



JUDICIAL MERIT SELECTION COMMISSION
PERSONAL DATA QUESTIONNAIRE
2020

Court, Position, and Seat #: Seventh Judicial Circuit, Family Court, Seat 1

1. Name: Mr. Robert C. Rhoden, III

Name that you are known by if different from above: Rob

Are you currently serving in some capacity as a judge? No

Home Address: [REDACTED]

Business Address: 630 Chesnee Hwy., Spartanburg, SC 29303

E-Mail Address: [REDACTED]

Telephone Number: (home): [REDACTED]
(office): 864-345-1109 or 1110
(cell): [REDACTED]

2. Date of Birth: [REDACTED] 1974
Place of Birth: New Orleans, Louisiana
Social Security Number: [REDACTED]

3. Are you a citizen of South Carolina? Yes.
Have you been a resident of this state for at least the immediate past five years? Yes.

4. SCDL# or SCHD#: [REDACTED]
Voter Registration Number: [REDACTED]

5. Have you served in the military? No.

6. Family Status: Married on August 15, 1998, to Laura Barbas Rhoden
Never divorced, two children
[REDACTED]

7. List each college and law school you attended, including the dates of your attendance, the degrees you received, and if you left an institution without receiving a degree, the reason for your departure.
(a) The University of the South (Sewanee, TN), 1992-96, B.A. (English, magna cum laude)
(b) Tulane University (New Orleans, LA), 1996-99, J.D. (magna cum laude)

8. List the significant activities in which you took part during your attendance at law school. Give the years you were involved in these activities and list any leadership positions you held.
- (a) Moot Court Board, 1997-99
 - (b) Tulane Legal Clinic (indigent services), 1997-98
9. List the states in which you have been admitted to practice law and the year of each admission. Also list any states in which you took the bar exam but were never admitted to the practice of law. Please indicate the number of times you took the exam in each state.
- (a) Louisiana, 1999 (one bar exam, July 1999)
 - (b) South Carolina, 2001 (one bar exam, July 2000)
10. Describe chronologically, since graduation from law school, your legal experience. Please include a list of all positions held in which you worked in a legal capacity. Describe the general character of your practice and divide it into periods with dates if its character changed over the years. Please also describe the extent to which you were involved with the administrative and financial management of each of these entities, including management of trust accounts.
- (a) July 1999 - June 2000: Law Clerk, Louisiana Court of Appeals, Fourth Circuit (The Hon. Stephen R. Plotkin). Completed a one-year clerkship under a distinguished appellate judge, conducting research and drafting opinions for numerous cases (predominantly criminal). No administrative or financial responsibilities.
 - (b) January 2001- December 2007: Assistant Solicitor, Seventh Judicial Circuit (The Hon. Harold W. "Trey" Gowdy, III). Prosecuted thousands of criminal charges in Spartanburg County in Magistrate Court, Family Court, Drug Court, and General Sessions Court. No financial responsibilities. Administrative responsibilities included constant caseload tracking and supervision/direction of an administrative assistant. My case specialization progressed as follows:
 - 2001-2003: domestic violence and drug offenses
 - 2003-2005: economic ("white collar") crimes; Drug Court
 - 2005-2007: juvenile cases
 - (c) January 2008 – present: Attorney III, South Carolina Department of Social Services (Spartanburg County). For the past eleven years, I have served as full-time, in-house counsel for Spartanburg County DSS. My practice has focused on representing the agency in child and elder welfare cases in Spartanburg Family Court.
 - I have represented the agency in thousands of Family Court hearings: probable cause; motion; merits; permanency planning; termination of parental rights (TPR); and adoption, as well as domestic/private and juvenile cases that have actual or potential DSS involvement.
 - Beginning around 2013, as the most senior attorney, I was given the newly created position of Managing Attorney, which made me responsible for

supervision of our Legal unit in Spartanburg. In terms of financial responsibilities, I had to approve expenditures for transmission and approval by our regional or state office. In terms of administrative responsibilities, I became primarily responsible for the hiring and supervision of our attorneys, administrative assistants, and paralegals; managing the division of caseloads among attorneys and paralegals; orchestrating the priority and flow of cases on our dockets (“running court”); conducting in-house training for our casework staff; and maintaining good relationships with the numerous stakeholders in the child protection system, e.g., judges, guardians, defense attorneys, foster parents, and courthouse personnel.

