judicial positions on these courts and on other courts of this State which are filled by election of the General Assembly. The General Assembly must elect the judges and justices from among the nominees of the commission to fill a vacancy on these courts.

No person may be elected to these judicial positions unless he or she has been found qualified by the commission. Before a sitting member of the General Assembly may submit an application with the commission for his nomination to a judicial office, and before the commission may accept or consider such an application, the member of the General Assembly must first resign his office and have been out of office for a period established by law. Before a member of the commission may submit an application with the commission for his nomination to a judicial office, and before the commission may accept or consider such an application, the member of the commission must not have been a member of the commission for a period to be established by law.

## South Carolina Code

*Note, Title 2 was significantly changed with passage in 2024 of Act No. 219, effective July 1, 2025.*

**SECTION 2-19-5.** South Carolina Judicial Merit Selection Commission creation; appointment; terms.

(A) There is created the South Carolina Judicial Merit Selection Commission composed of twelve members who must be appointed as follows:

(1) four members appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives and of these appointments:

(a) three members must be members of the House of Representatives; and

(b) one member must be selected from the South Carolina Bar who must be a member of the Bar in good standing with ten years' experience in the practice of law;

(2) four members appointed by the Senate and of these appointments:

(a) two members must be appointed by the President of the Senate one of whom must be a member of the Senate and one of whom must be selected from the South Carolina Bar and must be a member in good standing with ten years' experience in the practice of law; and

(b) two members must be appointed by the Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee both of whom must be members of the Senate; and

(3) four members appointed by the Governor all of which must be members in good standing of the South Carolina Bar with at least ten years' experience in the practice of law.

(B) No person is eligible for appointment if he individually contributed to a campaign of one of the appointing authorities in the most recent election. Nonlegislative members may not be a public employee or serve in another elected office.

(C) Members of the commission shall serve for a term of two years and may serve no more than two consecutive terms. However, a member of the House of Representatives or Senate who ceases to serve as a member of the General Assembly will have his service on the commission terminated upon the end of his service in the General Assembly. Additionally, a member appointed to fill a vacancy in an unexpired term may serve two full terms thereafter. The initial appointments must be made as follows:

(1) one member each appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives pursuant to subsection (A)(1)(a) and (b) shall serve an initial term of one year and may be reappointed to a following two-year term;

(2) one member each appointed by the President of the Senate and the Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee pursuant to subsection (A)(2)(a) and (b) shall serve an initial term of one year and may be reappointed to a following two-year term; and

(3) two members appointed by the Governor pursuant to subsection (A)(3) shall serve an initial term of one year and may be reappointed to a following two-year term.

(D) In making appointments to the commission, race, gender, national origin, and other demographic factors shall be considered to ensure nondiscrimination to the greatest extent possible as to all segments of the population of the State.

(E) A vacancy on the commission must be filled for the remainder of the unexpired term in the same manner as provided for the original selection.

(F) Members of the Judicial Merit Selection Commission serving on the effective date of this

act who have served more than four years on the commission are not eligible for appointment to the commission pursuant to the provisions of this act except for the current chairman and vice chairman who can serve a two-year term but then may not serve a successive term.

(G) No member of the commission shall receive any compensation for commission services, except those set by law for travel, board, and lodging expenses incurred in the performance of commission duties.

(H) No member of the commission is eligible for nomination and appointment as a judge or justice of the state court system or administrative law court while serving on the commission and for a period of one year thereafter. If a candidate is a family member of a member of the commission, the member must resign. For the purposes of this subsection, "family member" means a spouse, parent, brother, sister, child, step-child, mother-in-law, father-in-law, son-in-law, daughter-in-law, brother-in-law, sister-in-law, grandparent, or grandchild.

HISTORY: 2024 Act No. 219 (S.1046), Section 1, eff July 1, 2025.

#### **SECTION 2-19-10. Meetings; rules.**

When an election is to be held by the General Assembly in Joint Session, for members of the judiciary, the South Carolina Judicial Merit Selection Commission, composed of twelve members, shall consider the qualifications of the candidates. The commission shall meet at least once annually and at other times as may be designated by the chairman. The commission, at its first meeting and then annually, shall elect a chairman and a vice chairman who shall serve for a term of one year and until their successors are elected and qualified, and adopt rules necessary to the purposes of the commission. These rules shall address, among other things:

- (1) the confidentiality of records and other information received concerning candidates for judicial office;
- (2) the conduct of proceedings before the commission;
- (3) receipt of public statements in support of or in opposition to any of the candidates;
- (4) procedures to review the qualifications of retired judges for continued judicial service;
- (5) contacting incumbent judges regarding their desire to seek reelection;
- (6) prohibition against candidates communicating with individual members of the commission concerning the qualifications of candidates unless specifically authorized by the commission; and
- (7) format and use of anonymous surveys by the commission.

Seven members of the commission constitute a quorum at all meetings.

HISTORY: 1975 (59) 122; 1996 Act No. 391, Part I, Section 1; 2019 Act No. 1 (S.2), Section 21, eff January 31, 2019; 2024 Act No. 219 (S.1046), Section 1, eff July 1, 2025.

Effect of Amendment

2019 Act No. 1, Section 21, in (B), rewrote (2) and inserted (3).

2024 Act No. 219, Section 1, rewrote the section.

#### **SECTION 2-19-20. Investigation by Commission; publication of vacancies.**

(A) It is the responsibility of the South Carolina Judicial Merit Selection Commission to determine when judicial vacancies are to occur in the Administrative Law Court and on the family court, circuit court, court of appeals, or Supreme Court and to expeditiously investigate in advance

the qualifications of those who seek the position. For purposes of this chapter, a vacancy is created in the Administrative Law Court or on the family court, circuit court, court of appeals, or Supreme Court when any of the following occurs: a term expires; a new judicial position is created; or a judge can no longer serve due to resignation, retirement, disciplinary action, disability, or death.

(B) The commission, upon receiving notice of a judicial vacancy, ascertaining that a judicial vacancy shall occur, or receiving the decision of an incumbent judge regarding his seeking reelection, shall notify the Supreme Court of the vacancy for publication in the advance sheets provided by the Clerk of the Supreme Court at least thirty days prior to closing applications for the vacancy. The commission shall, if practicable, also notify the South Carolina Bar, other professional legal organizations it considers appropriate, and each newspaper of this State with daily circulation of the vacancy at least thirty days prior to closing applications for the vacancy. This notice must include, but not be limited to, the judicial office in which the vacancy occurs, the address to which, and the date by which interested candidates may apply.

(C) The commission shall announce and publicize vacancies and forthcoming vacancies in the Administrative Law Court, on the family court, circuit court, court of appeals, and Supreme Court. A person who desires to be considered for a position as justice or judge may make application to the commission. The commission shall announce the names of those persons who have applied.

(D) Any person wishing to seek a judicial office, which is elected by the General Assembly, shall file a notice of intention to seek the office with the commission. Upon receipt of the notice of intention, the commission shall begin to conduct the investigation of the candidate as it considers appropriate and may in the investigation utilize the services of any agency of state government. This agency shall, upon request, cooperate fully with the commission.

**HISTORY:** 1975 (59) 122; 1996 Act No. 391, Part I, Section 1; 1999 Act No. 32, Section 1; 2024 Act No. 219 (S.1046), Section 1, eff July 1, 2025.

**Effect of Amendment**

2024 Act No. 219, Section 1, in (A), in the first sentence, inserted "South Carolina" before "Judicial Merit Selection Commission", and substituted "Administrative Law Court" for "administrative law judge division" and "the position" for "nomination", and in the second sentence, substituted "Administrative Law Court" for "administrative law judge division"; rewrote (C); in (D), in the first sentence, substituted "commission" for "Judicial Merit Selection Commission"; and made a nonsubstantive change.

