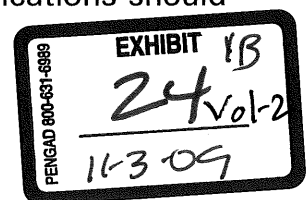


JUDICIAL MERIT SELECTION COMMISSION
Sworn Statement to be included in Transcript of Public Hearings

Family Court
(New Candidate)

Full Name: Usha J. Bridges
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1. Why do you want to serve as a Family Court Judge? When I was in law school, I decided that I did not want to practice domestic law. Upon starting my career, I was blessed to have opportunities to practice in the family court. As time progressed I found a love for the family court and an appreciation for the job that family court judges do. I love children and looking out for the best interest of children and as a family court judge I will continue to have this opportunity. This is a position that I have claimed for several years. . In order to progress, one must have goals and visions. By becoming the family court judge in Cherokee County, I will have achieved a goal that I set for myself several years ago.
2. Do you plan to serve your full term if elected? Yes, it is my intention to serve a full term and more if I am given the opportunity.
3. Do you have any plans to return to private practice one day? At this time I am unsure as I hope to retire on the bench and depending on circumstances, I hope to be able to enjoy my retirement and maybe do some volunteer work and enjoy the grandchildren that I am sure to have.
4. Have you met the statutory requirements for this position regarding age, residence, and years of practice? I have met the statutory requirements for this position in that I am soon to be 49 years of age, a lifelong residence of South Carolina and have been a practicing attorney for 16 years.
5. What is your philosophy regarding *ex parte* communications? Are there circumstances under which you could envision *ex parte* communications being tolerated? There should not be any *ex parte* communications except as allowable under the defined guidelines of Canon 3B (7) (a) which allows *ex parte* communications "for the facilitation of scheduling and other administrative purposes and to accommodate emergencies" that do not go to the merits of the matter. Additionally, Canon 3(B)(7)(b) allows oral or written advice from disinterested experts on the law providing the parties involved are informed of seeking advice and have an opportunity to respond to the oral or written communication. All *ex parte* communications should



- be disclosed and in the proper circumstance the judge should freely recuse him or herself.
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 think that all associations should be disclosed. If any party has reasons to believe that they may be unfairly treated as a result of some past association, then for the sake of maintaining the integrity of the bench, the judge should recuse himself.
 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 grant the motion because it is not necessarily the existence of a conflict but the appearance of such conflict. The appearance of bias would likely bring into question the issue of my ability to preside over the matter with impartiality.
 8. How would you handle the appearance of impropriety because of the financial or social involvement of your spouse or a close relative? I would disclose the involvement and recuse myself due to the fact that there is the appearance of reasonably questionable association.
 9. What standards would you set for yourself regarding the acceptance of gifts or social hospitality? As I have been a summary court judge, I understand the importance of myself and my family not accepting gifts or social hospitality because it might be construed as a debt obligation by the giver. As to social hospitality, one does want to be construed as being anti-social but must balance social involvement with professionalism.
 10. How would you handle a situation in which you became aware of misconduct of a lawyer or of a fellow judge? I would first pray about it so that I conduct myself in a manner that would allow the individual to be receptive to me because I would approach the individual and give him or her opportunity to address the matter. Should this fail than I have the obligation to report the misconduct to the proper agency or authority.
 11. Are you affiliated with any political parties, boards or commissions that, if you were elected, would need to be evaluated? No.
 12. Do you have any business activities that you would envision remaining involved with if elected to the bench? Other than the practice of law, I am not involved in any businesses.
 13. Since family court judges do not have law clerks, how would you handle the drafting of orders? Being a family law practitioner, I have had the honor or opportunity to draft many orders. I would follow the protocol and ask one of the attorneys to draft the order and submit it to me. After which, I would review it and if it conforms to my instructions, I would sign it and return to the submitting attorney.

14. If elected, what method would you use to ensure that you and your staff meet deadlines? I would utilize the computer software calendar as it sends popup reminders to alert one to deadlines. I would also utilize a hard copy calendar which allows me to have reminders in two places. Additionally, I would review the reports to ensure compliance.
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? As the Guardian ad Litem is a party to the case, I am unaware of any communications that the judge should have with the Guardian ad Litem outside of the presence of the court room or in the presence of other counsel. Since Guardian ad Litem are appointed, I would issue separate order appointing guardians and ensure that the guardians appointed have the necessary guardian ad litem certification by assuring that affidavit is filed at the beginning of the case. If problem arose during pendency of case, It would be up to the parties to bring the matter before the Court.
16. What is your philosophy on "judicial activism," and what effect should judges have in setting or promoting public policy? Canon 4 restricts "judicial activism" to activities which work to improve the law by participating and speaking at continuing legal education forums. A judge should not participate in activities which would appear to promote individual or public policy.
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 would perhaps engage in speaking, teaching or lecturing at judicial conferences or bar association functions.
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? I can see how the pressure of serving as a judge can put added stress on personal relationships in that even family members are limited in accepting hospitalities in as much as the giver may attempt to use this as a means of obligation. Additionally, family members are oftentimes not familiar with the term "ex parte" communications, they may find themselves in a situation that would fit the definition of ex parte communication and result in recusal.
19. Would you give any special considerations to a *pro se* litigant in family court? Pro se litigates are charged with being as knowledgeable of the law as attorneys in that they have undertaken to represent themselves. I would however assist them in procedural matters that would not prejudice the other party. For instance, if a litigant did not send the proper notice of hearing or certificate of service, I would continue the case and give him the opportunity to do it right.

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? I would not hear a case wherein a member of my family held a *de minimis* financial interest so as to avoid the appearance of impropriety.
22. Do you belong to any organizations that discriminate based on race, religion, or gender? No
23. Have you met the mandatory minimum hours requirement for continuing legal education courses? Yes
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: 45%
 - b. Child custody: 60%
 - c. Adoption: 5%
 - d. Abuse and neglect: 20%
 - e. Juvenile cases: 20%
25. What do you feel is the appropriate demeanor for a judge? The demeanor of a judge is significant in establishing a climate of respect, trust and fairness. Therefore, I believe that a judge should possess specific characteristics such as trustworthiness, professionalism, confidence, patience, reliability, punctuality, be courteous, even tempered while possessing a little humor.
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? Seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day. The rules expresses should apply seven days a week and twenty-four hours a day. Personal and professional conduct should correlate reflecting who you are while on the bench as well as who you are off the bench.
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? As we are all human and may get angry, emotional behavior is not consistent with responsibility to perform duties impartially and fairly. Therefore, it is imperative to have a self awareness of one's internal emotions so as not to react to situations from a personal emotional standpoint. If I am angry with someone who may appear before me, I have an obligation to recuse myself as all have the right to a fair and impartial hearing. As to attorneys, it is important to be emotionally intelligent when dealing with all attorneys

therefore if I find myself in a situation wherein my emotions are controlling, I have an obligation to call and recess and do an assessment of the situation.

28. How much money have you spent on your campaign? \$72.16 for postage If the amount is over \$100, has that been reported to the House and Senate Ethics Committees? I have not spent over \$100.00.
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? No
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 AND COMPLETE TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE.

s/ Usha J. Bridges

Sworn to before me this 9th day of August, 2009.

Notary Public for South Carolina

My commission expires: 09-08-2009