- Also around 2012-13, due to a vacancy in the attorney position for Cherokee County, DSS leadership designated me to assume primary responsibility for continuing operations in Cherokee County while reorganizing and implementing best practices in that office. Eventually, the agency hired a full-time attorney to manage Cherokee County, and I trained and assisted him until he was fully capable of succeeding in that role. I am pleased that he still holds that position and that operations in Cherokee have continued to run smoothly.
- Around 2017, I transferred the management responsibilities of our office to Kathryn Walsh, a very competent attorney who now manages a prestigious firm in Greenville. This was a voluntary choice that afforded me more time to practice litigation and appellate work and offered Ms. Walsh additional management experience. I transitioned from Managing Attorney to Senior Trial Attorney and began handling the vast majority of our appellate cases. After Ms. Walsh entered private practice around 2018, I assumed the role of Managing Attorney again until Jon Neal assumed that role in 2019. I helped him transition into that role and have continued to assist him in running one of the state’s busiest DSS legal offices.

11. Please answer the following:

- (a) If you are a candidate for Family Court, please provide a brief written description of your experience within each of the following Family Court practice areas: divorce and equitable division of property, child custody, adoption, abuse and neglect, and juvenile justice. Include information about cases you have handled in each of these practice areas, or if you have not practiced in an area, describe how your background and procedural knowledge has prepared you to preside over such matters as a Family Court judge. Please also indicate the frequency of your appearances before a Family Court judge within the past five years.
- Divorce and equitable division: I have participated in numerous domestic proceedings in which DSS has actual or potential involvement. These experiences include temporary hearings, settlement hearings, contested hearings, mediations, and depositions. Accordingly, I am familiar with these

proceedings and the issues involved. I understand that, if there is one area of my Family Court experience that is less robust than others, it is this one; and I will redouble my efforts to study and master these issues in the months to come through resources such as the rules and statutes; case law; and conversations with judges and experienced domestic attorneys.

- **Child custody:** Custody is a central issue in almost every DSS case. And again, I have participated in numerous, private custody cases in which DSS was a third-party. The Family Court always aspires to act in “the best interest of the child.” A multitude of case-specific facts and circumstances influence that determination, but we must always answer two questions: (1) Is the child safe—or what must be done to effect safety now?; and (2) What must be done in order to give the child the best chance to become a healthy, happy, and successful member of our community, preferably with his or her family members? I am intimately familiar with these overarching concepts of safety and positive permanency; with the reality that the various parties in a case often have differing or contradictory ideas as to what is best for a child; and with the role of the judge in listening to the parties’ perspectives and crafting an outcome for the child and family that gives them the best chance to move forward, preferably in a mutually supportive way.
- **Adoption:** I have been present at a number of adoption hearings, which are likely the best and most joyful of all Family Court hearings. I have not initiated any adoption proceedings myself; however, I have participated in TPR trials and appeals (and been present at relinquishments of parental rights) to make children legally free for adoption. I have often worked alongside and consulted adoption attorneys in our cases because often, for example, foster parents will hire their own attorney to amplify their voice and hopefully expedite the adoption process. I am familiar with the checklists and confidential reports that Family Court judges consider in order to ensure that everything is proper before entering a final order of adoption.
- **Abuse and neglect:** Representing DSS in abuse and neglect cases has been my career and specialization these past eleven years. I believe I have handled every kind of DSS case: physical abuse; excessive corporal punishment; mental injury; neglect through deprivation; neglect through drug addiction; educational neglect; domestic violence; medical child abuse (Munchausen Syndrome); sexual abuse; abandonment; and more. I have handled TPR cases and appeals, most of which involve TPR rulings. As Managing Attorney and Senior Trial Attorney, I have also spent many hours discussing these cases with colleagues, assisting them, and watching their hearings. Given the high volume of cases in Spartanburg County, there is a fair chance that I have handled and witnessed as many of these cases as any other attorney in the state in the past decade.

