

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

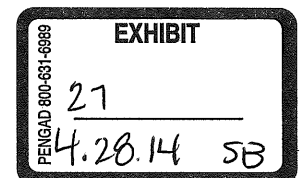
**Family Court**  
**(New Candidate)**

Full Name: Sara McMahon Bunge

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1. Why do you want to serve as a Family Court Judge? I have been a public servant for most of my career and would like to continue to serve my community with the legal experience I have gained over the last 15 years. Even before I went to law school, I worked for a State agency. I have a diverse legal background ranging from criminal defense, prosecution, civil defense, and plaintiff's litigation. I have served on the bench as a Municipal Court Judge and know that I have the necessary demeanor to be a Judge.
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? Generally, *ex parte* communications are not permitted. Such communications are permitted when they deal with scheduling, administrative or emergency purposes. I would not allow improper *ex parte* communications.
6. What is your philosophy on recusal, especially in situations in which lawyer-legislators, former associates, or law partners are to appear before you? I would disclose any personal relationships to the parties and recuse myself as required under the Rules.
7. 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 would probably give the party requesting the recusal deference and would recuse myself to avoid any appearance of bias or impropriety.



8. How would you handle the appearance of impropriety because of the financial or social involvement of your spouse or a close relative? To avoid even the appearance of impropriety, I would recuse myself from such a case.
9. What standards would you set for yourself regarding the acceptance of gifts or social hospitality? I have only accepted gifts from friends and family for special occasions such as a birthday or Christmas. Socially, I have gone to dinner with friends and either we have split the check or paid our own tab. Rarely have friends treated us to dinner. If elected, I would not accept any gifts or social hospitality unless allowed by Canon 4 so as to avoid any appearance of impropriety.
10. How would you handle a situation in which you became aware of misconduct of a lawyer or of a fellow judge? If I became aware of misconduct of a lawyer or of a fellow judge, I would report it to the proper agency as required by the Rules.
11. Are you affiliated with any political parties, boards or commissions that, if you were elected, would need to be evaluated? No, I am not.
12. Do you have any business activities that you would envision remaining involved with if elected to the bench? I do not have any other business activities.
13. Since family court judges do not have law clerks, how would you handle the drafting of orders? Generally, I would have the prevailing party draft the order, allowing the other party time to review it. I would make sure that the order complies with my ruling.
14. If elected, what method would you use to ensure that you and your staff meet deadlines? I would use a computerized system to ensure that all deadlines are met.
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? After reviewing the qualifications of the individual guardian *ad litem* to confirm that he/she has the proper training, I would appoint him/her an attorney. I would set deadlines for reports and review the thoroughness of the reports to assure that the Guardian Ad Litem is acting in the best interest of the child by conducting a thorough and complete independent investigation into the case. If I had a concern as to the Guardian's services, I would inform the parties and give them an opportunity to be heard.

16. What is your philosophy on "judicial activism," and what effect should judges have in setting or promoting public policy? A Judge is to apply the laws as they are written to the facts before him/her. It is not a Judge's duty to make law or to impose his/her personal opinion on the law into a case. Therefore, a Judge should not engage in "judicial activism".
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 intend to continue engaging in those activities. Over the years, I have spoken to students, teachers and school administrators about the juvenile justice system. I have participated in training law enforcement officers on juvenile procedures. I volunteered my time as a Mock Court Judge for middle school students and as a participant in the Kids in Court program. I have also been a member of the Children's Law Committee through the South Carolina Bar. I enjoy teaching others about the legal system and would continue to do so as much as I would be allowed.
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 husband and I have a wonderful relationship of support and understanding. He has his law degree as well and understands the pressures of a legal career. He supports my decision to run and will continue to support me if I am elected. I have an 8 year old son who is in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and I have a solid support system to accommodate any scheduling conflicts.
19. Would you give any special considerations to a *pro se* litigant in family court? I would be patient and courteous in explaining the proceeding to the *pro se* litigant in layman's terms. However, under the Canons, I am ethically bound to perform my duties impartially. I would assure that both the *pro se* litigant and the represented litigant are afforded their rights under the law.
20. Are you involved in any active investments from which you derive additional income that might impair your appearance of impartiality? No, I am not.
21. Would you hear a case where you or a member of your family held a *de minimis* financial interest in a party involved? Although the Code of Judicial Conduct technically allows a Judge to hear such a case, I personally would not to avoid even the appearance of impropriety.
22. Do you belong to any organizations that discriminate based on race, religion, or gender? No, I am not.

23. Have you met the mandatory minimum hours requirement for continuing legal education courses? Yes, I have.
24. What percentage of your legal experience (including experience as a special appointed judge or referee) concerns the following areas? If you do not have experience in one of these areas, can you suggest how you would compensate for that particular area of practice?
- a. Divorce and equitable distribution: 0%
  - b. Child custody: 0%
  - c. Adoption: 0%
  - d. Abuse and neglect: 0%
  - e. Juvenile cases: 100%
- While I have been prosecuting in Family Court, I not only handle cases dealing with juvenile justice, I also work closely with the Department of Social Services as many of our families are also clients of DSS. I have been through a divorce with custody, child support and marital distribution issues. I have taken and passed two bar exams (South Carolina and Georgia). I would devote extra time and effort studying the statutory and case law applicable to the areas in which I have not litigated cases. I would keep updated on the law in all areas both in preparation for serving and while on the bench.
25. What do you feel is the appropriate demeanor for a judge? I feel that a Judge should patient, humble, and trustworthy. A fair and impartial Judge is the foundation of our legal system. Every litigant, attorney, and witness should believe that they have respect from the person who makes the ultimate decision on a case. Public confidence in the system is impacted when a person has a negative experience with a Judge. Therefore, a Judge should do his or her best to hear from all sides and impartially rule as the facts allow.
26. Would the rules that you expressed in your previous answer apply only while you are on the bench or in chambers, or would these rules apply seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day? A Judge should conduct himself/herself accordingly at all times. A Judge must live personally and professionally to the highest standard of integrity.
27. 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? Anger is never appropriate in dealing with the public, attorneys, or pro se litigants. Although it is unreasonable to expect a Judge not to have feelings, showing them outwardly is never appropriate.
28. How much money have you spent on your campaign? If the amount is over \$100, has that been reported to the House and Senate Ethics

Committees? I have spent a total of \$441.57 on my campaign comprising of \$15.22 (legislative manual), \$5.96 (name tag), \$38.87 (business cards), \$296.81 (resumes, cover letters, envelopes, postage, ink and stationery), and \$84.71 (additional postage). Yes, I mailed a letter on 3/6/14 to the Chairman of both the Senate and House Ethics Committees.

29. If you are a sitting judge, have you used judicial letterhead or the services of your staff while campaigning for this office? N/A.
30. Have you sought or received the pledge of any legislator prior to this date? No.
31. Have you sought or been offered a conditional pledge of support by any legislator pending the outcome of your screening? No.
32. Have you asked any third parties to contact members of the General Assembly on your behalf before the final and formal screening report has been released? Are you aware of any friends or colleagues contacting members of the General Assembly on your behalf? I have not asked anyone to contact a member of the General Assembly. I have told friends, and family members of my candidacy. Some have asked if they could contact their legislator on my behalf. I have instructed them on Judicial Merit Selection Commission Rule 24.
33. Have you contacted any members of the Judicial Merit Selection Commission? No.
34. Are you familiar with the 48-hour rule, which prohibits a candidate from seeking pledges for 48 hours after the draft report has been submitted? Yes.

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

Sworn to before me this day  
(Print name)  
Notary Public for South Carolina  
My commission expires:

'2014.