



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

Family Court
(New Candidate)

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1. Why do you want to serve as a Family Court Judge?

Prior to attending law school, I worked with abused children. As a practicing attorney, I represented victims of sexual abuse. I then spent 6 years as a family court judge, protecting the children of our state and working for their best interests.

My time as a family court mediator has helped families make decisions that are best for them and avoid having a lengthy and stressful trial. The cases I mediate do not always involve children, sometimes the cases are financial ranging from small marital estates to multi-million dollar estates.

As a family court judge, I know there will be financial cases to hear and my experience has prepared me to do so. However, I have missed being able to help children and the state's youth. I have missed working to help juveniles realize a path other than being labeled a delinquent. If given the opportunity to serve again, I plan to start a juvenile drug court for the 9th Judicial Circuit to offer youth an alternative path. Serving South Carolina as a family court judge is a calling and one that I would like the opportunity to do again.

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

There are South Carolina rules that allow *ex parte* communications in matters where irreparable harm, injury, damage or loss may occur. Supporting documentation must accompany the request in the form of an affidavit, a verified complaint or a certified writing by an attorney that efforts to give notice to the other party have been made or that such efforts should not be required.

A judge may communicate with court personnel or with other judges in an effort to fulfill their duties and responsibilities.

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

I believe a party's request for recusal is a serious matter that should be reviewed in detail by the court. The appearance of impropriety is a serious consideration of any judge. At no time should a judge compromise the public's confidence in the judicial system. However, one cannot express how they would rule with any certainty as it could be viewed as unethical and each case and set of circumstances are different. I believe one of the most important jobs of a judge is to do their utmost to uphold the integrity of the court, which would include recusal from a matter that could cast a shadow of impropriety on the South Carolina judicial system.

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

The impression should never be allowed to exist that a party has influence with a judge because of a financial, social or political status. A judge should not handle matters wherein their spouse or close relative have a financial involvement or close social involvement with a party.

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

I believe it would be acceptable to retain gifts that are resource materials related to the legal field, so long as the gifts are not intended to influence. Social hospitality surrounding an event that is bar-related or an event devoted to the improvement of the law is acceptable as well. There will be times through my husband's volunteer work with the Greenville Shriner's Hospital that we would attend an event through his involvement that would also be acceptable as the events would not be an attempt to influence my judicial duties. I am also a volunteer with different organizations (ie. Blue Ridge Hunter Jumper Association, Labor of Love Pet Rescue, Miss South Carolina Organization) of which my involvement would include social events, but none that would attempt to influence my judicial duties.

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?

Pursuant to the Judicial Code of Conduct, it is a judge's responsibility to take action if information is received that another judge has violated the Code of Conduct. A judge is also under a duty to report an attorney who has violated the Rules of Professional Conduct. The violations should be reported to the appropriate governing body.

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

No

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

In the past year, I have donated to the Greenville Shriners Hospital through fundraisers conducted by the Greenville Shrine Club. I have donated to various pet rescues when they are in need for veterinary

services for an animal they have taken into their care. I have donated my time to the Blue Ridge Hunter Jumper Association. During my daughter's senior year of high school, I donated to different events sponsored by her high school to raise money for different school organizations.

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

No

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

It is my understanding that there is one law clerk per circuit for family court now. However, my approach to writing orders would not change with or without a law clerk. My experience in family court has been a combination of orders being drafted by myself or counsel for a party to the action submitting a proposed order. There will be times as a judge that I will draft portions of an order to ensure that certain language is in the body of the order. Sometimes, both parties are asked to submit proposed orders for review by the court.

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

Meeting deadlines is an imperative part of practicing and administering the law. As a judge, I would use a calendaring system that tracks the date a case was heard, if an order is due, the due date and who is responsible for drafting the order. My office would then track the orders that are due and would send out reminder emails to all parties prior to the due date if the order has not been received. If an order is not received by the due date, then a warning letter will be sent to the attorneys and/or litigants (if a party is self-represented) of record that the case could possibly be dismissed if the order is not received by a certain date.

Upon receipt of an order, my office would note in three places the date the order was received, the date the order was signed and to whom the order was sent to after signing. The information would be stored electronically and a hard copy of the case information sheet

with all of the information stated above would be kept in the event the information were not able to be accessed electronically.

15. If elected, what specific actions or steps would you take to ensure that the guidelines of the guardian ad litem statutes are followed during the pendency of a case?

I would have the file reviewed to make sure guardian ad litem has filed an affidavit with the court showing they have met the statutory requirements to serve as a guardian ad litem. In the event of a final merits hearing, I would have the file reviewed to ensure the final written report of the guardian ad litem has been filed within the required time frame.

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

A judge should decide the issues of a case on the law and not be influenced by their personal, political or social beliefs.

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

I believe court liaison meetings would be beneficial and informative. The meetings provide an avenue for judges to hear from attorneys and other judicially invested individuals on ways to efficiently and effectively the judicial system.

I plan to work with the necessary departments to create a juvenile drug court for the 9th Judicial Circuit.

If asked, I would participate as a speaker or observer at events that promote improvement of the law and the judicial system. For example, I have spoken at several bar related continuing legal education events as an attorney, judge and mediator. While on the bench, I was selected by Chief Justice Don Beatty to attend the national Juvenile Justice Reform Summit.

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

My legal career spans 24 years. In those years I have been a trial attorney, family court judge and a mediator. My spouse, child, friends and family have been on this legal journey with me for a long time. They are all respectful of the boundaries I have created between my work life and personal life. My spouse and child understand the hard work and dedication it takes for me to be a family court judge as they have lived it with me previously. They are extremely supportive of my decision to be a family court judge again.

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

As technology progresses, so does the number of pro se litigants in cases. I see them frequently as a mediator. I would take the same approach that I do now as a mediator. I would give them an opportunity to be heard, not offer legal advice and during court hearings, they would abide the rules applicable to the proceedings. There are resources on the South Carolina Bar and South Carolina Judicial system websites to assist pro se litigants.

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

No

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

No

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

Yes

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

Being a mediator has taught me a lot about how to be a more

effective judge and afforded me the opportunity to reflect on how I handled situations previously as a judge. Litigants should have the opportunity to be heard. Therefore, I believe it is important for a judge to be patient, courteous and compassionate.

In addition, a judge should be as punctual as possible and respectful of the docket and court participants. Because of the diversity of cases a family court judge hears, they should be able to communicate effectively with people of all educational and socio-economic backgrounds.

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

Judges in family court see an array of horrific situations, mostly effecting children. It is hard to comprehend at times that the world can be so cruel. However, being angry will not help the situation and will not help with effectively administering justice. Judges are human and to say that some of the things a family court judge sees would not affect them emotionally would be untrue. If the circumstances of a case were such that the judge needed to take a break, catch their breath and then resume court, I believe it would acceptable.

As I stated in a previous answer, I deal with pro se litigants on a regular basis in my mediation practice. The same approach I take with them during mediations would be the same approach I would take as a judge. I would be patient and give them the opportunity to be heard.

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

Keely Pope-Black

Sworn to before me this 9 day of August, 2025.

J. H. Black

(Signature)

Keely H. Black

(Print name)

Notary Public for South Carolina

My commission expires: 8-15-2026

БИЛ БИО ПОДАРЕН ОВОДА ЕВАНГЕЛИЈА СВЕДОВАЊА ЕВАНГЕЛИЈА ТАКВА ГОДИНА КОД УСКОДА СВЕДОВАЊА ЕВАНГЕЛИЈА