- Juvenile justice: I was the primary Assistant Solicitor for juvenile cases in Spartanburg County between 2005-2007. (I also handled many juvenile dockets in Cherokee County.) I handled every step of incoming juvenile cases. I screened new referrals and diverted less serious charges to our Arbitration or Pre-Trial Intervention programs. I attended multi-disciplinary staffings with members of the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) and other agencies in order to prepare for court and discuss appropriate recommendations for each child. I “ran court” every Tuesday during that time period, representing the State (and with it victims and law enforcement officers) at numerous adjudicatory (i.e., guilty pleas and trials) and dispositional hearings. I handled every kind of juvenile matter, from truancy and shoplifting to armed robbery and criminal sexual conduct. As the father of kids who are absolutely wonderful but still subject to inexperience and immaturity, I fully embrace a juvenile justice system that is primarily focused on moving forward—on rehabilitation and restorative justice that improve the child’s judgment and empathy so that he or she can learn from mistakes and mature into a successful member of our community. While this focus can and should be on the juvenile, it must also acknowledge the expectations of the victim, law enforcement officers, and community in order to seek a full restoration and illuminate a path forward for all.
- Frequency of appearances: Excluding chambers weeks and vacations, I have appeared before Family Court judges every week for the past five (5) years (and more). The Spartanburg Family Court typically hears DSS cases on Monday afternoons, Thursdays, and every other Friday morning. It hears DSS TPR cases every other Wednesday. As stated, I also often appear in Family Court on private/domestic actions. In my career, I am confident that I have appeared before more than fifty (50) Family Court judges.

12. What was the frequency of your court appearances during the past five years or in the five years prior to your election to the bench?

(a) federal: I have not practiced in federal court.

(b) state: I am constantly in Family Court.

13. What percentage of your practice involved civil, criminal, domestic, and other matters during the past five years or in the five years prior to your election to the bench?

- (a) civil: N/A
- (b) criminal: 1%
- (c) domestic: 98%
- (d) other: 1%

To clarify, my practice is almost exclusively DSS actions (including appellate matters) and domestic actions with DSS involvement. Sometimes, there is crossover with juvenile or General Sessions cases; and on rare occasions there is crossover with vulnerable adults with Probate Court matters, as well as administrative hearings (e.g. foster parents might appeal an action as to their licensing or a child’s placement).

14. What percentage of your practice in trial court during the past five years or in the five years prior to your election to the bench involved matters that went to a jury, including those that settled prior to trial?
- (a) jury: N/A
 - (b) non-jury: 100%

During the past five years, did you most often serve as sole counsel, chief counsel, or co-counsel?

Most often sole counsel, but I have served in the other roles on occasion, e.g. when assisting a less experienced attorney.

15. List five of the most significant litigated matters you have personally handled in either trial or appellate court, or before a state or federal agency. Give citations if the cases were reported and describe why these matters were significant.
- (a) Jobst v. Jobst, 424 S.C. 64 (S.C. App. 2018): complex, hybrid private-DSS action; first case to interpret and discuss the applicability of Section 63-3-550 (granting broad standing rights to persons filing actions with respect to abused or neglected children).
 - (b) SCDSS v. Kirk, 2017-DR-42-2193 (removal) and 2018-DR-42-3177 (TPR): the removal was a two-and-a-half-day trial centering on possibly the most graphic sexual abuse allegations the presiding judge recalled; the TPR freed two children for adoption.
 - (c) SCDSS v. Kennington, 2014-DR-42-1131: complex removal case centering on allegations of medical child abuse (Munchausen Syndrome) of a fragile child.
 - (d) SCDSS v. Artison, 2014-DR-42-2921: hotly contested, two-day TPR trial that freed four children for adoption.
 - (e) SCDSS v. [Jane Doe] 2017-DR-42-1490: complex neglect case involving the surviving siblings of a deceased child. This is still open as a permanency planning case, and a TPR case is pending; therefore, I have inserted a pseudonym.
16. List up to five civil appeals you have personally handled. Give the case name, the court, the date of decision, and the citation if the case was reported.
- (a) Jobst v. Jobst, 424 S.C. 64 (S.C. App. 2018)
 - (b) SCDSS v. Bright, Unpublished Opinion 2017-UP-293 (S.C. App., July 10, 2017)
 - (c) SCDSS v. Morgan, Unpublished Opinion 2019-UP-097 (S.C. App., Feb. 27, 2019)
 - (d) SCDSS v. Sibrian-Pineda, Unpublished Opinion 2019-UP-130, S.C. App. April 4, 2019)
 - (e) SCDSS v. Kelly D., Unpublished Opinion 2020-UP-107 (S.C. App., April 9, 2020)
17. List up to five criminal appeals you have personally handled. Give the case name, the court, the date of decision and the citation if the case was reported.

