



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

Family Court
(Incumbent)

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1. Why do you want to serve another term as a Family Court judge?

Except for my first year in practice, I have dedicated my entire professional life to Family Court. I am passionate about this area of the law as I believe it to be the most important. We deal with people's children, livelihood, and assets during their most difficult time of life. I believe I have had the professional, as well as life experience, which enables me to be a judge who not only knows and understands the law but is compassionate to the people who come before me. I have enjoyed my time on the bench since being sworn in on February 21, 2014. I have received positive feedback from each circuit I have presided in to include attorneys and court staff. I have participated in the education of those who practice and preside in Family Court. I also participate in groups who support and are active in Family Court. I hope to continue in my service to this state as a Family Court judge.

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

Yes

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

No

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

Yes

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

I believe that *ex parte* communications are improper, and should be avoided. However, there is statutory authority on how a judge must handle *ex parte* communication in the situation of an emergency, and when such issues are properly before the Court. I believe the only time such communication should be allowed is under strict compliance with the statute

6. If you disclosed something that had the appearance of bias, but you believed it would not actually prejudice your impartiality, what deference would you give a party that requested your recusal? Would you grant such a motion?

Each party should be allowed to make known all their concerns in this regard. A judge must strive to avoid the appearance of impropriety. While this philosophy should certainly not “hamstring” the court so that all motions for recusal are granted, each situation should be given due deference and weight. I would not want to encourage “judge shopping” by granting every motion for recusal; however, a litigant deserves to know that the trier of fact in his/her case is impartial. It is important that each party feel they are starting out on even ground with the person who is “in charge” of the case at that time.

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

This should be dealt with on a case by case basis. I could deal with every litigant fairly and would strive to do so; however, I strongly believe all litigants deserve the peace of mind that they are being treated fairly and there have been no preconceived notions about their case before it is started. If they can show that their concern is genuine and there is truly an appearance of possible bias, I would recuse myself.

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

A judge has a high standard to fill in this area so that there is no appearance of impropriety. If the gift is given by someone who

would give me a gift whether I was a judge or not, then I would most likely still accept the gift. However, if the gift is given because I am a judge or because I would not otherwise be in the position to even be associated with the giver, then I believe it is unacceptable and would not accept the gift.

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

The South Carolina Rules of Professional Conduct are clear and must be followed at all times, particularly for members of the Judiciary. If I am aware of any misconduct that violates the Rules, then I am mandated to report the misconduct.

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

No

11. Do you have any business activities that you have remained involved with since your election to the bench?

No

12. Since Family Court judges do not have law clerks, how do you handle the drafting of orders?

In most cases, one of the attorneys will be directed to prepare the proposed order. The attorney must submit the order to the opposing side for review prior to submission for any objections to the order. If the attorneys cannot agree on all terms in the order, then the order is submitted along with the objections, and I decide on the issue and give instructions accordingly. I will often have the attorney submit the proposed order to me as a Word document, and I will make the changes myself. There have been some occasions wherein I have prepared the order due to the difficulty or nature of the case or in situations where one or both of the parties are self-representing litigants.

13. What methods do you use to ensure that you and your staff meet deadlines?

We have an effective tickler system for all deadlines that we have in the office. For pending orders, we have a system in place in which a note sheet is used for each case heard. If an order is not signed at the time of the hearing it is noted on the note sheet along with the name of the attorney who is to prepare the order. Then my assistant will keep a record of the date the hearing was held and will tickle the due date of the order and place the note sheet in a notebook in which orders are pending. If an order is not received within two weeks, contact is made with the attorney who is responsible for preparing the order. Contact is made regularly until the order is received. Each month we must file a Matters Under Advisement (MUA) report which reflects the cases that have orders which have been outstanding for thirty days or more. There are many months wherein there are no cases to include on my MUA report; therefore, I believe our system is effective.

14. What specific actions or steps do you take to ensure that the guidelines of the guardian ad litem statutes are followed during the pendency of a case?

Prior to taking the bench, I served as a guardian ad litem for approximately fifteen years, and I am familiar with what role a guardian ad litem should play in a case. It is vital for a guardian ad litem to act properly and in the best interest of their minor charge. Strict adherence to the guardian ad litem statute is a must. I think it is imperative for a judge to know the qualifications of an appointed GAL and monitor those who serve as guardian ad litem. Prior to an appointment, a judge should ensure that a guardian ad litem is qualified to serve and has met all statutory requirements. There should no hesitation by a judge to question a guardian ad litem to ensure that they are following the mandates of the guardian ad litem statute.

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

I believe a judge's job is to interpret the law that is set out by the General Assembly of this state. I do not think a Family Court judge has the authority to "re-write" any statute. If a case is appealed, then the appellate courts have the power to make common law to govern certain interpretation of the statute. However, I do not believe a Family Court judge has the authority to ignore any statute due to their own ideology.

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

I have continued to participate in courses and seminars that teach attorneys how to effectively practice in family law. I organized a class in the Fifteenth Circuit for attorneys who are new to family court who are in need of training and mentoring, and it has been conducted on an alternating year basis since its inception. The class was offered at no charge to the participants and the instructors were on a volunteer basis.

In 2019, I became active in the education of newly elected Family Court judges. As a Family Court judge who serves on the Chief Justice's Commission on the Profession, I took on the task of addressing the issue of training for new Family Court judges. To accomplish this, I created and chair a Training Committee that developed a new training plan for Family Court judges. This plan includes a training team of judges who are committed to providing extensive training on the bench and in chambers. The plan also includes expanded training time and exposure to different circuits around the state. The goal is to make sure that each judge who presides in Family Court has the training to make the decisions that we are called upon to make.

17. Do you feel that the pressure of serving as a judge strains personal relationships (i.e. spouse, children, friends, or relatives)? How do you address this?

I have not faced any such problems in my time on the bench. In fact, I met my husband when he served as one of my deputies in the courtroom during a week of court in Charleston. Therefore, if anything, my job has enhanced my personal relationships.

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

No

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

No

20. 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

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

Yes

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

A judge should conduct herself/himself with cordiality and impartiality towards all who appear before her/him, attorney and litigant alike. Many times, the Family Court is a person's only contact with the judicial system, and in most cases, they are going through a difficult time. Each decision made should be made with sincerity and compassion for the situation. Becoming a judge does not give one justification to treat anyone without dignity and respect.

23. Do you feel that it is ever appropriate to be angry with a member of the public, especially with a criminal defendant? Is anger ever appropriate in dealing with attorneys or a pro se litigant?

I do not believe it is appropriate for a judge to become angry with a litigant, attorney, staff or anyone else who the judge has dealings with. I believe the judge sets the tone for how people are to act in their courtroom, and that must be done with dignity, respect, and fairness.

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 _____, 2021.

(Signature)

(Print name)

Notary Public for South Carolina

My commission expires: _____