## **SECTION 2-19-25. Solicitation of Bar assessment.**

(A) The South Carolina Judicial Merit Selection Commission is authorized to investigate and obtain information relative to any candidate for an Administrative Law Court judgeship or a family court, circuit court, court of appeals, or Supreme Court judgeship from any state agency or other group including, but not limited to, court administration and any law enforcement agency, to the extent permitted by law. And, as part of the investigation, candidates for election to judicial office or reelection to judicial office must disclose any sanctions, including private reprimands, to the commission.

(B) The chairman of the commission shall notify the President of the South Carolina Bar of the judgeships to be filled and of the candidates for those judgeships no later than four weeks before the scheduled date for the public hearing. The chairman of the commission shall also request the South Carolina Bar to offer the commission an assessment of each candidate's qualifications for

the judgeship sought, and the date by which the assessment must be returned to the commission. This assessment must specify the bar's finding as to whether each candidate is qualified or unqualified for the judgeship sought and the reasons for that finding. The commission may receive the bar's assessment in that form and at that time it desires but shall attach the assessments to its findings of fact in such form as the commission considers appropriate. Failure of the bar to return the assessment by the date requested is not a ground for delaying the applicable hearings or election.

(C) The commission shall forward the names of justices and judges who are at the midpoint in their terms to the committee in order for the committee to conduct midterm reviews utilizing the electronic ballot box survey polling or other forms of electronic surveys as it deems appropriate. The results of the midterm reviews must be forwarded to the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Midterm reviews also must be provided to the commission at the next public screening of each judicial candidate.

**HISTORY:** 1996 Act No. 391, Part I, Section 1; 2024 Act No. 219 (S.1046), Section 1, eff July 1, 2025.

**Effect of Amendment**

2024 Act No. 219, Section 1, rewrote the section.

**SECTION 2-19-30.** Hearings; executive session.

(A) Upon completion of the investigation, the Chairman of the South Carolina Judicial Merit Selection Commission shall schedule a public hearing concerning the qualifications of the candidates. Any person who desires to testify at the hearing, including candidates, shall furnish a written statement of his proposed testimony to the commission no later than two weeks prior to the date and time set for the hearing unless sufficient cause is determined by the commission for allowing the submitting individual's testimony after the deadline. The commission shall determine the persons who shall testify at the hearing. All testimony, including documents furnished to the commission, must be submitted under oath and persons knowingly furnishing false information either orally or in writing are subject to the penalties provided by law for perjury and false swearing.

(B) During the course of the investigation, the commission may schedule an executive session at which each candidate, and other persons whom the commission wishes to interview, may be interviewed by the commission on matters pertinent to the candidate's qualification for the office to be filled.

(C) At a reasonable time thereafter the commission shall render its tentative findings as to whether the candidate is qualified for the office to be filled and its reasons therefor as to each candidate.

(D) As soon as possible after the completion of the hearing, a verbatim copy of the testimony, documents submitted at the hearing, and findings of fact must be transcribed and published or otherwise made available in a reasonable number of copies to the members of both houses prior to the date of the scheduled election, and a copy shall be furnished to each candidate and anyone else upon request. A charge for these copies may be made as authorized in the Freedom of Information Act.

(E) A candidate may withdraw at any time prior to the public hearing or after the draft report is issued to members of the General Assembly. The information concerning a withdrawn candidate

also shall be exempt from disclosure pursuant to Chapter 4 of Title 30. However, all materials concerning the candidate must be retained and may not be destroyed by the commission.

(F) All of the commission's public hearings shall be live streamed except for the portions of the hearings conducted in executive session.

**HISTORY:** 1975 (59) 122; 1993 Act No. 181, Section 28; 1996 Act No. 391, Part I, Section 1; 1998 Act No. 388, Section 1; 2008 Act No. 219, Section 1, eff May 15, 2008; 2024 Act No. 219 (S.1046), Section 1, eff July 1, 2025.

**Effect of Amendment**

The 2008 amendment, in subsection (A), added the provision at the end of the second sentence relating to the time for submitting written statements of proposed testimony and deleted the third sentence requiring that the statements be furnished no later than 48 hours before the hearing.

2024 Act No. 219, Section 1, in (A), in the first sentence, substituted "Chairman of the South Carolina Judicial Merit Selection Commission" for "chairman of the Judicial Merit Selection Commission", and in the second sentence, substituted "commission" for "Judicial Merit Selection Commission"; rewrote (E); added (F); and made nonsubstantive changes.

**SECTION 2-19-35. Criteria for investigations and consideration of Commission.**

(A) The responsibility of the South Carolina Judicial Merit Selection Commission is to investigate and consider the qualifications of the candidates for judicial office in Administrative Law Court or on the family court, circuit court, court of appeals, or Supreme Court. Investigations and consideration of the commission should include, but are not limited to, the following areas:

- (1) constitutional qualifications;
- (2) ethical fitness;
- (3) professional and academic ability;
- (4) character;
- (5) reputation;
- (6) physical health;
- (7) mental stability;
- (8) experience; and
- (9) judicial temperament.

(B) Race, gender, national origin, and other demographic factors shall be considered by the commission to ensure nondiscrimination to the greatest extent possible as to all segments of the population of the State.

**HISTORY:** 1994 Act No. 413, Section 1; 1996 Act No. 391, Part I, Section 1; 2024 Act No. 219 (S.1046), Section 1, eff July 1, 2025.

**Effect of Amendment**

2024 Act No. 219, Section 1, in (A), in the first sentence, inserted "South Carolina" and substituted "Administrative Law Court" for "the administrative law judge division"; and in (B), substituted "Race," for "In making nominations, race," and "shall" for "should".

**SECTION 2-19-40. Reserved.**

**HISTORY:** Former Section, titled Exemption from hearing, had the following history: 1975 (59)



122; 1996 Act No. 391, Part I, Section 1. Reserved by 2024 Act No. 219, Section 1, eff July 1, 2025.

**SECTION 2-19-50.** Confidentiality of records, information, and other material.

All records, information, and other material that the South Carolina Judicial Merit Selection Commission has obtained or used to make its findings of fact, except materials, records, and information presented under oath at the public hearing, must be kept strictly confidential. The information required to be kept confidential also shall be exempt from disclosure pursuant to Chapter 4, Title 30.

**HISTORY:** 1975 (59) 122; 1996 Act No. 391, Part I, Section 1; 1998 Act No. 388, Section 2; 2024 Act No. 219 (S.1046), Section 1, eff July 1, 2025.

**Effect of Amendment**

2024 Act No. 219, Section 1, in the first sentence, inserted "South Carolina", and deleted the second sentence, which provided that after the commission has reported its findings of fact, all records, information, and material required to be kept confidential must be destroyed.

**SECTION 2-19-60.** Powers of Commission.

(A) The South Carolina Judicial Merit Selection Commission in the discharge of its duties may administer oaths and affirmations, take depositions, and issue subpoenas to compel the attendance of witnesses and the production of books, papers, correspondence, memoranda, and other records considered necessary in connection with the investigation of the candidate.

(B) No person shall be excused from attending and testifying or from producing books, papers, correspondence, memoranda, or other records before the commission on the ground that the testimony or evidence, documentary or otherwise, required of him may tend to incriminate him or subject him to a penalty or forfeiture. But no individual shall be prosecuted or subjected to any criminal penalty based upon testimony or evidence submitted or forfeiture for or on account of any transaction, matter, or thing concerning which he is compelled, after having claimed his privilege against self-incrimination, to testify or produce evidence, documentary or otherwise, except that the individual so testifying shall not be exempt from prosecution and punishment for perjury and false swearing committed in so testifying.

(C) In case of contumacy by any person or refusal to obey a subpoena issued to any person, any circuit court of this State or circuit judge within the jurisdiction of which the person guilty of contumacy or refusal to obey is found, resides, or transacts business, upon application by the commission may issue to this person an order requiring him to appear before the commission to produce evidence if so ordered or to give testimony touching the matter under investigation. Any failure to obey an order of the court may be punished as a contempt. Subpoenas shall be issued in the name of the South Carolina Judicial Merit Selection Commission and shall be signed by the commission chairman. Subpoenas shall be issued to those persons as the commission may designate.