N/A

18. Have you ever held judicial office?

No.

19. If the answer to question 18 is yes, describe or list five of your most significant orders or opinions and give the citations if they were reported. Also, list citations to any appellate review of these orders or opinions.

N/A

20. List all courts in which you have been admitted to practice and list the dates of your admission. Give the same information for administrative bodies that require a special admission to practice.

(a) South Carolina state courts, 2001

21. Have you taught law-related courses or lectured at bar association conferences, educational institutions, or continuing legal or judicial education programs? If so, briefly describe each course or lecture.

(a) I have lectured in Spartanburg County at the "Law School for Non-Lawyers" program promoted by the South Carolina Bar on several occasions. I have lectured on the topics of Child Protection and Juvenile Justice.

(b) I have lectured at USC Upstate on several occasions as a guest speaker in social work classes conducted by Professor Lynn McMillan.

22. Provide, as a separate attachment, your continuing legal or judicial education report from the past five years.

I will do so and have uploaded the same to the JMSC website.

23. List all published books and articles you have written and give citations and the dates of publication for each.

(a) Shadow, Light, & Steel, CreateSpace Publishing (2016) (not a legal text; a collection of fictional short stories, written as Robert Rhodes)

24. Please furnish as a separate attachment, two examples of legal articles, briefs, orders, or other legal writings for which you can claim sole or primary authorship. If you cannot claim sole authorship, please explain the extent to which you are the primary author, to include a description of the other authors and their contributions. The writing samples are for the Commission's use only and will not be published. (If you are a judge and are not seeking a different type of judgeship, this question is inapplicable.)

I will do so and have uploaded the same (two appellate briefs) to the JMSC website.

25. What is your rating or membership status, if any, by any legal rating organization; such as, Best Lawyers, Chambers, Legal 500, Martindale-Hubbell, Who's Who Legal, Super Lawyers, Million Dollar Advocates Forum, etc.? If you are currently a member of the judiciary, list your last available rating, if any.

N/A

26. List all bar associations and professional organizations of which you are a member and give the titles and dates of any offices you have held in such groups.
(a) Spartanburg County Bar Association
27. Have you ever held public office other than judicial office?
No. I am a State employee and a Notary (to facilitate in-house document production).
28. For sitting or former judges, list all employment you had while serving as a judge (whether full-time or part-time, contractual or at will, consulting or otherwise) other than elected judicial office. Specify your dates of employment, employer, major job responsibilities, and supervisor.
N/A
29. Have you ever been an unsuccessful candidate for elective, judicial, or other public office? If so, give details, including dates.
N/A (No)
30. Have you ever been engaged in any occupation, business, or profession other than the practice of law, teaching of law, or holding judicial or other public office? If so, give details, including a description of your occupation, business, or profession, the dates of your employment, and the name of your business or employer.
(a) I have always written fiction as a hobby and aspiration. Self-employed.
(b) I have been a youth soccer coach since 2010 and hold a national license from the United States Soccer Federation. I am currently affiliated with Carolina FC, based in Wellford, SC.
31. Are you now an officer or director or involved in the management of any business enterprise?
No.
32. Are you now or have you ever been employed as a “lobbyist,” as defined by S.C. Code § 2-17-10(13), or have you acted in the capacity of a “lobbyist’s principal,” as defined by S.C. Code § 2-17-10(14)?
No.
33. Provide, as a separate attachment, a complete, current financial net worth statement that itemizes in detail:
(a) the identity and value of all financial assets held, directly or indirectly, including, but not limited to, bank accounts, real estate, securities, trusts, investments, and other financial holdings; and

- (b) the identity and amount of each liability owed, directly or indirectly, which is in excess of \$1,000, including, but not limited to, debts, mortgages, loans, and other financial obligations.

