

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

**Master-in-Equity
(Incumbent)**

Full Name: James Camden West

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1. Do you plan to serve your full term if re-appointed?

ANSWER: Yes.

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

ANSWER: No.

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

ANSWER: Yes.

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

ANSWER: Unless permitted by Rule 501, SCACR, or expressly authorized by law, *ex parte* communications generally should not be tolerated. This policy promotes fundamental fairness, avoids the appearance of impropriety, and reinforces the principle of impartiality. I do believe it beneficial for the exchange of knowledge, wisdom and experience within the judiciary. Having a support structure within the judiciary allows a judge to harness the insight and perspective of other judges, without disadvantaging individual litigants.

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?

ANSWER: A judge must be keenly aware of the appearance of bias. The key to such a situation is earnest disclosure to the parties appearing before the bench. Disclosure alone is not enough. Disclosure must be accompanied by reflection. After full disclosure, the parties and counsel must be afforded a meaningful opportunity to reflect upon the facts and circumstances. Only upon adequate reflection can a party, and counsel, make an educated and informed decision. Likewise, only upon adequate disclosure and discussion can a judge make an educated and informed decision. I would likely grant a motion for recusal under circumstances reasonably calling into question the impartiality of the Court.

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

ANSWER: A judge should find guidance under Rule 4(D)(5) CJC, Rule 501, SCACR. My personal standard is to not accept gifts or social hospitality. The acceptance of gifts or social hospitality can be viewed as casting a shadow of bias upon the judiciary and should be avoided whenever and wherever possible.

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

ANSWER: The first step in any situation where misconduct or infirmity could be questioned is to care for the individual. Communication before action. People come first. Ascertain the situation. Determine if there is an urgent need for intervention. If urgent care is needed, help the individual seek appropriate medical attention. Should misconduct by a lawyer or member of the judiciary present a significant question regarding fitness, the appropriate disciplinary body must be informed.

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

ANSWER: Yes. During my adult life I have made donations to First Baptist Church, Freedom Church, and Together Church, all of Moncks Corner, South Carolina. During my service as a member of the Board of Directors for The Center for Heirs Property Preservation, I participated in fundraising activities. I served as a board member from 2016 – 2018.

9. How do you handle the drafting of orders?

ANSWER: It was my experience practicing before the Master-in-Equity for the parties to draft and submit proposed orders to the Master for review and final editing. This approach gives the parties a voice in the final version and complements judicial economy. Also, counsel for the parties tend to have intimate familiarity with the facts of a specific case. I have continued this practice from the bench. However, under appropriate circumstances, I would prepare the order personally.

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

ANSWER: Calendar reminders and deadline dates are an everyday reality as I have begun my service as Master. My practice is to set calendar reminders sufficiently in advance to allow for deadlines to be met. Also, I maintain a running spreadsheet of matters and tasks to be accomplished. Checklists are a judge's best friend. My administrative assistant also maintains calendar reminders and a running spreadsheet of action items, independent of my own. Weekly reviews with my administrative assistant have become the norm to ensure timely performance.

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

ANSWER: My philosophy on "judicial activism" can best be described as knowing one's purpose and place. Each branch of government serves a specific function. Each function is essential. The duty of a judge is to interpret and apply the law based upon legislative intent. The duty of the legislature is to create the law. Activism is best accomplished by members of the legislature, who are elected for the very purpose of being a voice for the public.

12. 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?

ANSWER:

While attending Charleston School of Law I had the privilege of observing judges in the Master's Court, Circuit Court and Family Court in Berkeley County. I was able to see the legal world outside of a textbook and see the textbook in practice. I hope, as my tenure as Master extends into the

future, to afford the same opportunity to law students by working with law schools to get students in the courtroom.

Further, I want to speak to law students in the classroom. As a law student, I found real-world experiences shared by visiting judges and attorneys invaluable. Students need to see that the judiciary is a part of the community. Students need to hear how the judiciary functions within the community. Students need to understand that the judiciary serves the community. These concepts can be lost within the pages of a textbook.

Lastly, I envision having a role in the Berkeley County Adult Treatment Court (Drug Court). One of the unexpected pleasures of my time as Master has been the observation of various judges conducting Treatment Court hearings. Perhaps more unexpected is my fascination with the individual lives of program participants. The Treatment Court process allows participants to invest in themselves, in their own education, in their own wellbeing, and in the wellbeing of their families. I want to be a part of this process.

13. 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?

ANSWER: I do believe the pressure of serving as a judge can strain personal relationships. However, this has not been my personal experience. I have found immense joy in my time serving as Master. I have the full support of my wife, who has been by my side since childhood. My wife encouraged me to seek the Master's seat. She has stood beside me as I have begun my service as Master. Likewise, my close family supports my service as Master. Importantly, my service as Master is improving my abilities as a parent. In all circumstances, a judge must be the example. Learn from the example of those that have served before you. Understand that others are learning from the example you set before them. Set a positive example worthy of remembrance. This lesson applies directly to parenthood. Would my children be proud? If my children were watching, what lesson would they learn?

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

ANSWER: No. I am not involved in any active investments that might impair my appearance of impartiality.

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

ANSWER: No. I do not believe it to be appropriate to hear a case where I, or a member of my family, held a *de minimis* financial interest in a party involved. While I may ethically be permitted to do so under specific circumstances, due to the appearance of impropriety or the appearance of bias I would likely decline to hear such a matter.

16. 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 these bases.

ANSWER: No.

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

ANSWER: Yes.

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

ANSWER: Persevere to be patient. Kindness and respect must be demonstrated. Decorum can be maintained without anger and without vulgarity. A judge must listen courteously, sit impartially, act promptly, and rule after careful and considerate deliberation. These principles always apply.

19. 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?

ANSWER: No. I do not believe anger is necessary. Nor is anger appropriate. Courtesy, impartiality and patience are appropriate. The courtroom is an inherently hostile environment. Human emotions exist. A judge is the face of the judiciary within the Courthouse, and within the community. Successful judges have the ability to focus natural emotions and inherent hostility into a productive form. It is not the role of a judge to embarrass a litigant, or the judiciary, by expressing anger. These principles apply both inside and outside of the courtroom.

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

J. Camden West

J. Camden West

Sworn to before me this 1 day of August, 2025.

Jessica Thompson

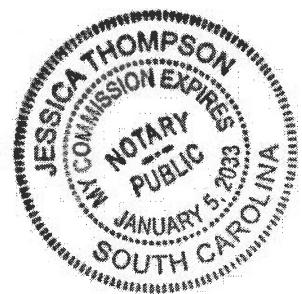
(Signature)

Jessica Thompson

(Print Name)

Notary Public for South Carolina

My commission expires: 11/5/2033



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