**HISTORY:** 1975 (59) 122; 1996 Act No. 391, Part I, Section 1; 2024 Act No. 219 (S.1046), Section 1, eff July 1, 2025.

**Effect of Amendment**

2024 Act No. 219, Section 1, made nonsubstantive changes throughout the section.

**SECTION 2-19-70.** Prohibition against dual offices, privileges of the floor, and pledges.

(A) No member of the General Assembly may be elected to a judicial office while he is serving in the General Assembly nor shall that person be elected to a judicial office for a period of one year after he either:

- (1) ceases to be a member of the General Assembly; or
- (2) fails to file for election to the General Assembly in accordance with Section 7-11-15.

(B) The privilege of the floor in either house of the General Assembly may not be granted to any candidate or any immediate family member of a candidate unless the family member is serving in the General Assembly, during the time the candidate's application is pending before the commission and during the time his nomination by the commission for election to a particular judicial office is pending in the General Assembly.

(C) No person may seek, directly or indirectly, the pledge of a member of the General Assembly's vote or, directly or indirectly, contact a member of the General Assembly regarding screening for the judicial office until the qualifications of all candidates for that office have been determined by the Judicial Merit Selection Commission and the commission has formally released its report as to the qualifications of all candidates for the vacancy to the General Assembly. No member of the General Assembly may offer his pledge to any person until the qualifications of all candidates for that office have been determined by the Judicial Merit Selection Commission and until the commission has formally released its report as to the qualifications of its nominees to the General Assembly. The formal release of the report of qualifications shall occur no earlier than twelve days after the nominees have been initially released to members of the General Assembly. For purposes of this section, indirectly seeking a pledge means the candidate, or someone acting on behalf of and at the request of the candidate, requesting a person to contact a member of the General Assembly on behalf of the candidate before nominations for that office are formally made by the commission. Prior to the formal release of the report as to the qualifications of judicial candidates, a person may not request that a member of the General Assembly, nor may a member of the General Assembly offer to, act on behalf of a candidate in furtherance of the candidate's candidacy in any capacity including, but not limited to, acting as a vote counter for a candidate. The prohibitions of this section do not extend to an announcement of candidacy by a person and statements by the candidate detailing the candidate's qualifications.

(D) No member of the General Assembly may trade anything of value, including pledges to vote for legislation or for other candidates now or in the future, in exchange for another member's pledge to vote for a candidate for judicial office or as an inducement for a candidate to withdraw.

(E) Violations of this section may be considered by the merit selection commission when it considers the candidate's qualifications and until the time set for election of candidates. Violations of this section by members of the General Assembly shall be reported by the commission to the House or Senate Ethics Committee, as may be applicable. Violations of this section by nonlegislative commission members shall be reported by the commission to the State Ethics Commission. A violation of this section is a misdemeanor and, upon conviction, the violator must be fined not more than one thousand dollars or imprisoned not more than ninety days. Cases tried under this section may not be transferred from general sessions court pursuant to Section 22-3-545.

**HISTORY:** 1990 Act No. 610, Part IV, Section 6; 1993 Act No. 181, Section 29; 1996 Act No.

391, Part I, Section 1; 1998 Act No. 388, Section 3; 2024 Act No. 219 (S.1046), Section 1, eff July 1, 2025.

Effect of Amendment

2024 Act No. 219, Section 1, rewrote (C); in (D), inserted "now or in the future" and "or as an inducement for a candidate to withdraw"; and in (E), in the first sentence, inserted "and until the time set for election of candidates".

**SECTION 2-19-80.** Nomination of qualified candidates to the General Assembly.

(A) The commission shall make nominations to the General Assembly of candidates and their qualifications for election to the Supreme Court, court of appeals, circuit court, family court, and the Administrative Law Court. It shall review the qualifications of all applicants for a judicial office and select therefrom and submit to the General Assembly the names and qualifications of not more than six candidates whom it considers best qualified for the judicial office under consideration. If fewer than six persons apply to fill a vacancy or if the commission concludes there are fewer than six candidates qualified for a vacancy, it shall submit to the General Assembly only the names and qualifications of those who are considered to be qualified, with a written explanation for submitting fewer than six names.

(B) The nominations of the commission for any judgeship are binding on the General Assembly, and it shall not elect a person not nominated by the commission. Nothing shall prevent the General Assembly from rejecting all persons nominated. In this event, the commission shall submit another group of names and qualifications for that position. Further procedures in the manner required by this chapter must be made until the office is filled.

(C)(1) If the commission does not find the incumbent justice or judge qualified for the judicial office held and sought, his name shall not be submitted to the General Assembly for reelection and upon expiration of his then current term of office, he shall cease serving in that judicial position.

(2) If the commission finds an incumbent judge not qualified for the office sought, or if an incumbent judge dies, withdraws, or becomes otherwise disqualified for the office sought between the time he makes application for the office and the date of the election, the election for the office may not be held at that scheduled time, and the commission shall proceed in accordance with the provisions of this chapter to make other nominations for the office as though a new vacancy without an incumbent exists in that office, including reopening the application process with all required notices. Nothing prevents the commission from including in its new nominations the names and qualifications of persons other than the incumbent judge it included in its previous nominations.

(D) The commission shall accompany its nominations to the General Assembly with reports as to the qualifications of particular candidates and the particular reasons a candidate or candidates were not found qualified.

(E) A period of at least twenty-two days must elapse between the date of the commission's nominations to the General Assembly and the date the General Assembly conducts the election for these judgeships.

**HISTORY:** 1990 Act No. 610, Part IV, Section 7; 1996 Act No. 391, Part I, Section 1; 2001 Act No. 49, Section 1; 2024 Act No. 219 (S.1046), Section 1, eff July 1, 2025.

Effect of Amendment

2024 Act No. 219, Section 1, in (A), in the first sentence, substituted "Administrative Law Court"

for "administrative law judge division", in the second sentence, substituted "not more than six" for "the three", and in the third sentence, substituted "six" for "three" in three places; in (B), in the fourth sentence, substituted "Further procedures" for "Further nominations"; made nonsubstantive changes in (C); in (D), deleted "or recommendations" following "with reports", and inserted "and the particular reasons a candidate or candidates were not found qualified" at the end; and in (E), substituted "twenty-two days" for "two weeks".

**SECTION 2-19-90.** Approval of General Assembly in joint session.

The General Assembly shall meet in joint session for the election of judges. The date and time for the joint session shall be set by concurrent resolution upon the recommendation of the South Carolina Judicial Merit Selection Commission. The Chairman of the Judicial Merit Selection Commission shall announce the commission's nominees for each judicial race, and no further nominating or seconding speeches shall be allowed by members of the General Assembly. In order to be elected, a candidate must receive a majority of the vote of the members of the General Assembly voting in joint session.

HISTORY: 1996 Act No. 391, Part I, Section 1; 2024 Act No. 219 (S.1046), Section 1, eff July 1, 2025.

Effect of Amendment

2024 Act No. 219, Section 1, in the second sentence, inserted "South Carolina".

**SECTION 2-19-100.** Eligibility of retired judges for appointment.

In order to be eligible for appointment by the Chief Justice to serve, any retired justice or judge of this State must have been reviewed by the South Carolina Judicial Merit Selection Commission under procedures it shall establish to review retired judges' qualifications for continued judicial service and be found by the commission to be qualified to serve in these situations within four years of the date of his appointment to serve, except that if a justice or judge retired before the expiration of his then current term, no further review of that justice or judge is required until that term would have expired.

HISTORY: 1996 Act No. 391, Part I, Section 1; 1997 Act No. 35, Section 1; 2024 Act No. 219 (S.1046), Section 1, eff July 1, 2025.