(A net worth statement form is provided with this questionnaire and you must use this format for submission of your financial statement.)

NOTE: The Commission may require written confirmation that financial obligations have been satisfied or that the parties have agreed upon a payment schedule.

A complete, current financial net worth statement was provided to the Commission.

34. Has a tax lien or other collection procedure ever been instituted against you by federal, state, or local authorities? Have you ever defaulted on a student loan? Have you ever filed for bankruptcy?

I have never filed for bankruptcy. I never defaulted on my student loans from college, and those were paid in full years ago. (I had a full scholarship and no loans from law school.) In September 2012, the state Department of Revenue briefly instituted a tax lien (3-51474727-2; file number 25487200). This was due to the late filing of an annual withholding form (WH-1606) for our then-household employee (“nanny”) and not due to an unpaid tax obligation. In July 2012, our home was burglarized and ransacked, and a computer with our tax and other records was stolen. This precipitated my missing an appeal deadline for the form and, in turn, the imposition of the lien. Within two weeks of the lien, I provided the DOR with the necessary form and appeal letter, and the DOR canceled the lien. I did not even have to pay the imputed amount. I will submit four (4) additional pages of documents, showing that the matter was closed in my favor.

35. Since filing with the Commission your letter of intent to run for judicial office, have you accepted lodging, transportation, entertainment, food, meals, beverages, money, or any other thing of value as defined by S.C. Code § 2-17-10(1) from a lobbyist or lobbyist’s principal?

No.

36. Itemize (by amount, type, and date) all expenditures, other than those for travel and room and board, made by you, or on your behalf in furtherance of your candidacy for the position you seek. If you have spent over \$100, have you reported your expenditures to the House and Senate Ethics Committees?

N/A (none)

37. List the recipient and amount of all contributions made by you, a member of your immediate family, or by a business with whom you are associated, to members of the General Assembly within the past four years.

N/A

38. Have you or has anyone acting on your behalf solicited or collected funds to aid in the promotion of your candidacy? If so, please specify the amount, solicitor, donor, and date of the solicitation.

I have not, and to my knowledge, no one has done so.

39. Describe any financial arrangements or business relationships you have, or have had in the past, that could constitute or result in a possible conflict of interest in the position you seek or currently hold. Explain how you would resolve any potential conflict of interest.

I do not believe I have any financial arrangements or business relationships that would impact this position. I would resolve a potential conflict by consulting Canons 3(E) and (F) of the Code of Judicial Conduct.

40. Describe any interest you or a member of your immediate family has in real property:
- (a) in which there is a potential conflict of interest with your involvement in a South Carolina state or local public agency;
 - (b) in which there have been public improvements of \$200 or more that adjoins property in which there have been public improvements of \$200 or more; or
 - (c) which was sold, leased, or rented to a state or local public agency in South Carolina.

We only own our one home, and none of these apply to it.

List the interest you hold and the value and location of the property. Identify as applicable the:

- (a) nature of any potential conflict of interest;
- (b) nature and value of any public improvements; and
- (c) South Carolina state or local public agency which purchased or is leasing or renting such property.

Attach a copy of any contract or agreement.

N/A

41. Identify any personal property interest you or a member of your immediate family sold, leased, or rented to a South Carolina state or local public agency. Identify the property, its amount or value, and the name of the agency. Attach a copy of any contract or agreement.

N/A

42. For sitting judges, if you currently hold an interest in stock or other securities or have held such an interest, list each stock you currently own or owned during the prior calendar year. If you prefer, you may attach broker or account records containing the requested information instead of listing it here.

