

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



Administrative Law Court
(New Candidate)

Full Name: Stephanie N. Lawrence

Business Address: P.O. Box 290021
Columbia, SC 29229

Business Telephone: (803)470-6652

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

Yes, I plan to serve my full term if elected.
2. Do you have any plans to return to private practice one day?

No, I do not have plans to return to private practice. Instead, my plan is to secure this judicial seat.
3. Have you met the statutory requirements for this position regarding age, residence, and years of practice?

Yes, I have met the statutory requirements for this position.
4. What is your philosophy regarding *ex parte* communications? Are there circumstances under which you could envision *ex parte* communications being tolerated?

My philosophy regarding *ex parte* communications is that they are generally not allowed and should be considered under very limited circumstances or in an emergency, which does not consider any substantive matter. This is also provided no party would be prejudiced by the communication and all parties are notified of the details of the communication with an opportunity to respond. I could see this being tolerated in something like scheduling or administrative matter. That said, I would refer to the Code of Judicial Conduct for guidance before proceeding.
5. If you disclosed something that had the appearance of bias, but you believed it would not actually prejudice your impartiality, what deference would you give a party that requested your recusal? Would you grant such a motion?

If a party requested my recusal under those circumstances, I would likely grant the motion. Even though I might not agree that my impartiality would be impacted, my continued involvement could negatively impact the perceived fairness of the proceedings and ultimately the integrity of the court.

6. If elected, what standards would you set for yourself regarding the acceptance of gifts or social hospitality?

I would hold myself to and actively consult the Code of Judicial Conduct, which specifically addresses the rules for acceptance of gifts or social hospitality in Canon 4.

7. How would you handle a situation in which you became aware of misconduct or appearance of infirmity of a lawyer or of a fellow judge?

If the information I received indicated a substantial likelihood of misconduct, I would take the appropriate action which would include direct communication with the lawyer or judge. If from that communication I became knowledgeable that a violation of the Rules of Professional Conduct/Code of Judicial Conduct was committed, I would notify the appropriate authority pursuant to my obligation under the Code of Judicial Conduct. If the "infirmity" is drug or alcohol related, I would also make a referral to an assistance program.

8. Are you affiliated with any political parties, boards, or commissions that, if you are elected, would need to be re-evaluated?

No, I am not.

9. Have you engaged in any fund-raising activities with any political, social, community, or religious organizations? Please describe.

Yes, I have engaged in fundraising activities on behalf of the Gamma Nu Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. and its charitable organization, the Pink and Green Community Service Foundation, which engages in community outreach efforts and providing scholarships for students. These efforts include an annual ball as well as a biennial pageant.

10. How would you handle the drafting of orders?

I would rely on counsel to assist in order preparation by requesting proposed orders. However, I would provide required findings of fact and conclusions of law (when appropriate) that must be included in the proposals. I would also set a deadline for submission of the proposed

orders and work in conjunction with my law clerk to further draft and finalize the order. (In longer cases, I would consider having the attorneys prepare findings of fact from the evidence presented each day.)

11. What method would you use to ensure that you and your staff meet deadlines?

I would use a shared calendar system with interval reminders/alerts as to approaching deadlines and docket items to ensure that myself and staff meet same.

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

My philosophy on judicial activism is that the ultimate goal in any matter should be reaching a decision based on fairness, impartiality and the evidence presented. It should not be to necessarily set or promote any particular public policy. That said, decisions reached can and will sometimes impact public policy. Whether that impact is considered positive or negative and labeled as justice versus judicial activism is subjective to the beliefs of interested parties on either side of the issue.

13. Canon 4 allows a judge to engage in activities to improve the law, legal system, and administration of justice. What activities would you plan to undertake to further this improvement of the legal system?

I would engage in activities that seek to improve the law, legal system, and administration of justice through my state and county bar associations as well as judicial conferences when available. This could include participation in panel discussions or maybe teaching a course/session.

14. Do you feel that the pressure of serving as a judge will strain personal relationships (i.e. spouse, children, friends, or relatives)? How would you plan to address this?

No, I do not feel that the pressure of serving as a judge will strain my personal relationships. I have a very supportive family and friend base.

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

No, I am not involved in any active investments that might impair my impartiality or appearance of same.

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

The term de minimis denotes an insignificant interest that could not raise reasonable question as to impartiality. That said, I would likely refrain from hearing the case to avoid even an appearance of impropriety.

17. Are you a member of any organization or association that, by policy or practice, prohibits or limits its membership on the basis of race, sex, religion, or national origin? If so, please identify the entity and explain if this organization practices invidious discrimination on any basis.

No, I am not a member of any such organization or association.

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

Yes, I have met the mandatory minimum hours required for continuing legal education.

19. What percentage of your legal experience has dealt with cases that appear before the Administrative Law Court? Please describe to the Commission your experience in these areas.

I feel maybe 30% or so of my legal experience has dealt with cases that appear before the Administrative Law Court. While practicing at Boykin & Davis, LLC I gained some experience in the prosecution of OSHA citations on behalf of the Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation. I also handled special education matters for school districts as well as assisting with a couple of charter school challenges. I now preside over teacher certification and revocation cases with our State Department of Education as an attorney hearing officer. These matters are presented to the State Board of Education following my report and recommendation.

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

I feel the appropriate demeanor for a judge is one of professionalism, patience, and courtesy at all times. When necessary, a judge should also be firm in her dealings to maintain order and decorum within a proceeding.

21. Do you feel that it is ever appropriate to be angry with a member of the public who would appear before you? Is anger ever appropriate in dealing with attorneys or a pro se litigant?

No, I do not think it is appropriate for a judge to be angry with a member of the public, attorney or pro se litigant who would appear before them. In my opinion, judges have a higher duty to refrain from emotional displays due to the nature of the office and their role as decision maker.

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

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

Notary Public for S.C.

My Commission Expires: _____