Effect of Amendment

2024 Act No. 219, Section 1, inserted "South Carolina".

**SECTION 2-19-110.** Vacancy in office of master-in-equity; recommendations by county legislative delegations.

Upon a vacancy in the office of master-in-equity, candidates shall submit an application to the South Carolina Judicial Merit Selection Commission. Upon completion of reports and recommendations, the commission shall submit such reports and recommendations on all qualified master-in-equity candidates to the appropriate county legislative delegations. The county legislative delegations may then submit the name of a candidate to the Governor for consideration for appointment. Nothing shall prevent the delegation from rejecting a candidate and directing the

commission to reopen the process. And, nothing shall prevent the Governor from rejecting the person nominated by the delegation. In this event, the delegation shall submit another name for consideration. No person found not qualified by the commission may be appointed to the office of master-in-equity. For purposes of this section, a vacancy is created in the office of the master-in-equity when any of the following occurs: a term expires, a new judicial position is created, or a judge no longer can serve due to resignation, retirement, disciplinary action, disability, or death. The commission may begin screening prior to the actual date of the vacancy in the case of an expiration of term, resignation, or retirement pursuant to written notice.

HISTORY: 1996 Act No. 391, Part I, Section 1; 1997 Act No. 35, Section 2; 2024 Act No. 219 (S.1046), Section 1, eff July 1, 2025.

Effect of Amendment

2024 Act No. 219, Section 1, rewrote the section.

Cross references—

Appointment of masters-in-equity, term, see Section 14-11-20.

**SECTION 2-19-120.** Citizens Committees on Judicial Qualifications; membership; compensation.

Section effective July 1, 2025. See, also, section 2-19-120 effective until July 1, 2025.

(A) The Chairman of the Judicial Merit Selection Commission, upon the advice of the commission, shall select members to serve on Citizens Committees on Judicial Qualifications for each geographic district set by the commission. These committees shall, under the rules adopted by the commission, advise the commission concerning judicial candidates. The committees shall report their findings to the commission in such form as prescribed by the commission.

(B) The members appointed to the Citizens Committees on Judicial Qualifications shall be compensated with an emolument of one hundred dollars per round of screening.

HISTORY: 1997 Act No. 35, Section 3; 2024 Act No. 219 (S.1046), Section 1, eff July 1, 2025.

Effect of Amendment

2024 Act No. 219, Section 1, reenacted the section with no apparent change.

## **Title 8, Chapter 13, Article 9: Ethics, Government Accountability, and Campaign Reform: Forms and Reports by Candidates for Election by the General Assembly**

### **§ 8-13-910: Candidates elected or consented to by General Assembly to file statements of economic interests; authority with whom to file.**

(A) No person who is a candidate for public office which is filled by election by the General Assembly may be voted upon by the General Assembly until at least ten days following the date on which the candidate files a statement of economic interests as defined in this chapter with the Chairman of the Senate Ethics Committee and the Chairman of the House of Representatives Ethics Committee. (emphasis added)

(B) No person who is appointed to an office which is filled with the advice and consent of the Senate or the General Assembly may be confirmed unless the appointment, when received by the Senate and/or the House, is accompanied by a current original copy of a statement of economic interests which has been filed with the appointing authority and is transmitted with the appointment and until at least ten days following the date on which the appointment, with the attached original economic interest statement, has been received by the Senate and/or the House.

#### **§ 8-13-920: Report of campaign expenditures.**

A person running for an office elected by the General Assembly must file a report with the Chairman of the Senate Ethics Committee and the Chairman of the House of Representatives Ethics Committee of money in excess of one hundred dollars spent by him or in his behalf in seeking the office. The report must include the period beginning with the time he first announces his intent to seek the office. The report must not include travel expenses or room and board while campaigning. Contributions made to members of the General Assembly during the period from announcement of intent to election date must be included. The report must be updated quarterly with an additional report filed five days before the election and the final report filed thirty days after the election. Persons soliciting votes on behalf of candidates must submit expenses in excess of one hundred dollars to the candidate which must be included on the candidate's report. A copy of all reports received by the Senate Ethics Committee and the House of Representatives Ethics Committee must be forwarded to the State Ethics Commission within two business days of receipt.

#### **§ 8-13-930: Seeking or offering pledges of votes for candidates.**

No candidate for an office elected by the General Assembly may seek directly the pledge of a member of the General Assembly's vote until the qualifications of all candidates for that office have been determined by the appropriate joint committee to review candidates for that office. No member of the General Assembly may offer a pledge until the qualifications of all candidates for that office have been determined by the appropriate joint committee to review candidates for that office.

### **Title 2, Chapter 1: General Assembly: General Provisions**

#### **§ 2-1-100: Members shall not be eligible for office created by General Assembly.**

No Senator or Representative shall, during the time for which he was elected, be elected by the General Assembly or appointed by any executive authority to any civil office under the dominion of this State which shall have been created during the time for which such Senator or Representative was elected to serve in the General Assembly.

See The Joint Legislative Committee for Judicial Screening v. Huff, et al., Op. No. 24348 (filed November 15, 1995).

### **Title 14, Chapter 1: Courts, General Provisions**

**§ 14-1-130. Disqualification of judge by reason of relationship to parties.**

No judge or other judicial officer shall preside on the trial of any cause when he may be connected with either of the parties by consanguinity or affinity within the sixth degree.

**§ 14-1-200. Establishment of salaries of Supreme Court Justices, Court of Appeals, Circuit Court, and Family Court judges, and circuit solicitors.**

The General Assembly shall establish the salary of the Chief Justice and Associate Justices of the Supreme Court in the annual general appropriation act with the salary of the Chief Justice to be one hundred five percent of the salary fixed for Associate Justices of the Supreme Court and shall fix the salaries for the court of appeals, circuit court, and family court according to the following schedule:

- (1) The chief judge of the court of appeals shall receive a salary in an amount equal to ninety nine percent of the salary fixed for Associate Justices of the Supreme Court;
- (2) Judges of the court of appeals shall receive a salary in an amount equal to ninety seven and one half percent of the salary fixed for Associate Justices of the Supreme Court, and circuit court judges shall receive a salary in an amount equal to ninety five percent of the salary fixed for Associate Justices of the Supreme Court;
- (3) Judges of the family court shall receive a salary in an amount equal to ninety two and one half percent of the salary fixed for Associate Justices of the Supreme Court.

**§ 14-1-215: Retired judges or justices may preside in certain courts.**

A retired judge or justice from the Supreme Court, court of appeals, or circuit court of this State may be assigned by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court to preside over any official proceeding in any circuit court of this State. A retired judge or justice from the Supreme Court or court of appeals of this State may be assigned by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court to act as an associate justice or judge in any proceeding before the Supreme Court or court of appeals. A retired judge from the family court of this State may be assigned by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court to preside over any official proceeding in any family court of this State.

In order to be eligible to be appointed by the Chief Justice to serve, any retired justice or judge of this State must have been reviewed in the manner provided in Section 2 19 10 et seq. and found by the commission to be qualified to serve in these situations within two years of the date of his appointment to serve, except that if a justice or judge retired before the expiration of his then current term, no further review of that justice or judge is required until that term would have expired.

**Title 14, Chapter 3, Article 1: Supreme Court: Composition, Organization & Employees**

**§ 14-3-10: Composition of court and election of justices; term.**

The Supreme Court shall consist of a Chief Justice and four associate justices, who shall be elected by a joint viva voce vote of the General Assembly for a term of ten years and shall continue in office until their successors are elected and qualified. They shall be so classified that one of them shall go out of office every two years. The successors of the Chief Justice and associate justices shall each be elected at the session of the General Assembly next preceding the expiration of their respective terms. The time for the commencement of their terms of office shall be the first day of August after their election.