N/A

43. For sitting judges, have you ever accepted anything of value from an attorney or litigant in a matter currently or previously before you or your court? If so, please give the details, including the name of the attorney or litigant and the thing of value you received.

N/A

44. For sitting judges, have you used the services of your staff, for which you did not pay, while campaigning for this office?

N/A

45. Have you ever been arrested, charged, or held by federal, state, or other law enforcement authorities for violation or for suspicion of violation of any federal law or regulation, state law or regulation, or county or municipal law, regulation, or ordinance, or any other law, including another country's law? If so, give details but do not include traffic violations subject to a penalty of \$125 or less. You must include any and all arrests, including, but not limited to, offenses for driving under the influence or similar traffic offenses. Include all arrests that resulted in expungement, which will be redacted. If you have questions regarding whether to include an offense, please contact the Commission.

[All answers have been received and considered by the Commission, and as noted above, any expunged matters are redacted from the record.]

46. Have you, to your knowledge, ever been under federal, state, or local investigation for possible violation of a criminal statute? If yes, explain.

No, I have not.

47. Have you ever been sued by a client? Have you ever been a named party (personally or professionally) in or had a pecuniary interest in any civil or criminal proceedings? If so, give details, including, but not limited to, dates, and resolutions.

No, I have not.

48. If you are in private practice, are you covered by malpractice insurance and, if so, how long have you carried malpractice insurance? If applicable, have you ever been covered by a tail policy? If so, please explain when you were covered by a tail policy. Also, if applicable, indicate your coverage and deductible for your current malpractice policy.

N/A

49. Have you ever, in South Carolina or any other jurisdiction, as a lawyer, judge, or other professional, been cautioned with or without a finding of misconduct, sanctioned, or disciplined for lawyer, judicial, or other professional misconduct or has any jurisdiction found that you committed any misconduct? If so, give the details and describe any final

disposition. Include any and all confidential and public sanctions, disciplines, letters of caution, or findings of misconduct of any kind. Private or confidential dispositions will be redacted.

[Yes and no responses are redacted for all candidates unless there is a public discipline.]

50. Have you ever been investigated by the Department of Social Services? If so, give the details and the resolution. Has your name ever been enrolled on the Central Registry of Child Abuse and Neglect? If so, give the details.

No, I have not.

51. Have you directly or indirectly requested the pledge of any member of the General Assembly as to your election for the position for which you are being screened, or have you been offered a conditional pledge of support by any legislator pending the outcome of your screening? Have you received the assurance of any public official or public employee that they will seek the pledge of any member of the General Assembly as to your election for the position for which you are being screened? If so, give details.

No, I have not.

52. Have you requested any third parties to contact members of the General Assembly on your behalf before the final and formal screening report has been released? Describe the campaigning you have done for this election and include a list of those individuals you have asked to campaign on your behalf and, to the best of your knowledge, those who have campaigned for you on their own initiative.

No, I have not. I have not done any campaigning because of the ongoing pandemic and my ongoing work responsibilities. I have told some colleagues and friends that I would apply for the position, but I have not asked them to campaign on my behalf (with the exception of requesting required letters of recommendation from some). To my knowledge, no one has campaigned or spoken with legislators on my behalf.

53. Are you familiar with the 48-hour rule, which prohibits a candidate from seeking pledges until after the draft report becomes final, which occurs on the day and time specified on the Commission's published screening schedule?

Yes.

54. Since submitting your letter of intent to become a candidate, have you or has anyone acting on your behalf contacted any member of the Judicial Merit Selection Commission about your candidacy or intention to become a candidate? If so, give details.

I have not, and to my knowledge, no one has contacted the JMSC on my behalf.

55. List the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of five (5) persons from whom you are providing references. Also, provide the Commission with original letters of recommendation from each person listed herein, including their signature (preferably in blue ink). The Commission will not accept a photocopy or electronic submission of a letter of recommendation and failure to include all five (5) original letters of recommendation in your packet when you submit it will render your packet incomplete. Please do not have references mail your reference letters to the Commission directly. *You must return the five (5) original letters of recommendation to the Commission with your application.*

(a) James Fletcher Thompson, Esq.