**§ 14-3-20: Qualification; administration of oath of office.**

The justices of the Supreme Court shall qualify within twelve months after the date of their election by taking the constitutional oath or the office shall be declared vacant by the Governor. The oath shall be administered by a justice of said court or by a circuit judge.

**§ 14-3-30: Salaries.**

The Chief Justice shall receive such annual salary as may be provided by the General Assembly and the associate justices shall receive such annual salary as may be provided by the General Assembly. They shall not be allowed any fees or perquisites of office, nor shall they hold any other office of trust or profit under the State, the United States, or any other power.

**§ 14-3-40: Vacancies; term of incumbent.**

All vacancies in the Supreme Court shall be filled by elections as herein prescribed; provided, that if the unexpired term does not exceed one year such vacancy may be filled by executive appointment. When a vacancy is so filled by either appointment or election, the incumbent shall hold only for the unexpired term of his predecessor.

**§ 14-3-50: Disqualification of justice by reason of interest or prior participation in case.**

In addition to the cases mentioned in Section 14 1 130, no justice shall preside in any case or at the hearing thereof in which he may be interested or in which he may have been counsel or has presided in any inferior court.

**§ 14-3-60: Procedure when justice cannot preside in cause; special justices.**

In case all or any of the justices of the Supreme Court shall be disqualified or be otherwise prevented from presiding in any cause, the court, or the justices thereof, shall certify the same to the Governor of the State, and he shall immediately commission specially the requisite number of men learned in the law for the trial and determination thereof.

**§ 14-3-70: Compensation and allowances for special justices.**

When such appointments are made by the Governor, such person shall receive as compensation for his services while so acting as associate justice of the Supreme Court for the time actually engaged in performing such services the same salary allowance and expenses and stenographic



hire as an associate justice of the Supreme Court would receive for the same period. Such salary and expense allowance shall be figured in the ratio that the number of days such acting associate justice is actually engaged in sitting with the court bears to the number of days that the court is actually in session during the year, except that in the event such acting associate justice shall sit and hear only one cause he shall receive only fifty per cent of the salary and allowances herein fixed.

**§ 14-3-80: Presiding officer.**

The Chief Justice shall preside. In the absence of the Chief Justice, the justice oldest in service and present shall preside.

**Title 14, Chapter 8, Article 1: Court of Appeals: Composition, Organization & Employees**

**§ 14-8-10: Court of Appeals created; number of judges.**

There is hereby created the Court of Appeals (the Court), which shall be a part of the unified judicial system. The Court shall consist of a Chief Judge and eight associate judges.

**§ 14-8-20: Election of members of the court; terms of office.**

(a) The members of the Court shall be elected by joint public vote of the General Assembly for a term of six years and until their successors are elected and qualify; provided, however, that of those judges initially elected, the Chief Judge (Seat 5) and the judge elected to Seat 6 shall be elected for terms of six years each, the judges elected to Seats 3 and 4 shall be elected for terms of four years each, and the judges elected to Seats 1 and 2 shall be elected for terms of two years each. The terms of office of the judges of the Court shall begin on July 1, 1985. Prior to such date, the General Assembly shall have authority to take such measures as necessary to secure accommodations, personnel, supplies, and equipment and such other matters as may be necessary to effect full implementation of the Court for operation by such date.

(b) Each seat on the Court shall be numbered. Candidates shall be required to file for a specific seat. Seat five shall be designated as the office of Chief Judge and shall be a separate and distinct office for the purpose of an election.

(c) In any contested election, the vote of each member of the General Assembly present and voting shall be recorded; provided, that the provisions of Chapter 19 of Title 2 shall be followed in the course of electing the members of the Court.

**§ 14-8-30: Qualifications for office.**

No person shall be eligible for the office of Chief Judge or associate judge of the Court who does not at the time of his election or appointment meet the qualifications for justices and judges as set forth in Article V of the Constitution of this State.

**§ 14-8-40: Oath of office.**

The judges of the Court shall qualify within twelve months after the date of their election by taking the constitutional oath or the office shall be declared vacant by the Governor. The oath shall be administered by a justice of the Supreme Court, a judge of the Court of Appeals, or by a circuit court judge.

**§ 14-8-50: Salary; prohibition on holding other offices.**

The Chief Judge and the associate judges shall receive such annual salary as may be provided by the General Assembly. They shall not be allowed any fees or perquisites of office, nor shall they hold any other office of honor, trust, or profit.

**§ 14-8-60: Vacancies.**

All vacancies in the Court shall be filled in the manner of original election; provided, that if the unexpired term does not exceed one year such vacancy may be filled by executive appointment. When a vacancy is filled, the judge selected shall hold office only for the unexpired term of his predecessor.

**Title 14, Chapter 5, Article 3: Circuit Courts: Judges and Special Judges**

**§ 14-5-110: Qualification by circuit judge.**

The circuit judges of this State, upon their election, shall qualify by taking the oath required by the Constitution of this State before a justice of the Supreme Court, the President of the Senate, the Speaker or Speaker Emeritus of the House of Representatives, a circuit judge, a clerk of the Supreme Court, a clerk of the court of common pleas or a probate judge of the county, and shall forthwith enter upon their duties. Such oath must be filed in the office of the Secretary of State. Terms of office for all circuit judges elected after January 1, 1977, shall commence as of July first of the year in which they are elected.

**§ 14-5-120: Salaries of judges.**

The circuit judges shall each receive such annual salary as may be provided by the General Assembly.

**§ 14-5-130: Judges shall not absent themselves from State without permission.**

No circuit judge shall absent himself from this State without leave first granted in writing by the Chief Justice or presiding associate justice.

**§ 14-5-140: Neglect of duty as to holding terms, disobeying order of assignment, and other violations; proceedings.**

If any circuit judge shall fail or neglect to hold a term of any court of general sessions or common pleas in any circuit to which he may be assigned until the business of such court shall have been disposed of or the end of the term arrives, shall fail to recognize and obey the order of assignment of the Chief Justice or presiding associate justice or shall violate any provisions of this chapter, the Attorney General shall, upon any reliable information of the same, by official communication bring such violations of this chapter to the notice of the General Assembly at its first session and such circuit judge shall be held amenable to proceedings for neglect of duty, as provided in the Constitution.

**§ 14-5-150: Judges shall notify Chief Justice of inability or disability to hold court.**

Each circuit judge, when disabled by sickness or other cause to hold any court to which he may be assigned, shall give or cause to be given prompt notice of such inability or disability to the Chief Justice so that his place may be temporarily filled and the court held according to law.

**§ 14-5-160: Assignment of disengaged circuit judge to fill vacancy.**

Whenever any circuit judge, pending his assignment to hold the courts of any circuit, shall die, resign, be disabled by illness or be excused for any other reason considered sufficient in the opinion of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court or in case of a vacancy in the office of circuit judge of any circuit or if a special session of the court of general sessions or common pleas be ordered as provided for in Sections 14-5-910 to 14-5-950, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court may assign any other disengaged circuit judge to hold the courts of any such circuit, to fill any appointment made necessary by such vacancy or to hold any special session of the circuit court that may be ordered by the Chief Justice.

**§ 14-5-170: Appointment of special judge to fill vacancy.**

In the event there be no other disengaged circuit judge available to hold such courts, then the Governor shall immediately commission as special judge some person learned in the law, as shall be recommended by the Supreme Court or by the Chief Justice thereof if the Supreme Court be not in session, to hold the courts of any such circuit or to hold any special session thereof which may be ordered by the Chief Justice as aforesaid. Whenever a special judge shall be appointed to hold any court he shall have and exercise all the powers and duties that a regular judge would have if presiding.

**§ 14-5-180: Assignment of disengaged circuit judge or appointment of special judge when docket is overcrowded.**

Whenever the time fixed for holding any of the courts of general sessions or common pleas of this State shall be found not sufficient for the trial of all cases before the court, a like assignment of a disengaged circuit judge or commission of a special judge may be had to hold the court to which the judge then holding such overcrowded court may have been in due course next assigned and the term of such overcrowded court shall proceed until the cases before it are disposed of.

**§ 14-5-190: Assignment or appointment when Chief Justice is not available.**

Should there be a vacancy in the office of Chief Justice of the Supreme Court or in case of his absence from the State or of his illness or incapacity from whatever cause, then the power and authority vested and the duties imposed upon the Chief Justice by the provisions of Sections 14-5-160 to 14-5-180 shall be exercised and discharged by the senior associate justice of the Supreme Court in point of service who is at the time within the State and is not ill or otherwise incapacitated and his acts in exercising such powers and discharging such duties shall be as effectual as though performed by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

**§ 14-5-200: Compensation of special judge.**

The special judge shall be allowed for his services per diem of one hundred (\$100.00) dollars and his necessary expenses and the same per diem for not exceeding five days for the preparation of his decrees.

**§ 14-5-210: Clerk shall adjourn court in absence or indisposition of judge.**

Whenever it shall so happen that any circuit court in this State cannot be held at the time appointed, in consequence of the absence or indisposition of the judge, the clerk of such court or his deputy shall open and adjourn the court from day to day until the court shall meet or until he may receive due notice that the judge will not be present, when he shall adjourn the court until the first day of the succeeding term.

**§ 14-5-220: Clerk shall notify authorities and jurors of special terms.**

When notified of the appointment of a special judge to hold a special term, the clerk of the court shall notify the proper authorities and the grand jury shall be summoned to attend, if it be a court of sessions, and a petit jury shall be drawn and summoned, if jury cases are to be tried, in the regular manner, for the purpose of such court and as the same may be necessary. The clerk shall notify the special judge of the time fixed for holding the special term of court.

**Article 7**

**Circuits and Terms of Court**

**SECTION 14-5-610.** Division of state into sixteen judicial circuits; number of judges to be elected from each circuit; election of additional judges without regard to county or circuit of residence.

(A) The State is divided into sixteen judicial circuits as follows:

- (1) The first circuit is composed of the counties of Calhoun, Dorchester, and Orangeburg.
- (2) The second circuit is composed of the counties of Aiken, Bamberg, and Barnwell.
- (3) The third circuit is composed of the counties of Clarendon, Lee, Sumter, and Williamsburg.
- (4) The fourth circuit is composed of the counties of Chesterfield, Darlington, Marlboro, and Dillon.
- (5) The fifth circuit is composed of the counties of Kershaw and Richland.
- (6) The sixth circuit is composed of the counties of Chester, Lancaster, and Fairfield.
- (7) The seventh circuit is composed of the counties of Cherokee and Spartanburg.

(8) The eighth circuit is composed of the counties of Abbeville, Greenwood, Laurens, and Newberry.

(9) The ninth circuit is composed of the counties of Charleston and Berkeley.

(10) The tenth circuit is composed of the counties of Anderson and Oconee.

(11) The eleventh circuit is composed of the counties of Lexington, McCormick, Saluda, and Edgefield.

(12) The twelfth circuit is composed of the counties of Florence and Marion.

(13) The thirteenth circuit is composed of the counties of Greenville and Pickens.

(14) The fourteenth circuit is composed of the counties of Allendale, Hampton, Colleton, Jasper, and Beaufort.

(15) The fifteenth circuit is composed of the counties of Georgetown and Horry.

(16) The sixteenth circuit is composed of the counties of York and Union.

(B) One judge must be elected from the sixth circuit. Two judges must be elected from the first, second, fourth, eighth, tenth, and sixteenth circuits. Three judges must be elected from the third, seventh, eleventh, twelfth, fourteenth, and fifteenth circuits. Five judges must be elected from the fifth, ninth, and thirteenth circuits.

(C) In addition to the above judges authorized by this section, there must be seven additional circuit judges elected by the General Assembly from the State at large for terms of office of six years. These additional judges must be elected without regard to county or circuit of residence. Each office of the at-large judges is a separate office and is assigned numerical designations of Seat No. 1 through Seat No. 7, respectively.

***2025 Act No. 50, Section 2, provides as follows:***

***SECTION 2. (A) Upon the effective date of this act:***

***(1) At-large Circuit Court Seat 1 is converted to a resident seat and designated Third Circuit Court Seat 3;***

***(2) At-large Circuit Court Seat 4 is converted to a resident seat and designated Thirteenth Circuit Court Seat 5;***

***(3) At-large Circuit Court Seats 6 and 12 are converted to resident seats and designated Twelfth Circuit Court Seats 2 and 3, respectively;***

***(4) At-large Circuit Court Seats 8 and 10 are converted to resident seats and designated Fifth Circuit Court Seats 4 and 5, respectively;***

***(5) At-large Circuit Court Seat 9 is converted to a resident seat and designated Ninth Circuit Court Seat 5;***

***(6) At-large Circuit Court Seat 13 is converted to a resident seat and designated Eleventh Circuit Court Seat 3; and***

***(7) At-large Circuit Court Seat 14 is converted to a resident seat and designated Seventh Circuit Court Seat 3.***

*(B) Nothing in this act may be construed to require a judge currently serving in an at-large circuit court seat which is converted to a resident circuit court seat pursuant to this act to undergo additional screening until the end of the term for which they were screened and duly elected to an at-large circuit court seat.*

## **Title 63, Chapter 3, Article 1: Family Court and Family Court Judges**

### **§ 63-3-10: Family courts created.**

There hereby are created courts of limited jurisdiction to be known and designated in this title as “family courts.” The number and boundaries of such family courts shall be the same as the judicial circuits. Each court shall bear the name of “The Family Court of \_ Judicial Circuit.”

### **§ 63-3-20: Family court judges.**

(A) Each family court shall have one or more family court judges who shall devote full time to their duties as judges, shall be prohibited from engaging directly or indirectly in the practice of law except in the performance of their judicial duties and shall be bound by the Code of Judicial Conduct.

(B) One family court judge in each circuit shall be designated chief family court judge which designation shall be made by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Such chief family court judge, in addition to his other judicial duties, shall perform such administrative duties as may be prescribed by the Chief Justice.

(C) The family courts shall be courts of record, and each family court judge shall appoint a court reporter and a secretary who shall hold office at the pleasure of the judge. The court reporter shall take down and record the testimony and judge’s rulings and charges, and transcribe such portion of the proceedings as may be required. The court reporter and the secretary shall perform such other duties as the judge may prescribe.

(D) Records in the family court concerning juveniles shall be kept confidential as prescribed in Sections 63-7-1990 and 63-19-2020.

### **§ 63-3-30: Judges’ qualifications and terms.**

(A) (1) No person shall be eligible to the office of family court judge who is not at the time of his assuming the duties of such office a citizen of the United States and of this State, and has not attained the age of thirty-two years, has not been a licensed attorney at law for at least eight years, and has not been a resident of this State for five years next preceding his election, and is not a resident of the circuit wherein the family court of which he is a judge is located. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, any former member of the General Assembly may be elected to the office of family court judge.

(2) Any family court judge serving in office on the effective date of the provisions of this section requiring a family court judge to be at least thirty-two years of age and to have at least

eight years of service as a licensed attorney at law who is not of that age or who has not been licensed for this required period of time may continue to serve for the remainder of his current term and is considered to have the requisite age and years of service as a licensed attorney at law for purposes of future re-elections to the office of family court judge.

(B) Family court judges must be elected by the General Assembly for terms of six years and until their successors are elected and qualify.

(C) The terms of all family court judges expire on the thirtieth day of June of the year in which their terms are scheduled to expire.

(D) For the purpose of electing family court judges, if more than one judge is to be elected from a circuit, each judgeship in that circuit shall be serially numbered beginning with the number (1) and the General Assembly shall elect a judge for each such judgeship. Any candidate for the office of family court judge in a circuit shall specifically file and run for a serially numbered judgeship in that circuit.