[REDACTED]

(b) Alexandria Marie Wolf, Esq.

[REDACTED]

(c) Brandt Rucker, Esq.

[REDACTED]

(d) Kenneth P. Shabel, Esq.

[REDACTED]

(e) Andrew J. Johnston, Esq.

[REDACTED]

56. Are you active on or a member of a social media or Internet site such as, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, etc.?

If so, please list the account names for each account and the relevant platform.

How would your use of social media or other similar types of Internet sites be affected if you were serving in a judicial capacity?

I have an active Twitter account: @RobRhoden

If I were serving in a judicial capacity, I would have to be even more sensitive to the fact that my posts or “retweets” or “likes” could be (mis)interpreted as evidence of partiality in some matters. By the same token, I would have to be even more sensitive to the fact that the same activity could or would reflect upon the integrity and honor of the Court. As a long-serving state employee, I have been conscious of these factors, and I do not generate much activity on the account.

57. List all civic, charitable, educational, social, and fraternal organizations of which you are or have been a member during the past five years and include any offices held in such a group, and any professional honors, awards, or other forms of recognition received and not listed elsewhere.
- (a) St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, Lector
 - (b) Carolina FC, coach/assistant coach
 - (c) Phi Beta Kappa Honor Society

58. Provide any other information that may reflect positively or negatively on your candidacy, or which you believe should be disclosed in connection with consideration of you for nomination for the position you seek. This information may include how your life experiences have affected or influenced the kind or type of judge you have been or plan to be.

My aspiration is to be a Family Court judge who, first and foremost, works hard to listen and reach the most appropriate and equitable decision in every case and, second, inspires attorneys and litigants to make their best presentations and to believe that the Family Court will help them resolve their personal and legal issues with competence, efficiency, and compassion.

To accomplish these goals, I bring not only a proven record of Family Court experience and achievement, but also the skills and instincts of a husband, father, competitive athlete and coach, and enthusiast for stories and words. From the latter, I offer two Shakespearean quotations I have recalled for inspiration during my years of government service:

The quality of mercy is not strained.
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest:
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes
The thronèd monarch better than his crown.
His scepter shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;
But mercy is above this sceptered sway.
It is enthronèd in the hearts of kings;
It is an attribute to God Himself;
And earthly power doth then show likest God's
When mercy seasons justice.
(Portia, The Merchant of Venice, Act IV, Scene 1)

He who the sword of heaven will bear
Should be as holy as severe.
(Duke Vincentio, Measure for Measure, Act III, Scene 2)

These are lofty sentiments, to be sure; and yet, a skill vital to Family Court practice but sometimes overlooked is the less-lofty ability to “read the room” and adjust. So even as I aspire to old-fashioned ideals such as Justice and Mercy, I have practiced the ability to read the room, to meet people where they are, and to modify my demeanor and communicative style to increase the chance of mutual understanding. I have become as comfortable debating the nuances of statutes before the Court of Appeals as explaining to a tearful (self-represented) parent in a waiting room why his or her child cannot come home. And I am willing to meet people where they are and move cases forward because, ultimately, their Family Court cases are about them, not me. When the Family Court keeps children and families, not lawyers and judges, as its focus, it is at its most successful.

Deeds often matter more than words, of course, and what someone says about himself is usually less persuasive than what others say about him. So I close with this simple promise: if the Commission and Legislature believe I am the best choice for this position, I will strive to be a Family Court judge who serves the people of Spartanburg County and South Carolina to the best of his ability and works to increase their confidence in the integrity, impartiality, and compassion of their judicial system.

Thank you for considering my application.

YOUR SIGNATURE WILL BE HELD TO CONSTITUTE A WAIVER OF THE CONFIDENTIALITY OF ANY PROCEEDING BEFORE A GRIEVANCE COMMITTEE OR ANY INFORMATION CONCERNING YOUR CREDIT.

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

Signature: _____

Sworn to before me this ____ day of _____, 2020.

(Notary Signature)

(Notary Printed Name)

Notary Public for South Carolina

My Commission Expires: _____