(E) When a vacancy occurs for an unexpired term in an office of family court judge, the Governor, upon recommendation of the Chief Justice, shall commission a temporary family court judge to fill such vacancy until such time as the General Assembly shall elect a successor who shall serve for the remainder of the unexpired term. Such temporary family court judge shall receive as compensation for his services the salary paid to a regular family court judge and in addition thereto shall also receive the subsistence and mileage as authorized by law for family court judges.

**§ 63-3-40: Initial election.**

(A) The General Assembly shall elect a number of family court judges from each judicial circuit as follows:

**First Circuit    Four Judges**

**Second Circuit    Two Judges**

**Third Circuit    Three Judges**

**Fourth Circuit    Three Judges**

**Fifth Circuit    Four Judges**

**Sixth Circuit    Two Judges**

**Seventh Circuit    Four Judges**

**Eighth Circuit    Three Judges**

**Ninth Circuit    Seven Judges**

**Tenth Circuit   Three Judges**

**Eleventh Circuit   Four Judges**

**Twelfth Circuit   Three Judges**

**Thirteenth Circuit   Six Judges**

**Fourteenth Circuit   Four Judges**

**Fifteenth Circuit   Three Judges**

**Sixteenth Circuit   Three Judges**

(B) In the following judicial circuits at least one family court judge must be a resident of each county in the circuit: fifth, seventh, tenth, twelfth, thirteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth. In those judicial circuits made up of three or more counties, at least one family court judge must be a resident of one of the counties which does not have the largest population in the circuit. In the ninth circuit, both counties in the circuit must have at least two resident family court judges.

(C) No county in the sixth circuit shall have more than one resident family court judge.

(D) In addition to the judges authorized by this section, there must be eight additional family court judges elected by the General Assembly from the State at large for terms of office of six years. These additional judges must be elected without regard to county or circuit of residence. Each office of the at-large judges is a separate office and is assigned numerical designations of Seat No. 1 through Seat No.8, respectively.

**2025, Act. No. 7, Section 2, provides as follows:**

***“SECTION 2.   The Judicial Merit Selection Commission shall begin the process of nominating candidates for the judicial offices authorized by the provisions of SECTION 1. The General Assembly then shall elect these judges from the nominees of the commission; except that, the nominating process may not begin until funding for the additional judges is provided in the general appropriations act.”***

***Effect of amendment:***

***The 2025 amendment Section 1, in (A), in the "Ninth Circuit" row, substituted "Seven Judges" for "Six Judges", in the "Eleventh Circuit" row, substituted "Four Judges" for "Three Judges", and in the "Fourteenth Circuit" row, substituted "Four Judges" for "Three Judges".***

**§ 63-3-50: Compensation of judges.**



Family court judges shall receive such compensation as shall be provided by the General Assembly. The compensation of a family court judge shall not be reduced during his term of office. All family court judges shall also receive such subsistence and mileage as may be authorized by law for circuit court judges while holding court without the county in which the judge resides.

**§ 63-3-60: Retirement for abolished officers.**

A judge or master whose judicial office is eliminated by the provisions of this act shall be given credit for state retirement purposes for the time in which he served as judge or master under a formula to be determined by rule and regulation of the Public Employee Benefit Authority.

**Title 14, Chapter 11, Article 1: Masters and Referees: General Provisions**

**§ 14-11-10: Establishment of master in equity court.**

As a part of the unified judicial system, there is established in each of the counties of this State having a population of at least one hundred thirty thousand, according to the latest official United States Decennial Census, a master-in-equity court. The master-in-equity for the court must be appointed pursuant to the provisions of Section 14-11-20. Nothing in this section prohibits a county or area with a population of less than one hundred thirty thousand, according to the latest official United States Decennial Census, from having a part-time master-in-equity. The governing bodies of any two or more counties may join together to fund the office of master-in-equity to serve two or more counties. Funding of this master-in-equity must be borne by each county included on a per capita population basis.

**§ 14-11-15: Equity courts.**

The equity court is considered a division of the circuit court, and the master-in-equity, as judge of the equity court, is entitled to all the benefits and subject to all the requirements of the South Carolina Bar and the rules of the Supreme Court in the same respect as circuit court and family court judges. This section may not be construed as providing retirement for masters-in-equity under the provisions of Chapter 8 of Title 9.

**§ 14-11-20: Appointment of master in equity; term.**

Pursuant to the provisions of Section 2-19-110, masters-in-equity must be appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the General Assembly for a term of six years and until their successors are appointed and qualify. No person is eligible to hold the office of master-in-equity who is not at the time of his appointment a citizen of the United States and of this State, has not attained the age of thirty-two years upon his appointment, has not been a licensed attorney for at least eight years upon his appointment, has not been a resident of this State for five years immediately preceding his appointment, and has not been found qualified by the Judicial Merit Selection Commission.

Each master-in-equity of this State qualifies by taking the oath required by the Constitution of this State before a justice of the Supreme Court, a judge of the Court of Appeals, the President of

the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, a circuit judge, the Clerk of the Supreme Court, a clerk of the court of common pleas, or a probate judge of the county and immediately enters upon his duties. The oath must be filed in the office of the Secretary of State.

A full-time master-in-equity is prohibited from engaging in the practice of law. A part-time master-in-equity may practice law but is prohibited from appearing before another master-in-equity. A standing master-in-equity may not serve as the probate judge of any county.

#### **§ 14-11-30: Compensation of master in equity.**

The governing body of the county or counties in which a master-in-equity serves shall provide the salary, equipment, facilities, and supplies of the master-in-equity, together with the salaries of support personnel and all other costs for the necessary and proper operation of the master-in-equity's office. The salaries of the masters-in-equity are as follows:

(1) Where the area served has a population of up to thirty-four thousand, nine hundred ninety-nine, according to the latest official United States Decennial Census, the master-in-equity serving that area is part time and must be paid a salary equal to ten percent of that of a circuit judge.

(2) Where the area served has a population of between thirty-five thousand and forty-nine thousand, nine hundred ninety-nine, according to the latest official United States Decennial Census, the master-in-equity serving that area is part time and must be paid a salary equal to fifteen percent of that of a circuit judge.

(3) Where the area served has a population of between fifty thousand and seventy-nine thousand, nine hundred ninety-nine, according to the latest official United States Decennial Census, the master-in-equity serving that area is part time and must be paid a salary equal to twenty-five percent of that of a circuit judge.

(4) Where the area served has a population of between eighty thousand and ninety-nine thousand, nine hundred ninety-nine, according to the latest official United States Decennial Census, the master-in-equity serving that area is part time and must be paid a salary equal to forty-five percent of that of a circuit judge.

(5) Where the area served has a population of between one hundred thousand and one hundred twenty-nine thousand, nine hundred ninety-nine, according to the latest official United States Decennial Census, the master-in-equity serving that area is part time and must be paid a salary equal to fifty-five percent of that of a circuit judge.

(6) Where the area served has a population of between one hundred thirty thousand and one hundred forty-nine thousand, nine hundred ninety-nine, according to the latest official United States Decennial Census, the master-in-equity serving that area is full time and must be paid a salary equal to seventy-five percent of that of a circuit judge.

(7) Where the area served has a population of between one hundred fifty thousand and one hundred ninety-nine thousand, nine hundred ninety-nine, according to the latest official United

States Decennial Census, the master-in-equity serving that area is full time and must be paid a salary equal to eighty percent of that of a circuit judge.

(8) Where the area served has a population of between two hundred thousand and two hundred forty-nine thousand, nine hundred ninety-nine, according to the latest official United States Decennial Census, the master-in-equity serving that area is full time and must be paid a salary equal to eighty-five percent of that of a circuit judge.

(9) Where the area served has a population of over two hundred fifty thousand, according to the latest official United States Decennial Census, or where the area served is located in a county which generates four million dollars or more in accommodations tax revenue, the master-in-equity serving that area is full time and must be paid a salary equal to ninety percent of that of a circuit judge.

No sitting master-in-equity, whether full time or part time, may have his salary reduced during his tenure in office. Tenure in office continues at the expiration of a term if the incumbent master-in-equity is reappointed.

#### **§ 14-11-40: Accounting for fees and costs received.**

All fees and costs received and recovered by any master-in-equity shall be accounted for and paid into the general fund of the county as directed by the governing body thereof.

#### **§ 14-11-50: Vacancies.**

All vacancies in the office of master from death, resignation, removal from the State or any cause whatsoever shall be filled in the manner of original appointment for the unexpired term.

#### **§ 14-11-60: Appointment of special referee.**

In case of a vacancy in the office of master-in-equity or in case of the disqualification or disability of the master-in-equity from interest or any other reason for which cause can be shown the presiding circuit court judge, upon agreement of the parties, may appoint a special referee in any case who as to the case has all the powers of a master-in-equity. The special referee must be compensated by the parties involved in the action.

#### **§ 14-11-70: Limitation on practice of law.**

No person while he holds the office of full time master shall practice or be a partner with anyone engaged in the practice of law in this State.

#### **§ 14-11-80: General duties.**

The master shall make all such sales as the circumstances may require or as the court may order him to make in granting equitable relief and shall execute all proper conveyances thereof. Such sales shall be conducted at the county courthouse or at such other public places in the county designated in the notice of sale. He shall execute and perform all orders of the court upon references to him conformably to the practice of the court.

**§ 14-11-85: Appeals from final judgments of masters in equity.**

When some or all of the causes of action in a case are referred to a master-in-equity or special referee, the master or referee shall enter final judgment as to those causes of action, and an appeal from an order or judgment of the master or referee must be to the Supreme Court or the court of appeals as provided by the South Carolina Appellate Court Rules. A matter may not be referred to a master or referee for the purpose of making a report to the circuit court.

**§ 14-11-100: Authority to administer oaths, and to take testimony, depositions, renunciations of dower, affidavits, and other instruments; fees.**

The masters in this State, while in office, may administer oaths, take depositions, affidavits and renunciation of dower, probate deeds and other instruments and take testimony by commission as fully and effectually as the clerks of courts and notaries public. Their fees therefor shall be the same as allowed by law to other officers for similar services.

**Title 1, Chapter 23, Article 5: State Agency Rule Making and Adjudication of Contested Cases: South Carolina Administrative Law Court**

**§ 1-23-500: South Carolina Administrative Law Court created; number of judges.**

There is created the South Carolina Administrative Law Court, which is an agency and a court of record within the executive branch of the government of this State. The court shall consist of a total of six administrative law judges. The administrative law judges shall be part of the state employees retirement system.

**§ 1-23-505: Definitions.**

As used in this article:

(1) "Administrative law judge" means a judge of the South Carolina Administrative Law Court created pursuant to Section 1-23-500.

(2) "Agency" means a state agency, department, board, or commission whose action is the subject of a contested case hearing or an appellate proceeding heard by an administrative law judge, or a public hearing on a proposed regulation presided over by an administrative law judge.

(3) "Contested case" means a proceeding including, but not restricted to, ratemaking, price fixing, and licensing, in which the legal rights, duties, or privileges of a party are required by law or by Article I, Section 22, Constitution of the State of South Carolina, 1895, to be determined by an agency or the Administrative Law Court after an opportunity for hearing.

(4) "License" includes the whole or part of any agency permit, franchise, certificate, approval, registration, charter, or similar form of permission required by law, but does not include a license required solely for revenue purposes.

(5) "Party" means each person or agency named or admitted as a party, or properly seeking and entitled as of right to be admitted as a party.

(6) "Person" means any individual, partnership, corporation, association, governmental subdivision, or public or private organization of any character other than an agency.

#### **§ 1-23-510: Election of judges; terms.**

(A) The judges of the division must be elected by the General Assembly in joint session, for a term of five years and until their successors are elected and qualify; provided, that of those judges initially elected, the chief judge, elected to Seat 1 must be elected for a term of five years, the judge elected to Seat 2 must be elected for a term of three years, the judge elected to Seat 3 must be elected for a term of one year. The remaining judges of the division must be elected for terms of office to begin February 1, 1995, for terms of five years and until their successors are elected and qualify; provided, that those judges elected to seats whose terms of office are to begin on February 1, 1995, to Seat 4 must be initially elected for a term of five years, the judge elected to Seat 5 must be initially elected for a term of three years, and the judge elected to Seat 6 must be initially elected for a term of one year. The terms of office of the judges of the division for Seats 1, 2, and 3 shall begin on March 1, 1994. The terms of office of the judges of the division for Seats 4, 5, and 6 shall begin on February 1, 1995. The terms of office of each of the seats shall terminate on the thirtieth day of June in the final year of the term for the respective seats.

(B) In electing administrative law judges, race, gender, and other demographic factors including age, residence, type of practice, and law firm size should be considered to assure nondiscrimination, inclusion, and representation to the greatest extent possible of all segments of the population of this State.

(C) Before election as an administrative law judge, a candidate must undergo screening pursuant to the provisions of Section 2 19 10, et seq.

(D) Each seat on the division must be numbered. Elections are required to be for a specific seat. The office of chief administrative law judge is a separate and distinct office for the purpose of an election.

(E) In the event that there is a vacancy in the position of the chief administrative law judge or for any reason the chief administrative law judge is unable to act, his powers and functions must

be exercised by the most senior administrative law judge as determined by the date of their election to the division.

**§ 1-23-520: Eligibility for office.**

No person is eligible for the office of law judge of the division who does not at the time of his election meet the qualification for justices and judges as set forth in Article V of the Constitution of this State.

**§ 1-23-525: Members of General Assembly disqualified for office of law judge.**

No member of any General Assembly who is not otherwise prohibited from being elected to an administrative law judge position may be elected to such position while he is a member of the General Assembly and for a period of four years after he ceases to be a member of the General Assembly.

**§ 1-23-530: Oath of office.**

The judges of the division shall qualify after the date of their election by taking the constitutional oath of office.

**§ 1-23-535: Official seal.**

The Administrative Law Court shall have a seal with a suitable inscription, an impression of which must be filed with the Secretary of State.

**§ 1-23-540: Compensation; full time position.**

The chief judge (Seat 1) shall receive as annual salary equal to ninety percent of that paid to the circuit court judges of this State. The remaining judges shall receive as annual salary equal to eighty percent of that paid to the circuit court judges of this State. They are not allowed any fees or perquisites of office, nor may they hold any other office of honor, trust, or profit. Administrative law judges in the performance of their duties are also entitled to that per diem, mileage, expenses, and subsistence as is authorized by law for circuit court judges.

Each administrative law judge shall devote full time to his duties as an administrative law judge, and may not practice law during his term of office, nor may he during this term be a partner or associate with anyone engaged in the practice of law in this State.

**§ 1-23-550: Vacancies.**

All vacancies in the office of administrative law judge must be filled in the manner of original appointment. When a vacancy is filled, the judge elected shall hold office only for the unexpired term of his predecessor.

**§ 1-23-560: Application of Code of Judicial Conduct; complaints against administrative law judges; attending judicial related functions.**

Administrative law judges are bound by the Code of Judicial Conduct, as contained in Rule 501 of the South Carolina Appellate Court Rules. The sole grounds for discipline and sanctions for administrative law judges are those contained in the Code of Judicial Conduct in Rule 502, Rule 7 of the South Carolina Appellate Court Rules. The Commission on Judicial Conduct, under the authority of the Supreme Court, shall handle complaints against administrative law judges for possible violations of the Code of Judicial Conduct in the same manner as complaints against other judges. Notwithstanding another provision of law, an administrative law judge and the judge's spouse or guest may accept an invitation to attend a judicial related or bar related function, or an activity devoted to the improvement of the law, legal system, or the administration of justice.